





but advised us to first visit Bent Tree Farm before making any decisions. He had recently attended a presentation Teddy Gentry had given in Dothan, Alabama. Herman was impressed with the South Poll composite breed Teddy had developed. These heat-tolerant cattle should thrive on our southern grasses, according to Teddy.

We immediately contacted Bent Tree Farm, made an appointment, drove to Fort Payne, and met with Dave Roberts, the herdsman for Bent Tree Farm. Dave drove us all over the mountain and into a picturesque area he called the Cove showing us these beautiful red cattle, some with white faces. We stopped at a quaint little store in the Cove operated by Dave's sister and had a delicious grass-fed hamburger. Dave explained all the attributes of the South Polls. OK, now we were sold!

Dave said there was a herd of South Poll cattle Teddy had donated to the University of Georgia, Alapaha Research Station in South Georgia that was for sale. We met Dave at the research station and he helped us pick out 40 bred mama cows with calves and one bull, M480. We set out on a new adventure. Our goal was to raise a sustainable breed of cattle that would do well in our environment and produce tender and tasty beef that could be taken from the farm to the table. We also wanted a mama cow with excellent maternal traits, disposition and of moderate size.



Board members John Eldridge and Tom McGrady admiring the Whites' cattle.



Board member J.A. Girgenti and Paul Shanks walk among the cow/calf pairs.

The South Poll met all of our requirements and exceeded our expectations.

Having no experience with cattle was probably a good thing as I did not have any preconceptions as to what to do. I knew I wanted to raise grass-fed beef. What could be easier than grazing? I subscribed to the Stockman Grass Farmer newsletter, I read books, and researched on the internet. Yep, we needed to raise grass-fed beef. Here is where the problem began.

All of the traditional cattlemen we talked to said you can't raise a beef animal to finish in our environment on Bahiagrass. Their advice was to take the calves to the sale barn at weaning straight off their mama.

Several Extension agents advised it would be impossible to raise grass-fed beef without large inputs of supplemental feed. I distinctly recall one agent telling me, "But, the calves have got to eat something!"

Even the university system researchers said there would be certain times during the year when there would not be forage for the calves to finish on.

The local farm co-op suggested if we were to expect any yield at all it would be necessary to spread fertilizer, especially nitrogen.

Our hay supplier stated that we should not grow more than one species of grass in a field. He said by growing multiple species, we would ruin our bahia pastures. Also, he advised if we wanted quality grass, we must spread commercial fertilizer and spray chemicals to control weeds.

Our friends and acquaintances were only familiar with the traditional way of doing things and could offer no advice other than the way their daddy and granddaddy did things.

Our ranch was a monoculture of Argentine Bahiagrass with some volunteer Bermuda grass. Bahiagrass grows in semi-tropical regions. It has an upright habit and the roots grow deep. It is dormant until around the first of June but when it is actively growing; it produces tons and tons of forage. I was in the fields yesterday and the Bahiagrass was so thick and tall (mid-thigh) I could barely walk through it. The down side is it begins to decline in



Both the cattle and the people were relaxed Oct. 3 when this photo was taken at Cliff and Kay Whites' Holiday Ranch in Vernon, Fla. In the background is the Whites' beautiful farm home.

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nutritive value in September and is worthless once it is frosted (yes, we have frosts and freezing in North Florida). Argentine Bahiagrass will not make standing hay.

We, like everyone else in the grass-fed movement, were familiar with Joel Salatin's "salad bar" concept of mixed forages. We wanted a salad bar. We also wanted to finish our steers on grass. We were convinced there was a way for the cattle to have "something to eat" on a year-round basis without costly supplemental inputs. Cliff was willing to go along with my wishes so together we began our odyssey into building a year-round forage chain, even though "they" said it couldn't be done!

Another important practice we wanted to try was strip grazing using a solar charger and electrified poly tape. However, the stockers we spoke with said it was too labor intensive. Traditionally, when a field was ready for grazing, cattle had free access to an entire field and it was grazed until the grass was gone.

Over the past few years we developed a diversified permanent forage base on both our irrigated and non-irrigated paddocks. We have used small grains such as millet, rye and oats. We have used several varieties of ryegrass, a winter annual. We have used a number of different clovers, most of which act as annuals in our warmer environment but through careful management, the clover reseeds.

Here is what we have learned:

By using high density strip grazing, we were able to increase soil fertility by the cattle depositing manure and urine in a controlled manner. Also, our stocking rate capacity increased by 30 to 60 percent.

Since changing to Cydectin wormer instead of the tradi-



**On Sunday, Oct. 4, those attending the meeting at the Whites' had an opportunity to go fishing off the gulf coast. These five had a good day. They are Cliff White, Lisa Jeffery, Sunshine Shanks, Paul Shanks and Bruce Shanks.**

tional Ivermectin, we have created a dung beetle-friendly habitat. Those thousands of beetles will bury a cow patty in two days, incorporating tons of natural fertilizer into the soil thereby increasing the soils' fertility, moisture retention capacity and aeration.

We can have a year-round forage chain in North Florida using Bahiagrass as a base. In the summer we seed some of the paddocks with millet. The millet is grazed several times during summer and fall. In early fall we no-till the Bahiagrass with ryegrass, rye and oats, along with crimson, arrowleaf, red, and Durana clovers. Thanks to our irriga-



**Cliff White struggling with one of the many amber jacks and mackerel caught Oct. 4.**



**Bruce Shanks holds one of the many nice amber jacks they caught while fishing Oct. 4.**



**Lisa Jeffery works to land one of the many fish they came home with that day.**



tion system, we can plant our winter forages at least 30 days earlier than farms with non-irrigated land.

The oats develop first in the fall, followed by the rye, then the ryegrass. The rye and ryegrass persist through the winter, providing very lush grazing. During the establishment phase of our winter grazing, we allow the cattle to graze until they have their fill then we move them off of the paddock. When the forages are fully developed, the cattle stay in the paddock full time and are rotated paddock to paddock. This allows us to manage the height of the remaining forage and allows for quick regrowth.

During February, the crimson clover develops followed by arrowleaf clover in April. The red clover then appears in May and June followed by Durana clover which persists the rest of the summer season. These clovers are providing nitrogen fertilizer for the grasses for months. Yesterday, in that tall, thick Bahiagrass you could dig down into the grass to find Durana clover near the ground.

Last year we planted 30 acres of Red River Crabgrass which has spread to the adjoining 20 acres (and my vegetable garden!). Crabgrass is more nutritious than Bahiagrass and provides good grazing particularly in the fall when the Bahiagrass is losing its nutritive value.

Earlier this year, we planted 10 acres of Perennial Peanut, a legume. Perennial Peanut is similar to alfalfa which does not grow well here. Our Perennial Peanut is a summer crop mixed in Crabgrass. It provides very good grazing and we cut a little hay off this mixture.

Even with the ability to have year-round forage, it would be useless without the proper breed of cattle with the ability to thrive and finish on grass – the South Poll. As another South Poll breeder, John Lyons, stated at our first South Poll Grass Cattle Association organizational meeting in Fort Payne, “The South Polls can do more on less than any breed I have ever seen.” John should know - he runs a stocker operation at his farm in east central Alabama and



Board members Tom McGrady and Dave Roberts were so intent on their discussion they may not have known this photo was being taken.

has seen how many other breeds perform on his fescue grass. The South Polls excel on grass alone.

Well, “they” (traditional cattlemen, stockers, friends and acquaintances, our hay guy, Florida Extension, university researchers and the local farm co-op) said it couldn’t be done here in North Florida, but I believe we proved them wrong! And, as the saying goes, the proof is in the pudding. When our steers were delivered for slaughter on Aug. 10, the owner of the grass-fed slaughter facility (a widely recognized premier USDA beef processor), after seeing the steers stated, “These are the best set of steers that have ever come through here, and if not THE best, then among the VERY best”.

**And “they” said it couldn’t be done!**



Kay White, Paul Shanks, Cliff White and Ralph Voss discuss South Poll blood lines while looking over some of the Whites’ cattle.

## SPGCA MEETS OCT. 3 IN FLORIDA

The South Poll Grass Cattle Association held its fall meeting Oct. 3 at the home of Kay and Cliff White in Vernon, Fla.

Board members gave final approval to the association’s bylaws and also discussed issues and concerns with the website.

The board heard financial reports and discussed whole herd reporting, along with the association’s next annual meeting, which will be held June 11, 2010, in Montgomery, Texas, at the home of members Toyah and Tom McGrady. The annual field day will be held the next day at the McGrady Ranch.

The next SPGCA board meeting will be held at the McGradys’ on March 6.

The pictures in this newsletter were all taken at the October meeting in Florida.