

Floralta Hemarthria

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At Williamson Cattle Company we have been planting and using Floralta Hemarthria since its release in the mid-eighties. We also have been planting and using Flora Star, Callie Giant Bermuda and have one-year-old stand of Callide Rhodesgrass. Like many other south Florida ranches, our pastures were planted in pangola and bahias. Due to spittlebug and selective grazing by the cattle, our pangola pastures slowly turned into bahia. About ten years ago we realized we were faced with two very important needs: 1) providing our cattle with adequate nutrition to wean 600 lb calves while breeding on schedule, and 2) increasing carrying capacities on the land we own.

Grazing Management

One way of utilizing these vigorous new grasses more effectively is to rotational graze them in a three to five pasture cycle. This requires the cattle to harvest the grass more evenly and allows an eight to twelve-day rest between grazings.

In late September and early October, we usually vacate the Floralta pastures and concentrate the grazing on the Star and Bermuda pastures. This accomplishes four things: 1) allows us to utilize the recently fertilized, high quality, frost susceptible, Star and Bermuda pastures before cold weather; 2) these sandy land pastures are a better environment to calve in; 3) lets the Floralta redominate the pasture, thus, reducing weed and undesired grass (mostly common bermuda) competition; and 4) allows us to grow and "stockpile" a very large quantity of a good quality forage to use for cow-calf pairs during the coming winter. During this "stockpile" time we will fertilize the Floralta with ammonium nitrate or ammonium sulfate at the rate of 80 to 90 lb of N per acre. These stockpiled Floralta pastures will be used for winter grazing cow-calf pairs, along with an 18% molasses/slurry supplement fed at the rate of 5 lb per head per day. The cost per cow-calf unit of this program is about \$58.00 excluding labor and overhead.

Feed =

\$133.33/ton \times 60 days \times 5 lb/head/day = \$20

Fertilizer =

\$95.00/ton \times 400 lb/acre \times 2 acres = \$38

Total per cow-calf unit =

\$58

The cattle at Williamson Cattle Company calve from September 15 through January 15 (120 days). These cattle are divided up into two differently managed groups. The cows that calve from September 15 through November 15 will go through the previously mentioned "winter" program. Their critical nutrition period is from October through February. The cows that calve from November 15 through January 15 will go through a similar "spring" program with fertilized improved grasses and molasses/slurry feed. Their critical nutrition period is from December through April.

Around February 15 we will refertilize all our improved grass pastures. We will use a more balanced fertilizer this time with a ratio of about 4-1-1. Instead of just improving forage quality, as we did in the fall nitrogen only fertilizing, this time we need to grow quantity as well as improving grass quality. Ten years ago we would have never fertilized pangola or bahia prior to May, due to the poor response these grasses have as long as the nights are cool. But, with today's improved grasses it pays to fertilize earlier. We have also become much more aware of the environmental effects in our area, especially in regards to phosphorus. By applying the phosphorus fertilizer in the drier spring instead of summer, we have less chance of a "gully-washer" rain sending our fertilizer to Lake Okeechobee to fertilize algae instead of the grass I intended it for.

Propagation

A typical pasture renovation procedure for us will start in late October. After grazing the targeted pasture down very low, we will bottom plow, light disk, and lime

if needed. We will either drill or broadcast and roll ryegrass at the rate of 20-25 lb per acre. The ryegrass will be fertilized in November and is usually ready to graze in late December. We use this high quality grazing for our two- and three-year-old first calf heifers. In most years, the ryegrass will last into May. In June, we will redisk the pasture and fertilize the seedbed that is to be used for planting materials. Because of poor early planting stands, our target date for planting is July 1. In the past we have planted grass after rains in May or June, but often an early summer drought will kill out much of that planting. The pastures we plant in July always have the most uniform and complete stand come winter. I contract with an experienced grass planter to cut, bale and spread the seed grass on our disked land. We disk and roll the grass in ourselves. I pay him by the bale rather than by the acre so I can dictate how heavy or light to plant. Last year I paid \$1.50 per bale for this service. I am a firm believer in planting at least 30 bales per acre (60-65 lbs/bale). The amount of grass you spread per acre and the job you do in disking and rolling in the grass are directly related to the amount of grazing you will get from the new pasture that winter.

Weather is the one factor in grass planting that we obviously can't control. Wet conditions are much better than dry conditions, especially when planting Floralta. We have never lost a planting of Floralta due to too much water.

As you can see in Tables 1 and 2, the cost of converting a bahia pasture to a Floralta pasture can run in the neighborhood of \$200 per acre. Some of the costs are attributed to the pasture conversion (\$90) and some I feel must be attributed to regular operating cost (\$95). From my experience, I feel we can increase stocking rates by 80-100% by converting a bahia pasture to a Floralta pasture. If we double stocking rate from one cow-calf unit per four acres (bahia) to two cow-calf units per four acres (Floralta), that is worth \$50 to \$80 per additional cow-calf unit per year when compared to leasing. Amortization of the \$360 ($\$90/\text{acre} \times 4 \text{ acres}$) @ 8% for 10 years comes to \$13.41 per acre or \$53.64 for the additional cow-calf unit. All other expenses per cow-calf unit seem to remain the same, with the exception of fertilizer cost that will increase depending upon stocking rate.

TABLE 1. Pasture Renovation Cost

Expense Item	Units	Cost/acre, \$
Tractor/fuel/operator/plow	\$48/hour @ 3 acre/hour	16
Fertilize seedbed (1 acre of seedbed = 10 ac planting material)	\$140/ton spread @ 400 lb/ac ÷ 10	3
Cut/bale/spread grass	\$1.50/bale @ 30 bales/acre	45
Tractor/fuel/operator/disk	\$32/hour @ 4 acre/hour	8
Tractor/fuel/operator/roller	\$32/hour @ 4 acre/hour	8
Miscellaneous	Overhead, management, etc.	10
Total	Cost per acre	\$90

TABLE 2. Pasture Operating Cost

Expense Item	Units	Cost/Acre, \$
Tractor/fuel/operator/disk	\$32/hr @ 4 acre/hr	8
Tractor/fuel/operator/drill	\$32/hr @ 3 acre/hr	11
Lime (every five years)	\$30/ton @ 1 ton/acre	6
Ryegrass seed	\$.30/lb × 20 lb/acre	6
Fertilize ryegrass	\$140/ton spread @ 300 lb/acre	21
Fertilize ryegrass	300 lb/acre @ \$100/ton spread	15
Fertilize planted grass	400 lb/acre @ \$140/ton spread	28
Total	Cost per acre	\$95