

Multispecies Grazing Incorporating Small Ruminants to the Mix

2013 Small Ruminant Production
Conference

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Range ≠ Pasture

- Range – native vegetation in the landscape – grasses, forbs, herbs, shrubs
- Florida range has a regular regime of fire applied by nature (prescribed fire by man) or wildfire (applied by nature or man).
- Fire helps to keep the vegetative diversity

Goats are Browsers

- Browse- the edible parts of woody vegetation, such as leaves, stems, and twigs from bushes.
- Preferentially:
 - Cattle prefer grasses
 - Sheep prefer forbs (broadleaf weeds)
 - Goats prefer browse
 - Horse prefer grass

*Ensminger and Olentine – Feeds and Nutrition

Dietary Preferences

Species	Grass %	Weed %	Browse %
Goats	20	20	60
Sheep	60	30	10
Cattle	70	20	10
Horse	90	4	6

Grazing

- A Method of Harvesting the Resource
- Single Biggest Problem in Central Florida is **OVERGRAZING** of Pastures

Over Stocking

- Leads to high parasite infection
- Leads to weed intrusion
- Decreases forage production
- Contributes to loss of plant density
- Can result in sand lots

STOCKING RATE

“RULES OF THUMB”

Good improved, fertilized, rotated Pasture

Horse ----- 700 pounds per acre

Cow ----- 800 pounds per acre

Sheep ----- 600 pounds per acre

Goats ----- 600 pounds per acre

Multispecies Grazing Positives

- Literature claims 5-20% increased utilization of forages
- Possible increase in meat production by >20%
- Reduction in internal parasite load and therefore less resistance developed to wormers
- Weed control

Weed Control

Most noticeable benefit of multispecies grazing is brush and weed control

Multispecies Grazing Negatives

- Excess Copper in mineral for sheep
- Predator control for sheep and goats
- Additional fencing requirement for sheep and goats
- Conflicts between individuals of different species
- Challenges of working multiple species

Overgrazing

- Stubble height dependent on forage species
- It is time to move them before the grass is gone!
- Rotation of total herd and/or species with ample rest/regrowth time is the best policy

Pasture stocking considerations

Agronomic	Animal	Management
Forage species	Herd size	Supplementation amount
Fertilization	Bodyweight	Supplementation type
Precipitation	Dry matter intake	Pasture management
Pasture size	Nutrient requirements	Forage allowance
Season		Future forage needs
Forage seasonal growth		
Forage chemical composition		
Forage mass		

*AN 155, Matt Hersom