



Animal production on Tropical Pastures in Brazil

Cacilda Borges do Valle and Valéria Pacheco Batista Euclides
Embrapa Beef Cattle – Campo Grande, MS, Brazil.
cacilda@cnpqg.embrapa.br; val@cnpqg.embrapa.br

Animal production in the tropics is done mostly on native and cultivated pastures. Brazil is predominantly tropical and is the fifth largest country in the world with about 20% of its area covered by pastures (174 million ha). It has a natural aptitude for livestock production also as climate and topography are concerned. Soils however, are acid and poor, with more than 90% dystrophic (soil base saturation less than 50%) in Central Brazil, the most significant region for livestock production. The majority of the cattle of 209 million head is on pastures, mostly of grasses and planted to a few *Brachiaria* and *Panicum* cultivars, characterizing extensive monocultures. Estimates are of only 3% finished in intensive systems. Pasture diversification as well as recovery of degraded old pastures is the major target of research and public policies nowadays in Brazil. Since 2004 Brazil is the largest exporter and second largest producer of beef in the world. It is also the largest producer and exporter of tropical forage seed, a market of about 1 million dollars a year, triggering interest from multinational companies to begin exploring this sector. Technology has increasingly been used in livestock or integrated with crop-forest-livestock systems. Together with research-oriented inputs, productivity has increased despite decrease in the area of pastures. Major issues of sustainability and animal welfare have been raised towards Brazilian beef despite the fact that the country has 68% of its area in original forests. Efforts to observe good agricultural practices and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from ruminants are being undertaken to make Brazilian livestock industry ever more efficient and competitive. Tropical forage breeding is a recent activity worldwide and started with legume breeding in Australia and at CIAT in Colombia. Regrettably almost of all those programs have been discontinued and results have not really impacted production systems in the tropics. In Brazil, breeding and selection of tropical forages began in the mid-1980's focusing mostly on *Panicum maximum*, *Brachiaria* sp., *Andropogon*, *Stylosanthes*, *Arachis* and *Leucaena*. Recently released cultivars in Brazil, selected either from germplasm collections or from bred progenies are expected to fulfill expectations of increased productivity with sustainable production. A very important contribution comes from the private sector through the partnership with UNIPASTO (Seed Companies Association) since 2002. As exclusive seed producers and distributors of Embrapa's cultivars, both in Brazil and abroad it assists in the rapid adoption and dissemination of these cultivars.