

New Bahiagrasses Give Southeasterners Options

Three varieties offer improved yields, other benefits

Fae Holin, [Hay and Forage Grower](#)

March 1, 2009

Not one, not two, but three bahiagrass varieties have recently been introduced for Southern graziers and hay growers. All offer improved yields, two are also more cold-tolerant and the third establishes quickly, says Auburn University extension forage agronomist Don Ball.

Bahiagrass, used for either pasture or hay but most commonly grazed, doesn't have the yield potential of bermudagrass. But this seed-propagated warm-season grass can be grown on drought-prone sandy land to fairly heavy clay soils and from upland sites to wet bottom fields, Ball says.

Auburn University's AU Sand Mountain variety will extend the bahiagrass area of adaptation north. "The exact northern limit ... is likely at least as far as central Tennessee," he says.

Originated from Pensacola bahiagrass, AU Sand Mountain consistently yields better than other varieties in more northern areas and less so farther south. It may be particularly useful in areas where soils are too moist for good bermudagrass production. Avoid pastures where it may outcompete other desired perennial forages, he suggests.

Farther south, it's intermediate in forage production compared to Pensacola and Argentine, the old standbys, and Tifton 9, the 1989 release that touted 25-30% yield increases over the older varieties, says Ann Blount, a University of Florida geneticist.

"That's how it performs for us in southern Georgia, southern Alabama and throughout Florida," she adds.

UF-Riata, a new bahiagrass from the University of Florida, is also more cold-tolerant, Blount says. "It's got a good 10% improvement in cold tolerance over Tifton 9 and is much more so than Pensacola or Argentine. It grows about two weeks later in the fall and two weeks earlier in spring.

"The idea was to minimize the need for feeding hay particularly in Florida, because our cattlemen have a very short winter. For central and south Florida, this grass stays green much of the year. It also has a little better disease resistance than current varieties," Blount says.

Much like Tifton 9, UF-Riata and the third new bahiagrass, TifQuik, from the University of Georgia/USDA-ARS, don't handle overgrazing, Blount says. "Pensacola and Argentine tolerate heavy grazing because they're more prostrate in their growth habits. But UF-Riata and TifQuik, like Tifton 9, have more upright growth habits. Because of that, it makes them a little bit more vulnerable for overgrazed situations; so you have to manage them better.

“The benefit is, with a little management, you can get at least 25-50% more growth with these varieties, compared to Argentine and Pensacola,” she points out.

TifQuik, developed at the USDA-ARS Crop Genetics and Breeding Research Unit in Tifton, GA, was bred to get a jump on establishment and extend the grazing season.

Bahiagrass has a lot of hard seed and usually needs two to three weeks to establish. But TifQuik was developed to have reduced hard seed and faster germination, says USDA-ARS geneticist William Anderson.

“These features mean that a TifQuik-seeded pasture will be covered earlier, and grazing or hay removal can be performed sooner — with higher initial yields,” he says.

“TifQuik will be particularly valuable to growers who wish to include bahiagrass in a sod-based rotation system with row crops such as peanuts and cotton in the southeastern U.S. Bahiagrass has been shown to reduce nematode and disease problems in subsequent crops, and it should provide many forage growers with another tool to make their operations more efficient and, hopefully, more profitable,” Anderson says.

To order AU Sand Mountain seed, call Jim Bostick, Alabama Crop Improvement Assn., at 334-693-3988.

Ragan & Massey Inc., Poncha-toula, LA, at 985-386-6042, is taking orders for UF-Riata, to be available in late summer.

Supplies of TifQuik seed for this spring may be limited, says Anderson. For TifQuik ordering information, call Mike Garland, Georgia Seed Development Commission, 706-542-5640.