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ZERO GRAZED PASTURE UNDER YOUNG

RUBBER (Hevea brasiliensis)

By

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the feasibility of growing cut and carry pastures under young rubber. The aspects investigated were productivity and species selection, nutritional aspects in relation to application of fertilizers to grass, legume grass compatibility and dry matter yields of mixed swards, competition of grass and legume grown under young rubber trees. Aspects of pasture establishment, systems of planting and dry matter in relation to plant density and certain ecological factors were also studied.

Nine field experiments were laid out at four different sites. Three at Pembroke State Plantation, one at Dartonfield Estate, three at Eladuwa State Plantation and two at Hadigalla State Plantation, all in the Kalutara District.

Nitrogen showed a linear increasing response in dry matter production of grass to increasing levels of applied nitrogen up to about 350 kg N/ha/yr and potassium also showed

such linear responses but increase of grass DM/kg K was less than grass DM/kg N. There was no response in grass dry matter production to either the source or level of application of phosphorus. There were certain indications of N,P,K interactions.

Different grass species responded differently to application of nitrogen. A 30-day defoliation interval secured the highest dry matter yields and nutritive value in grass. Fertilizers applied little and often gave higher yields than larger doses at longer intervals.

Legume-based pastures were more productive than pure grass pastures. Indication of fixed nitrogen contribution to grass by legumes were seen. Less weed competition in mixed swards was evident. Stylosanthes guanensis had higher dry matter yields than Pueraria phaseoloides and Centrosema pubescens.

Panicum maximum cv Guinea b and Bracharia ruziziensis competed with all five clones of Hevea tested reducing their growth. In this instance the more productive grass competed more with the trees. Grass has shown to compete with rubber for soil nitrogen. The dry matter yield of ten grasses tested under Hevea gave dry

matter yields in descending order of Panicum maximum cv Guinea a, Guinea b, Paspalum plicatulum, Setaria sphacelata, Bracharia decumbens, Bracharia brizantha, Bracharia ruziziensis, Bracharia milliformis, Pennisetum purpureum and Panicum maximum var trichoglume cv greenpanic.

The rate of competition of 10 species of grass grown under Hevea in the descending order were B.brizantha, B.decumbens, P.maximum cv Guinea b, P.purpureum, P.maximum cv Guinea a, P.phaseoloides(legume), B.ruziziensis, B.milliformis, P.plicatulum, S.sphacelata, P.maximum cv greenpanic.

The productive vigour and competitiveness of grasses with Hevea was not closely related. Therefore it is possible to plant species such as P.plicatulum, S.sphacelata and B.milliformis for interplanting with rubber. Grass and legume compete with Hevea when planted close to the trees and should be planted at best 2m away from the base of the trees.

The highest yields were obtained with a spacing of 0.15x0.30 m in grass. Methods of zero tillage with herbicides gave higher rates of grass establishment. The dry matter

production of grass is conditioned by high night temperature, high morning relative humidity, and increased clear sunshine hours. Rainfall did not show a close relationship with dry matter production of grass.

P.plicatulum and S.guyanensis cvs schofield or fine stem oxley could be the best species of grass and legume for intercropping under young rubber in the future. The grass and legume could be grown in alternate rows about 2m from the base of the tree. The trees are best planted at a spacing of 9.1x2.4 m. The pasture has to be fertilized with 90-100 kg P/ha/yr and about 135 kg K/ha/yr. No nitrogen is necessary for such a mixed sward. But the rubber trees have to be fertilized heavily over and above their normal needs. Such a mixed pasture sward would supply 25,000-30,000 kg DM/ha/yr provided it is defoliated monthly at 13-20 cm above ground. Pasture/tree competition could be avoided some more probably if pasture is irrigated during the dry periods.

Implications of this work are discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
ABSTRACT	1v
INTRODUCTION	1
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
Productivity	4
Productivity in relation to agroecological zones of Sri Lanka	6
Productivity and nutrient response	7
Nitrogen	7
Phosphorus	10
Potassium	11
Productivity of legume based pastures	11
Productivity and cutting frequency	15
Nutritive value digestibility and intake	17
Crude protein levels and maturity of grass in monoculture	19
Crude protien content in grass/legume mixture	19
Cut and feed versus grazing	20
Establishment	21
Monocultures versus mixtures	21
Cuttings versus seed	22
Spacing and Density of planting	23
Cultivation and Establishment	23
Pasture as intercrops in perennial tree crop culture	24

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Expt No.	Page
I. Effects of sources and levels of phosphate.	31
II. Effects of cutting regimes, species and levels of nitrogen on dry matter yield of grass.	34
III. Effects of levels, and application frequencies of fertilizer on the dry matter production of grass.	36
IV. Drymatter yield of grasses and legumes in monoculture and mixture.	38
V. Effect of grasses and a legume on growth of <u>H. brasiliensis</u> .	39
VI. Effect of grasses and a legume on growth of young <u>Hevea</u> clones.	41
VII. Effect of planting systems on growth of immature rubber.	42
VIII. Effect of spacing and applied nitrogen on dry matter yield of grass.	45
IX. Establishment of grass under <u>Hevea</u> .	46
X. Effect of Climatic factors on the dry matter yield of grass	48

RESULTS

Expt No.	Page
I. Effects of Sources and levels of phosphate,	51
II. Effects of cutting regimes, species and levels of nitrogen on dry matter yield of grass.	57
III. Effects of levels and application frequencies of fertilizer on the dry matter production of grass.	88
IV. Dry matter yield of grasses and legumes in monoculture and mixture	93
V. Effect of grass and a legume on growth of <u>H. brasiliensis</u> .	106
VI. Effect of grasses and a legume on growth of young rubber clones.	129

X

Expt.No.	page
VII.Effect of planting systems on growth of immature rubber.	136
VIII.Effect of spacing and applied nitrogen on dry matter yield of grass.	140
IX.Establishment of grass under Hevea.	145
X.Effect of climatic factors on the dry matter yield of grass.	149
DISCUSSION	
Expt.No.	
I.Effect of sources and levels of phosphate.	154
II.Effects of cutting regimes, species and levels of nitrogen on dry matter yield of grass.	157
III.Effects of levels, and application frequencies of fertilizer on the dry matter production of grass.	161
IV.Dry matter yield of grasses and legumes in monoculture and mixture.	163
V. Effect of grasses and a legume on growth of <u>H. brasiliensis</u> .	167
VI.Effect of grasses and a legume on growth of young <u>Hevea</u> clones.	172
VII.Effect of planting systems on growth of immature rubber.	174
VIII.Effect of spacing and applied nitrogen on dry matter yield of grass.	177
IX. Establishment of grass under Hevea	179
X. Effect of climatic factors on the dry matter yield of grass	180
GENERAL DISCUSSION	183
APPENDICES	195
BIBLIOGRAPHY	212
FURTHER RESEARCH	232