

APPLICATION OF SYSTEM CONCEPTS IN COW-CALF MANAGEMENT

Mike Adams

Adams Ranch
Ft. Pierce, Florida

This is a description of the Adams Ranch pasture that has been developed over the last 40 years. Our ranches are located in St. Lucie, Okeechobee, and Osceola counties. This is the sub-tropical region of the state. We deal with a variety of habitats from the Osceola palmetto prairie, to cabbage hammock, to flat woods.

In developing improved pastures, our goal is to provide a good balance of forage on year round basis. Each grass or legume has its growth period. In planting new areas, a grass and legumes are planted together. Our principal pasture grasses are Pangola, hermathria, and bahia. The legumes are White Dutch clover, Osceola clover, aeschynomene, Carpon desmodium, and common beggar weed.

We manage our pastures to be productive over a long period of time. Some pastures planted 40 years ago are still very productive even though some have changed considerably. Over time Pangola pastures have become a mix of bahia and other grasses. This has helped from the standpoint of providing grass year round, since bahia will grow in the cool Spring while you are waiting until June for Pangola. As smutgrass takes a pasture to the point of renovation, hermathria is planted as it tends to be a little more competitive but is an open sod grass to allow legume growth.

After establishment, pastures are annually fertilized with potash and phosphorus mix (0-15-30) at 200lb rate. The phosphorus source is half single super and half triple super phosphate. The single super provides the sulfur. Also, boron is added. This is put out in the Fall after hurricane season.

Pastures are stocked to allow enough standing grass reserve to carry the cow herd through winter without additional supplement. Also, most pastures

are divided into three or four blocks. This allows us to move the cattle and rest blocks to allow time for the legumes to establish. This has been helpful for the wildlife as well.

Our program revolves around clover production to the point that it carries us through the winter. February and early March is the toughest part of the year. By late March, the clover is to the point of providing enough forage to get us through the remainder of the winter.

Concerning the management of our pastures, annual soil testing is done to keep pH better than 5.0 and a relatively high level of calcium.

Moving the cattle is just as critical. In pastures divided into 2, 3, or 4 blocks, cattle have to be managed on a put and take basis. It is difficult to predict the weather and other conditions to keep from running out of grass in the wintertime except from experience. For four years, we experimented with a high intensive multi-paddock grazing cell. This cell was made of 23 paddocks and cattle were moved daily in the summer and much slower through the winter. We were able to increase carrying capacity 30% without any more fertilizer, but it is highly intensive as to management. It does allow one more flexibility in planning and adjusting to shortages in grasses before there gets to be a problem.

As far as pastures go, you become much more aware of what and when different grasses or legumes are growing. In doing so, you are much more aware of your cattle.