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(Note: Monte Noelk is recuperating from major surgery, so until he mans the keyboard again, we thought we would pull some Shortgrass Country from the files.)

The Shortgrass Country is on the verge of having a terrific spring. Snow and rain have seasoned the ground to a perfect quality. Hombres who have arthritis in both hind legs are pacing the floor, waiting for warm weather to bring out the weeds and the grass.

Livestock prices are right in line with the forage prospects. Cutter and canner stock bring more than the prime end used to. Every market day sets new records. Buyers and sellers go wild at each meeting.

Not too long ago, I watched a stocker cow sale that would have burned down a wooden auction ring. The auction was out of bounds. Old nellies hardly strong enough to flavor a can of Vienna sausage were going back to the country as mother cows. Young cattle were commanding prices that would have shocked the royal treasurer of the British Empire.

Buyers were willing to arm wrestle for the right to bid. It was sure no place for the timid or the weak. I had

to hang on to my hat to keep the hand wavers from knocking it down the aisle.

An old boy down in front caught my eye as a bunch of long-legged crossbred cows came tearing into the ring. The cattle were so tall and this fellow was so short that he had to climb up on the rails to make his bids.

He was so hot to buy these cows that he finally started to wave his hat to get the auctioneer's attention. Mayo Brothers' clinic wouldn't have had the equipment necessary to count his pulse beats or take his temperature. I never saw an hombre so dead set on making his bet on a high-priced game.

After he'd bought them, I began to imagine what sort of person this man was. His mother probably begged him 25 short years ago to study piano or read the law. But oh, no, he was dead-set on following a course that'd lead through the world of paper profits and real losses.

The chances are he could have done something important with his life, like entertaining crowds with a snake charming act, or thrilling the multitudes by wrestling brown bears. Instead, he just had to be a cow operator who never thrills anyone except the banks holding his paper.

Don't misunderstand. Far be it for me to say cows are going to go down. I'm not faulting the buyer for what he did.

What interested me was the fact that it was so typical of a true son of the Shortgrass soil to be sure that if he couldn't get in on the action sitting down, he'd climb the fence to get in trouble. Every one of us out here is of the same breed. A direct order from President Nixon won't stop us from taking chances on four-legged stock. CBS could announce that the world was coming to an end and we'd all try to buy before the earth crumbled.

Prices go up every time a counting gate is opened or an auctioneer plugs in his microphone. Sitting at the ranch, you worry whether to load up everything and go to town; sitting at the sales, you wonder whether to buy everything offered and take them home.

Good times seem to be as hard on a rancher as the bad ones were. When the banks were taking most of the risk, we didn't have to worry what was going to be lost. Nowadays, we are the ones who have something to lose. I liked it a lot better when most of the worry was between the bankers and their examiners.

Who knows what to do? The old boy who waved his hat to buy \$500-plus cows may be slipping off with the biggest bargain of the year.

One thing for sure, if we aren't happy now, we never will be. (M.N.— 03/08/1973)

(Editor's note: Monte's skepticism was warranted; euphoria reigned for about six more months before the cattle market began to crumble. Within a few more weeks, the milk and champagne bath would be a bloodbath. Those who were in the business then remember it well.)