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Leave it to the Department of Labor to discover that kids need to be protected from livestock. New proposals impose restrictions on employment of under-16 year-olds. Allow, please, cases to be presented from way back in the files.

Mull this around first: how does the Labor Department know kids shouldn't be hired to work on ranches, or spend summers on ranches? It would have been more sensible for a ruling to forbid bareback horse races, open range bulldogging, diving in dirt tanks, and climbing bluffs to rattlesnake dens for all ages of kids.

But go back to an article in the November third edition of this newspaper on new rules: "Would prohibit working on a farm, in a yard, pen or stall occupied by an intact (non-castrated) male equine, porcine, bovine or bison older than six months of age."

Stop right there, and appreciate how quick the Labor Department caught on that kids better think before they go around bulls, boars, stud horses and buffalos after the animals were seven month old.

The Labor Department probably caught onto the old lady from the Cedar Canyon Ranch on the Pecos River who walked through the pen holding the meanest Jersey bull in Texas,

morning and evening, with nothing but a pick handle for a passport.

She would have said you had to live more than 16 years to be able to bluff a Jersey bull. Jose and I were at least 32 years old the winter we worked down there. Without any rules, we knew to stay outside the bull's pen without the lady and her pick handle.

It must have slipped on dangerous boar hawgs from an incident at the shipping pens at Noelke Switch. Somebody coming down the railroad or county road probably saw us perched outside of the picket corral (a feat in itself), fishing with our lariat ropes, trying to capture this ferocious beast from a safe place. The loop had to go behind the tusks to hold the monster, plus seal his mouth shut to drag him onto a pickup bed.

Second choice was for one of us to donate a hind-leg in a free-for-all on the ground. Inspiration came from knowing that cowboys north of us on a big ranch roped wild hawgs in the pasture from horseback. The policy came from showing good sense.

Once snared, it took 30 feet more rope and six men to pull him up the loading chute onto the pickup. No part of that event was safe for a teenager. Kids today would have

too much sense to rope a hawg with eight-inch tusks using nothing but a 33-thread lariat to hold him.

Best basis for stud horse material was one snubbed in those same picket corrals named "Marijuana". His top (favorite) trick was to fall over with the saddle and sulk in the corral dust. Without the Labor Department's advice not to go around the stallion, Little Maxie Tankersley rode and led the brute down the bottom of Spring Creek Draw in hopes he'd fall over and sulk in a gravel bar and lose his eyesight or, maybe better, his life. (This is clear where I am talking about Maxie and when I am talking about "Marijuana.")

The stud horse turned a full three and Little Maxie became old enough to go to the Army that fall. After Max left, the Big Boss had the stud horse neutered. He never bucked another jump, but it wasn't because of any rules by the Labor Department.

On this subject, in a later prohibition by Labor about minors not riding horses to work livestock, I need to suggest not to wear big-roweled Chihuahua spurs like Little Maxie wore to tune that stud horse, regardless of your age or the dedication of administrative agencies to your welfare.

Last buffalo I saw in a pasture were over a hundred, maybe two hundred yards away up in Arizona from safe in the comfortable seat of a crew-cab pickup. I don't know why a buffalo would or would not be dangerous for a minor to be around, except you can bet that after the age boys find out about girls, they are apt to want to show off around every animal from pea fowls to hippopotamuses.

The Department throws around fitting phrases in the proposal like: "Assisting or engaging in animal husbandry practices such as, but not limited to branding, breeding dehorning, vaccinating, castrating and treating sick or injured animals: handling animals with known behavior problems."

The orders continue, but you can tell they have an inside. Somebody somewhere on a ranch or farm is coaching those guys. Bigger mystery is where do they think there's a kid you can get out of town at any age under any set of rules?