



Introducing **Mulato**: *An Improved Forage for the Caribbean*

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Figure 1:

Mulato - an improved grass that signals new hope for livestock farmers

Mulato (*Brachiaria* hybrid CIAT 36061, Figure 1) and Mulato II (*Brachiaria* hybrid CIAT 36087) are improved grasses recently introduced into Trinidad and Tobago. They are the result of more than 20 years of research by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Columbia. In 2003, CARDI imported seeds of Mulato and initiated research, in collaboration with the Sugarcane Feeds Centre (SFC) at the latter's field station, to determine its suitability for local livestock production. The other collaborators on this work are the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (MALMR) and the University of the West Indies (UWI).

Given the rising price of grain on the world market and the escalating costs of other commodities, CARDI is recommending forage-based feeding systems for ruminant livestock production. This is the main reason that we are continuously conducting research (Figure 2) to find suitable forages for ruminant livestock. Mulato and Mulato II are *Brachiaria* hybrids of *B. brizantha*, *B. ruziziensis*, and in the case of Mulato II, *B. decumbens*. They are closely related to Tanner grass (*B. arrecta*), which is the species most commonly used in local pasture systems.

Tanner has proven to be very successful as pasture grass because it is easy to establish (from cuttings), quick growing, well adapted to acid soils and is very palatable to ruminant livestock. Although Mulato and Mulato II are propagated by seed and require special land preparation and agronomic care of seedlings, these grasses represent a significant improvement over Tanner grass in terms of dry matter yield, leaf to stem ratio, nutrient content, pest resistance and persistence.

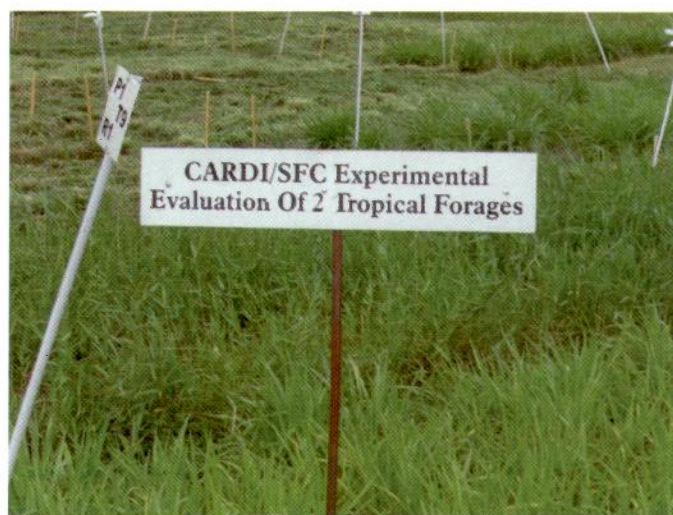


Figure 2:

Research to compare Mulato with Tanner grass

Mulato can be established vegetatively, however, growth and yields through this method are still being evaluated by CARDI. Owing to the nature of its rooting system, Mulato has been able to withstand grazing and trampling by livestock and the regrowth after grazing has been quick. What is also very exciting about these grasses is that CARDI's research is showing that they are very adaptable to local conditions. Since the first introduction of Mulato and the research that showed its adaptability to acid infertile soils and drought conditions, Mulato II, which represents an improvement over Mulato, was released by CIAT and introduced into Trinidad and Tobago by Nestlé, Trinidad and Tobago Ltd.. These grasses grow best in well-drained soils of medium to high fertility with pH 4.5-8.0 but can grow in less fertile acid soils with high aluminium.