

This field of crabgrass produced 3 tons per acre in two cuttings after the rye pasture was grazed out.

## MAKES GOOD HAY OR PASTURE

# Cattlemen Turning Crabgrass Into Money

Crabgrass — cursed by home owners, tolerated by farmers, and laughed at by singers and cartoonists — is starting to make a better name for itself in the South.

Crabgrass pastures are producing up to 2 lbs. of daily gain for cattle, and crabgrass fields are yielding up to 6 tons per acre of hay.

If this all sounds a little incredible, consider the characteristics of crabgrass that have made it a hated weed in fields, lawns and gardens. Known by the scientific name *Digitaria sanguinalis*, it's a persistent volunteer plant which comes up year after year. It also survives and even thrives under drouth conditions.

These are the kind of attributes that caught the eye of agronomist R. L. Dalrymple 10 years ago at the Noble Foundation farm near Ardmore, Okl. During the 1970's, he researched this grass and developed management practices for it that have made it into a respectable forage crop that could become important in many parts of the United States.

Grazing tests over the past six years on crabgrass have averaged out to a daily gain of 1.42 lbs. for weaning and stocker steers and heifers. But there were large differences, depending on the quality of the forage. One group that was grazed on mature crabgrass gained 0.63 to 0.90 lbs. daily.

"But the point is that these calves did respectably well on grass that was completely mature at turn-on time. What other grasses can produce good gains on beef calves when the grass is at the full-seed ripe stage?" Dalrymple asks. He notes that crabgrass usually averages about 10% crude protein, and its palatability rates higher than Johnsongrass, bermudagrass, lovegrass, and bluestem.

In the South, crabgrass yielded 2 to 3 tons per acre under a two cutting system. Dalrymple says that under ir-



Agronomist R. L. Dalrymple examines some of the experimental plots he has planted to crabgrass.

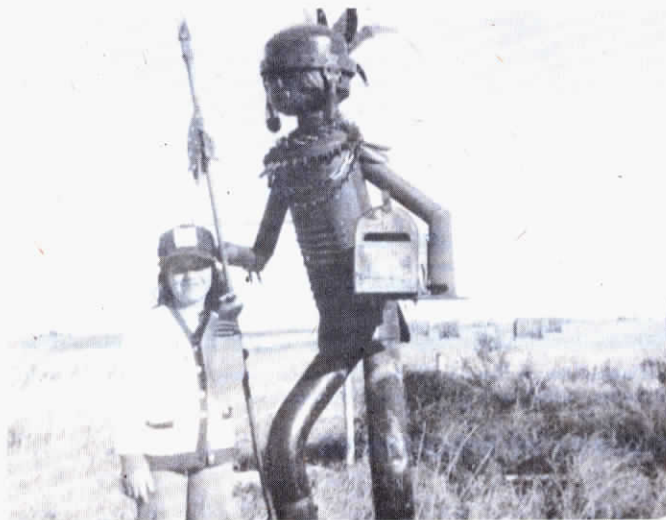
rigation or on good soils, 3 to 5 cuttings can be taken with yields going up to 6 tons per acre.

He thinks that crabgrass could be an important forage crop wherever rainfall averages 30 in. or more annually. It responds well to irrigation and heavy rainfall. It also responds well to nitrogen fertilizer at 60 lbs. to the acre or higher.

"There are tremendous variations in strains of crabgrass," says Dalrymple, who has selected 18 different strains to test and compare. Yields vary from 3 tons to 5½ tons per acre, plant height from 4½ to 13½ in. and plant width from 7 to 11 in.

Crabgrass is not the only "weed" that Dalrymple hopes to develop into a profitable forage crop. He is working with Japanese brome, fescue grass, cheat grass, prairie cupgrass, and kochia. (FARM SHOW recently reported on kochia as a pasture grass.)

For more information on crabgrass as a forage, contact: FARM SHOW Followup; R. L. Dalrymple, Noble Foundation, Rt. 1, Ardmore, Okl. 73401 (ph 405 223-5810).



Stacy Leiker poses beside Chief Sweetwater, the sculpted metal mailbox holder that marks entrance to the Leiker's ranch.

## NO TWO SCULPTURES EXACTLY ALIKE

# He's Turning Junk Into Mailbox Art

Business is booming for sculptor Marvin "Curly" Leiker who uses an arc welding torch to create mailbox holders and yard decorations out of junked truck and tractor parts.

Curly has sculpted cowboys, Indians, farmers, fisherman, golfers, and even a quarterback with his welder. Look close and you can spot refrigerator compressors used for heads and hats, driveshafts and oil-field pipes for arms and legs, and discarded soft drink compressor cans for bodies. Details are added by welding nuts and bolts to form eyes and buttons. Welds form special touches such as eyebrows, sideburns and mustaches.

With just the right materials, Leiker's cowboys can carry either a gun or a guitar. By varying the amount of bending in each cowboy's hat, legs and arms, each sculpture can be individualized.

Says Leiker: "Every time I sell a mailbox, I get one or two sales nearby. But they don't want one just like the

next guy. I'm still making them different enough so that you won't drive down the road and see two alike."

While cowboys have been the favorites of customers over the years, an Indian mailbox marks the entrance to Leiker's "Sweetwater Ranch" near Victoria, Kan. He has also created a greyhound for one woman, a hog mailbox for a hog farmer and a quarterback for a former Kansas State University football coach.

Normally, Leiker leaves the finished sculptures unpainted and doesn't remove old paint spots or rust already on the metal.

Mailboxes aren't the only uses for Leiker's sculptures. He says they make good yard lantern holders, lawn decorations and firewood holders. The going rate for one of his creations is right at \$350.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Marvin "Curly" Leiker, Rt. 2, Box 22, Victoria, Kan. 67671 (ph 913 628-8161).



These steers are grazing an irrigated crabgrass pasture at the Noble Foundation farm near Ardmore, Okl.