

# University of Florida, IFAS Extension Service Grazing Woods as Pasture

## Cattle

Seventy-five years ago range provided almost all of the grazing in Florida. In the 1940's, millions of acres of range were converted to pasture after the introduction of improved pastures. Yet even today range can play a role in meeting forage needs of cattle especially in the winter. It also offers owners of large tracts of undeveloped land a way to get a return without large input for improvement. It is, however, a much less desirable choice because compared with improved, fertilized grass, range has low potential for forage production with low nutritive value. You also have the disadvantage of bare ground and shrubs covering much land area further reducing the carrying capacity.

In the year 2000 Dr Rob Kalmbacher of University of Florida ONA Cattle REC stated at the Spring Ranchers Forum that annual dry matter yield on flat woods would be 500 to 800 lb/A while a bahia grass pasture would yield 8000 lb/A annually with only a 50 lb N/Acre fertilizing per year. He also stated it would take 25 acres to support one cow year round, but with proper management combined with improved pasture, this could be improved to 15 acres per cow. FDACS 1977 publication "Beef Cattle in Florida" was more optimistic stating 8 to 12 acres per cow. This is then compared with improved pasture and a properly supplemented diet could yield 3 acres per cow or in rare cases, 1 to 2 acres per cow during the growing season.



Photo credit: [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_MEDIA/nrcs141p2\\_020545.jpg](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_MEDIA/nrcs141p2_020545.jpg)

## Farm/Ranch Case Studies Series

### Fact Sheet #031716



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## Proper Management

Realistically range pastures can assist cattlemen in their operation especially in the winter when bahia is dormant. Admittedly there are “woods cattle” that are far more successful in this way then when cattle never exposed to range attempt to graze there. It is also helpful to have cows who are “easy keepers” to spend part of the year on range. Still, even range needs to be burned or chopped to achieve maximum grazability. Remember though “old timers” expected cows to have a 50% calf crop, it is not acceptable with today's cattle operations. Range is just not adequate for a lactating cow. She will lose weight and most likely not rebreed next year.



Flatwoods. Photo credit: <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/wildflower/wildflowerGrows.asp>

A second necessity is to supplement cows on range especially in winter months with the equivalent of 5 lb/day molasses with an 18% crude protein. An additional positive when attempting cattle management on range land is the additional revenue possible from the sale of hunting leases that can even exceed revenue from cattle in some cases. If you are convinced that you want to pursue this type of operation, seek further advice from experienced local cattlemen especially concerning specific known pasture lands. In addition, your local UF Livestock Agent can help you with achieving a balanced ration and estimated hay needs for your cattle.

### Horses in the Woods

The usefulness here is shade for your horses not grazing. A horse's more simple stomach does not make them a candidate for grazing in the woods.



### Small Ruminants

Small ruminants have the most potential for woods grazing or even land clearing. However, the points above are still true even for a goat. Success is achieved most often when a goat or sheep can mix browse with large amounts of pasture grass in the opinion of this Agent.



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## Danger: All Woods are Not Safe!

In the last ten years, many beef cattle, horses, and even goats have died due to invasive exotic toxic plants that are now common in woods. The cost of grazing in woods, flat woods, or even the edge of forested areas has risen due to the necessity to do weed control before the cattle are introduced to a new pasture. Even long time pastures are experiencing this infringement especially along bodies of water. For goat owners who believe their animal is invincible: be careful! Even a goat will die if it eats castor bean or chinaberry.

## Native & Exotic Common Toxic Plants in Woods

*Castor Bean*



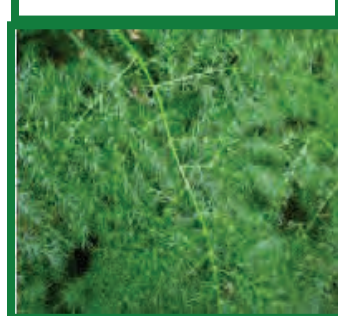
*Chinese Tallow*



*Yellow Jasmine*



*Asparagus Fern*



*Coral ardisia*



*Cherry Tree*



*Bracken Fern*



*Chinaberry*



*Crotalaria*



*Lantana*



# Selected References

Connor, Doyle. Commissioner of Agriculture. "Beef Cattle in Florida" 1977 Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences pg. 296-297

Kalmbacher, Robert. "Livestock Production on Florida Range" 2000 Spring Ranchers Forum Proceedings. Pg 25-26



## **Online Resources**

Many publications are available free online at agriculture websites. Here are some examples:

- Orange County Extension <http://orange.ifas.ufl.edu/>
- CFLAG <http://cflag.ifas.ufl.edu/>
- Forages of Florida <http://agronomy.ifas.ufl.edu/ForagesofFlorida/index.php>
- EDIS (Electronic Data Information Source) <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>

## **Pasture Visits**

Private consultations are a great way to acquire assistance without further cost. This can occur at your ranch, farm, or at the local Extension Education Center. Limited soil testing is included as well.

## **Toxic Plant Identification**

In the Orlando area Extension Agent Dennis Mudge specializes in poisonous plant education and assistance. He has numerous fact sheets available for all farm species and will visit your ranch for a consultation helping to prevent poisoning of your animals. He can also help determine the cause when animal loss or sickness occurs if it is due to toxic plant ingestion.

Contact Dennis Mudge in Orange & Seminole Counties for pasture visits and toxic plant identification at 407-254-9200.