

APPLICATION OF SYSTEM CONCEPTS IN COW-CALF MANAGEMENT

Bill Thompson

Ironwood Farms
Madison, Florida

INTRODUCTION

Ironwood Farms is a diversified farm in Madison County which is located in the Big Bend area of Florida. Although we are involved in a tree nursery, swine production on pasture, and blueberries, we are probably best known for our purebred Brahman herd. How we produce forage and supplemental feeding for the cow herd will be the topic of my discussion today.

Before starting on what we do at Ironwood Farms, I think it is important to go over what seems to be the normal weather pattern for our area of Florida: cold wet Winters, dry cool Springs, hot humid Summers, and dry Falls. I think that you can see that this can create a lot of problems when developing a forage program.

I. PASTURE

Our pastures are divided into approximately 100 cells ranging in size from 1/2 acre to 80 acres. Most cells are approximately 15 acres in size. The boundaries are fenced with permanent fencing and the cells are constructed utilizing polywire which is electrified. These serve us very well during our dry Springs and Falls. It also allows us to stockpile forage for the Winter. Our permanent pastures are planted in Argentine bahiagrass, Pensacola bahiagrass, and Tiff 44 bermudagrass.

Normally during the months of July, August, and September, we produce more forage than we can utilize.

II. WINTER FORAGE AND SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

- A. Oats
- B. Ryegrass and Clover
- C. Stockpiled Forage
- D. Broiler Litter Mix
- E. Hay

In addition to supplying adequate forage or supplemental feeding for the cow herd, each year with four different seasons with different requirements, we also must grow out all of our replacement females as well as keep an inventory of yearling and coming two year old bulls.

It is also important to us to keep free choice minerals in front of all our animals year round. We also make available fresh water in all of our pastures.

Internal and external parasites are treated twice each year, Spring and Fall. We also utilize a fly control program during the fly season.

These are practices that work for us. They have evolved during many years. We have tried many things that did not work that we know work for others. We will continue to try new ideas and improve on our current practices. We hope our sharing what we do at Ironwood has helped you with your program and we invite you to visit us for a first hand look at our program.