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Now is the Time to Consider Pasture Renovation for 2005

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There are many reasons to renovate a pasture. However, the most common reason is to increase forage production and forage quality. Improved pasture, results in increased livestock carrying capacity and increased live weight gain (LWG) per acre. Pastures containing 50% improved grass (bahiagrass, stargrass, pangolagrass, or limpograss) and 50% weedy plants (smutgrass, common bermudagrass, or tropical soda apple) have the potential to produce about 150 lb/A LWG. Pastures containing 100% improved grass will produce about 300 (bahiagrass) to 700 (stargrass) lb/A LWG using 550 lb steers, consequently providing increased income per pasture acre.

Pasture renovation methods may be: 1) Complete tillage (disking, plowing, or rotilling) during the droughty period of March - May, 2005; 2) Complete vegetative control (Roundup®) followed by complete tillage during the dry period of March - May, 2005; 3) Complete tillage after a winter vegetable crop; 4) Complete vegetative control (Roundup®) followed by no-till seeding of ryegrass; or 5) The most forage productive method would be complete tillage in the fall, seeding ryegrass, covering seed, and roller packing the same day. Tilling the field and seeding the ryegrass within 12 hours allows the grower to conserve moisture resulting in ryegrass emergence within 6 to 7 days. Ryegrass establishment in central Florida is normally November 1 to December 1 when soil moisture is limited. Seeding prior to November 1 (about October 15) could result in loss of ryegrass seedlings to Pythium, a disease which is more prevalent during high temperatures found in early fall.

The use of ryegrass in a pasture renovation program insures high quality forage

production during the cool winter and early spring. Studies have shown ryegrass is generally more dependable than small grains. Ryegrass harvested on a rotational system every 4 weeks will yield about 3 to 3.5 tons/acre dry forage consisting of 20% crude protein and 75 to 80% digestibility when fertilized with 50-30-60 lb/A after seedling emergence followed by 30 lb/A N after each grazing. Ryegrass tends to work in this program better than small grains because ryegrass is less expensive to plant and more tolerant to rust and other diseases than small grains. Normally, cattle gains will be lower the first grazing in January on ryegrass, than small grains because ryegrass forage contains about 90 to 91% water and small grains 85 to 86% water, consequently, cattle grazing ryegrass will require an additional source of dry matter such as bahiagrass or hemarthria during the month of January. Remember ryegrass production in a pasture renovation program will yield six times more forage than ryegrass grown in a non-tilled, non-herbicide bahiagrass pasture. If additional information is desired please call 863-735-1314.