

## PANEL DISCUSSION — FARM GAME SPECIAL INTEREST MEETING

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Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Game & Fish Comm. 8:232-233

The comments were directed early in this meeting to the high costs of obtaining a good food patch. Mr. Durell had a detailed cost analysis of work being done in Kentucky which indicated a very high cost. This was compared briefly with the costs per good patch in the planting contests which have been conducted for high school children in a number of counties in Virginia. These costs were also out of all reason per good patch. This subject evolved presently into a detailed discussion of the Virginia Tractor Projects as they are being carried on in several counties. The history and first three years were reviewed.

Three years ago Powhatan County Board of Supervisors bought a tractor and disk for use by the local game club in habitat improvement work. The game club put up \$500.00 and the Game Commission put up \$250.00 plus the time of the Game Biologist and Game Warden and all the seed needed in this project. The commission limited its 250-dollar contribution to hiring a tractor driver, gas, oil, and lubrication for the tractor and buying fertilizer.

The first year of the project the game club was encouraged to take over as much supervision of the project as possible. This supervision was to include selection of sites to be planted, getting permission from the landowner and clearing the planting locations with him prior to the arrival of the tractor for work. In theory, each club member was responsible for supervision of the tractor while it was working in the vicinity of the members home. This is a theory, pure and simple, since almost without exception this responsibility falls back on the Warden or the Biologist. This is one of the big weaknesses of this program, there is too much give away and not investment on the part of the landowner whose land is being improved for game.

This project spread, with minor variations, to two counties the second year, three counties the third year, and will go to at least four counties the fourth year. One absolute essential to the success of such a project is that the Warden must be exceedingly interested in, and sold on, the value of habitat improvement. The County Supervisors and local game club must be behind the project 100%. If this is not the case the Warden will surely be criticized for spending too much time on this phase of his work and neglecting some other phase.

The best figures available place the cost of an "A" grade planting at \$9.50. This includes the cost of a bag of fertilizer. This cost was by far cheaper than any method known to the group assembled there.

Several facts learned by three years of experience are as follows: 1) Land must be plowed deep (disking is not good enough) if the planting is to make good growth in drought years such as have been the case in Virginia for the past three years; 2) Fertilizer must be used at the rate of approximately 800 pounds per acre in order to obtain the desired seed production; 3) It is false economy to hire a

cheap tractor driver that is not capable of assuming responsibility and working without direct supervision; 4) The Warden and Biologist must devote a world of time to the supervision of this project to keep it moving efficiently through the relatively short planting period.

Virginia's tractor project is built around the use of an annual mixture of grains. Bicolor and Sericea seed are used only in areas that can be permanently devoted to wildlife. Due to competition of honeysuckle in Piedmont and Tidewater, Virginia, permanent plantings of bicolor and sericea are not proving to be 100% satisfactory. We are turning toward the use of Korean Lespedeza which customarily reseeds itself for three to five years in this section. This seems to be about as long as land can be removed from cultivation before being taken over by honeysuckle.

After much discussion of details this special interest meeting was adjourned. This session was very well attended and audience participation was exceptionally good.

Wm. P. Blackwell  
Moderator