

The Value of Improved Pastures to Brazilian Beef

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Brazil is basically an agricultural country, with 190 million hectares of pastures which sustain 209 million heads of cattle. Less than 10% of the cattle are fattened in feedlots, whereas cattle reared on pastures are a competitive advantage for exportation eliminating the risks presented by the mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) and considering animal welfare. Brazil occupies the first place in beef exports since 2004 and has the largest commercial herd in the world. In 2011, 16.5% of its production was exported, and the livestock sector contributed with 30.4% of the gross national product of the agribusiness and 6.73% of the Brazilian GNP. Many forage breeding programs, mainly at Embrapa, contribute to the development of improved pastures, however, cultivars of *Brachiaria brizantha*, *B. decumbens*, *B. humidicola* and *Panicum maximum* are the main species used in the country. All of them are of apomictic reproduction, so there are few cultivars occupying very large continuous areas, thus offering a risk to the productive system. Such is the case of *B. brizantha* cv. Marandu which occupies alone around 50 million hectares. Brazilian tropical forage seed industry is also very important, and Brazil is the main seed exporter, supplying all Latin American countries. Due to pasture degradation, around 8 million hectares are renovated or recovered each year. Forages are also used and planted each year in integrated crop-livestock and integrated crop-livestock forest systems. Four million hectares are nowadays occupied with these systems. Improved pastures are thus a major asset in Brazil not only for the beef production chain but also for the dairy industry.

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