

Winter Grazing and Supplementation in South Florida

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Introduction

Everyone is aware that each ranch has a little different idea about wintering cattle. That is how it should be because each ranch has its own environment, management style, and objectives. The ideas I am going to discuss with you today should be used solely as a management tool in deciding your management strategies for your winter grazing and supplementation in South Florida.

Utilizing Stockpiled Grasses

Utilizing stockpiled grasses, whether native or improved, is a key to cutting costs. At Lykes Bros., we normally run our cows on improved grasses all summer until we ship the calves. Once the calves are shipped and the cows are worked, we move the cows to native ranges where grasses have stockpiled all summer. This gives our improved grasses time to recover before winter hits. Once cows start calving they are moved back to the improved grass areas. By overgrazing, failure to fertilize at the right time, or neglect of managing the range conditions, you could be costing yourself a lot of money.

At Lykes, we utilize the following stockpiled improved grasses during the winter: Bahia, Pangola, Rhodesgrass, Limpograss, and Callie Bermuda.

Winter Grasses

Generally, we plant ryegrass every year for our heifers. We drill ryegrass into established grasses in the heifer development areas. The pastures all being improved and irrigated reduces the chance of a crop failure.

It depends on the weather, but we usually start the no-till drills in October.

We try to renovate pastures in conjunction with ryegrass planting. Sod fields and old bahia fields get

disked or chopped, limed, and replanted with bahia along with ryegrass in the fall.

Other renovations, such as aeration and ditch cleaning works well in the fall, especially when the seed is drilled or flown on.

Varieties of winter grasses that can be used are ryegrass, oats, grain rye, and wheat. I have had good results from Tetraploid ryegrass and grain rye. Mixtures of the above-mentioned varieties work quite well, reducing the chance of a total crop failure. We have planted a mixture of Japanese millet, grain rye, and ryegrass on old watermelon fields and got a lot of good grazing.

We try to utilize the winter grasses for our yearling, two-year-old, and first calf heifers. Then we utilize any remaining winter pastures with thin cows. When cattle are on the winter grasses, we don't supplement with anything except mineral.

One of the perennial grasses we utilize is Rhodesgrass. Fertilized in December, it gives high quality grazing through most of the winter without protein supplement.

Winter Supplement

We try to use the cheapest source of protein that is available. This is a difficult consideration, due to our limited sources. We have liquid, cubes, blocks, and loose feed. Each, or a combination, may or may not fit your operation. Cost varies considerably from one product to the next and from one distributor to the next.

By managing the cow herd and utilizing the grasses you have grown, you can cut your cost of supplements without hurting production.

Currently, we at Lykes Bros. are using molasses, molasses slurry, and some cubes.

Other byproducts that may be available are citrus

molasses, distillers solubles, citrus pulp, and cull vegetables (to name a few).

Conclusion

Simply put, I don't have the magic winter program. Every year our program changes a little due to the weather, grass condition, supplement cost, cow conditions, and our strategic management plans.

Our basic plan calls for good pasture management, ryegrass for heifers, and utilization of stockpiled grasses with as little supplemental protein as possible.

It all boils down to management, and planning ahead of time. The middle of winter is no time to start worrying about the cows.