

Cogongrass in Pastures and Hay-Meadows in Louisiana – A Historical Perspective

**Dearl Sanders, Resident Coordinator and Edmiston Professor
LSU AgCenter
Clinton, Louisiana**

In Louisiana, cogongrass in a pasture was first identified on a dairy farm in Angie in April of 1990. Prior to 1990 it had primarily been restricted to an urban area east of New Orleans. An initial survey of the immediate area and surrounding parishes (counties) indicated infestations on an additional eight farms. Infestations varied in size from just a few feet in diameter up to approximately 10 acres.

An attempt to determine the overall extent of the infestations was conducted by Dr. Buddy Dayton (area dairy specialist) and county agents from the area through a series of grower meetings, farm visits, mass media announcements and informational displays at parish fairs. A total of 12 different farms were found to have infestations, none exceeding 10 acres. All of the infested fields were confined to Washington, St. Tammany and Tangipahoa Parishes (parishes in extreme southeastern Louisiana adjacent to Mississippi).

In May of 1990 rhizomes from one infested field were collected and potted in a greenhouse on campus in Baton Rouge. A variety of post-emergent herbicides were screened on 6-8 inch new-growth plants. Herbicide screening was conducted by Dr. Jim Griffin and included a number of sugarcane herbicides, since Dr. Griffin's primary concern was the spread of cogongrass into sugarcane. Of the herbicides screened the most efficacious treatment was a mixture of glyphosate at 2 lb.ai./acre plus sulfometuron (Oust) at 0.25 lb.ai./acre. Glyphosate and sulfometuron were obtained from their respective manufacturers' in sufficient amounts to treat the on-farm infestations. Most of the farmers treated the infestation sites, those that did not, chose to plow their sites. Control ranged from good to excellent, but had the negative impact of also killing desirable forages associated with the infestation sites. Summer plowing of the sites resulted in less control than the chemical treatments.

In the spring of 1991 an infestation site was found associated with a sugarcane field near Donaldsonville, LA. After extensive additional survey work the infestation was found to be confined to one edge of a field and had been there for 10 years (according to the farm manager and verified by the owner). No additional plants could be found within the field. This field was monitored monthly throughout 1991. Herbicides used in the production of this sugarcane were screened in the greenhouse and were found to be ineffective against cogongrass. The infestation was limited to field margins that were not cultivated. It was hypothesized that the intense cultivation associated with sugarcane production severely limited the spread of the pest.

In the fall of 1991 and again in 1992 it was suggested that infested pastures be deep plowed (at least 6 inches deep) and planted to ryegrass. This was not considered to be an unusual practice since both dairy and beef farms in the area were dependent on winter forage. The only change suggested was that the cogongrass sites be targeted for planting for two consecutive years. Results were outstanding, with infestations within the planted areas being reduced by greater than 95%. Infestations remained in the pastures in areas that could not be plowed, ie: fences, shade trees, water troughs, etc. Chemical treatments for these areas were recommended and continue until today. Fences and non-crop areas

associated with the pastures were treated with glyphosate or glyphosate plus sulfometuron or imazapyr. Areas not treated remain sources of re-infestation.

Infestations of cogongrass have continued to increase along roadsides, transmission lines and in forest sites throughout the three parish region. Attempts at chemical control have continued on these sites with varying degrees of success. No additional pasture or forage infestation sites have been reported to the author in the three parish region since 1995.

In 2000, a pasture on the western side of state near Leesville, LA was found to be infested and the same recommendations were made. However the landowner refused to spray or plow and plant winter forage and the infestation has become a legal matter.

Louisiana's Current Recommendations for Cogongrass in Pastures Are:

- **Prepare a complete fall seedbed, utilizing a finishing tool with sweeps if possible to deposit crowns and rhizomes at the soil's surface.**
- **Plant ryegrass at a minimum of 30 lbs/acre alone or in combination with other winter forages.**
- **Do not overgraze the ryegrass in the infested areas.**
- **Allow the ryegrass in infested areas to naturally senesce, allowing full season competition before removal.**
- **Spray all fencerows and noncrop areas with glyphosate alone or in combination with sulfometuron (Oust, etc.) or imazapyr (Arsenal, etc.) where allowed.**
- **Practice good sanitation to prevent re-infestation.**