# GROWING COOL-SEASON FORAGES IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

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## Introduction

Florida beef cattle ranchers utilize perennial forage crops or rangeland to provide grazing throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Unfortunately, winter forage availability can be limited and sparse in some cases. Since 55% of the cost of maintaining a cow can be associated with winter feeding, some managers use cool-season forages to bridge the gap between growing seasons.

**Objective:** To demonstrate cool-season forage production in Central Florida

## Methods and Material

- Soil tests were conducted in July 2023 to evaluate nutrient needs before planting, and pastures were sprayed with glyphosate and disked.
- On 14 November 2023, twenty-two plots measuring 2.4 meters wide and 30.5 meters long were disked a second time and planted by broadcast over-seeding and rolled.
- Varieties grown include five oats, two wheats, four ryes, two triticale, five ryegrasses, one clover, and three mixes.
- Fast-acting pelleted lime was applied as a strip down a middle cross-section of the plots.
- All treatments were fertilized 15 days after planting using 16-4-8 (N-P-K) at 336.3 kg/ha and 84 days at 168 kg/ha, providing 53.8 kg and 26.8 kg N/ha, respectively.

Figure 1: Rolling the prepared seedbed after planting.

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Figure 2: Cool-season forage varieties one month after planting.

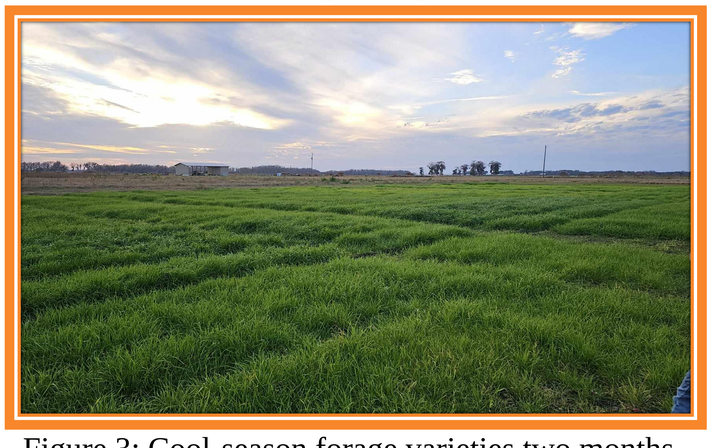

Figure 3: Cool-season forage varieties two months after planting.

Figure 4: Cool-season forge varieties three months after planting.

## Results

- One month after planting the cool-season forage varieties, small grains varieties grew 15 to 20 cm, and ryegrass varieties grew 28 cm.
- Two months after planting, small grains reached a height of 30 to 53 cm, and ryegrass varieties reached a height of 66 cm.
- Three months after planting, small grains increased to 36 - 76 cm, and ryegrass maintained a height of 66 cm.
- A field day was conducted on February 23, 2024, where 62 participants saw firsthand how these forages grow in this environment.
- In post-meeting survey evaluations, 6 participants indicated they planned to implement cool-season forages, nine weed control, and three pasture management strategies. Sixty-one percent of participants increased their knowledge of cool-season forages by attending this program.


Figure 5: Tim Wilson presenting at field day (top left) & Field Day flyer (bottom right)

## Conclusion

Although the weather can influence growth, cool-season forage production can help provide high-quality nutrition to livestock during the early winter and spring and may be an option for some growers in Central Florida.