

Summary

Three sampling methods to estimate forage availability and consumption were evaluated using native pastures at the Zootechnics Department, Federal University of Viçosa, which is located in the Zona da Mata region of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The trial included six sampling periods between August and October 1995 (dry season) and between December 1995 and February 1996 (rainy season). The experimental area (1.5 ha) was divided into three lots in which forage availability was measured by the following methods: (1) cutting, (2) cages, and

(3) comparative yield using BOTANAL software. For method 1, 20 squares of 30 cm x 30 cm were harvested in each lot before grazing. For method 2, 10 cages, each covering 1 m², were distributed at random. For method 3, visual observations were made regarding 52 previously selected points. Each lot was grazed by Holland-Zebu steers (254 kg live weight). Forage consumption was determined by the difference in availability before and after grazing. Apparent daily consumption was obtained by dividing the amount of DM missing by total live weight of animals and by period of occupation. Significant differences were found among the sampling methods. Of the species evaluated, *Melinis minutiflora* presented the highest availability during the dry season (1.47 t/ha DM), while shrubs presented the greatest availability during the rainy season (1.44 t/ha DM). The methods used did not reveal differences in apparent forage consumption by animals.