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In the shortgrass country, economic calamities of an impact to make the most intrepid trader to ever set foot on Wall Street tremble severe enough to ground his stock ticker escape notice out here.

We know, but do not heed, the indisputable ranch doctrine that drouth accompanies recession to lower livestock prices and raise the cost of feed. Included in the equation is the fact that jugkeepers covering the action begin to clear their throats, reaching for demand note pads in bottom desk drawers longer than a Patagonian ostrich takes to gargle quicksand. Sadder, we keep right on ranching even if the Dow Jones flops and the indexes collapse in a heap.

My daughter learned in medical school years ago that once a lab mouse becomes addicted to getting heroin by tapping a dropper, the subject will hit the rubber bulb after it's empty 10,000 times before he stops. Yet she grew up unaware around parents and grandparents hooked on gambling on hollow horns and woolies that, compared to 10,000 pops by a mouse for a heroin fix, ranked the mice's addiction to a two-a-day sarsaparilla habit.

Now don't go blabbing all over that herders resemble lab mice, or a take off on a wild notion that herders are

poor prospects to study drug addiction. No, indeed, this proves a lab mouse can be trained to hit a rubber bulb for a pleasant fix, but all the brains of Harvard University can't fool a mouse into going for broke in the ranch business.

One news item bound to have caught herders' attention ran on the back page of *The Fort Worth Star Telegram* in April. The whole point, condensed from 1500 words, was that unpapered Mexican aliens were staying home because of the unemployment rate in the U.S. The article reported further that 11 million illegals remain on this side the Big River, but failed to address whether we continue to consider fencing the Border to hold the number of maids and gardeners constant in the cities.

Be the *Telegram's* article correct, it sounds as if prospects are better in Mexico, and that it might be time to notice such symptoms as calves dropping 20 bucks a hundred last week, or glance over on the way to the auction at the red and yellow balloons tied to hood ornaments on the Angelo car lots shriveled from no action.

A lady poet's version from Mexico City at the Round Top Festival's final party focused more on the drug lords and blatant corruption in the South than on the economy. She felt a lot more citizens were going to perish in the

*Federal* from gunfire than from the Swine Flu, or no work in the North.

Cocktail parties offer an unequal field on plain mineral water, my drink of choice. The lady poet had a story. One vein presented the Mexico City drug king posed in a news photo by a closet in his ranch home filled with handmade boots from a San Antonio maker. Flip over a page for a recommendation of San Miguel de Allende as a safe site for summer study. Then lean forward to hear better above the crowds, and catch her drift back toward locked walls and bodyguards and street terror.

The article clipped from the Fort Worth paper was back in the zoom. Over in a corner, a trio begins a contest to disavow harmony by guitar, flute and fiddle.

In my last contact with the poet, she asked the band's name. I replied, "The Barbarians," for now, but the polls aren't closed — they may win the name "The Round Top Insults." Mexico stayed on my mind. For sure, the breaking coverage on the swine flu was going to be heated and overblown. Other panics taught us that lesson. Remember when the guy who claimed credit for discovering "Mad Cow Disease" predicted that 500,000 people were doomed to die every year in the British Kingdom? His lordship, or whoever the hell, missed too far to score. Something like 258

people died worldwide from the whole episode of mad cow disease, is my understanding.

Nowhere did anyone mention in the flu panic how many bristle and snout operators were going to keel over in financial ruin from the outcome from such a dinky name. Be a cinch the Canadian herders who survived the mad cow quarantine could empathize. Four or five old milk cows caused enough country to be quarantined in the Dominion to isolate all the world's hay fever victims.

From the ranch, signs don't appear whether wets are coming or going home. The trails grew up after "coyotes" began to haul the *Mejicanos* far north for hire. We never see water bottles discarded by tanks, much less have a visitor from Mexico, or the Border Patrol.

Bad break that it wasn't possible to further interview the poet from Mexico, supported by the news article. Been good luck too, while on the subject of migration, if the band could have been deported.