Effect of Frequency and Height of Cutting on the Yield, Stand, and Protein Content of Some Forages in El Salvador

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Although El Salvador is the smallest of the Central American Republics, it has an important place in agriculture. Its dense population on an area of only about 13,000 square miles demands that all usable land be devoted to producing food. Livestock, which is included in most farming operations, is an important enterprise even though some of the animals are imported. Approximately 1½ million animals were reported recently by the Department of Statistics. The animals are fed on limited pasture areas and on soiling crops such as rapid-growing tropical grasses and sorghum. Many of the animals on upland regions receive only cut feed, for pasture there is inadequate. During the long dry season from October to May, feed is acutely short, and many of the animals die of starvation.

The productivity of the forage areas depends on the fertility of the soil and on the botanical composition and management of the pastures. At present no standard for management of pastures exists in El Salvador: some livestockmen permit their animals to overgraze; others undergraze their pastures. Many pastures are so overgrazed that the only plants surviving are a few scattered tufts of grasses and a few trees. These practices are inefficient and point to the need for good forages and better management. This problem has been discussed in other publications.

Considering the deficiency of forage in El Salvador, the prerequisite for a successful livestock program is to supply adequate quantities of feed to animals through the extreme dry season. Until this objective has been attained, modern techniques for producing highly nutritious forage cannot be fully applied. The investigations presented in this paper deal with the study of several forage plants that promise to fill the needs if properly managed.

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