

01.16.1975

Gulf winds are furnishing the air conditioning and the heat for our motel room. Child Who Sits in the Sun and I are staying on the outskirts of Harlingen, deep in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Palm trees weave in the wind. Greybearded tourists go around wearing short britches and summer shirts. Life is far removed from the Shortgrass winter of frost and feed sacks.

Enough cattle are scattered in the fields to keep the cow depression fresh in mind. Don't ask why a citrus farmer or carrot planter would want an old cow. People can't answer that in a cow country. Nobody could in this rich tropical land.

Market disasters do hit the Valley. Fruit and vegetable farmers can face them better than we can. A John Deere tractor leading a plow can cover up their grief. The biggest Caterpillar on earth can't plow under the cow species.

Just for spite alone, cattle meet the terrible times by becoming more obvious and more prolific. An old sister that can't produce a coupon on a 50 cent market can shell out a premium sized heifer calf on a faltering show.

As bad as the bovine population needs to be covered in dirt, they keep multiplying. I sure envy these old boys' solutions to a losing situation. Studies should be made by entomologists backed by rabbit experience to explain where all the cattle come from.

Earlier today, I listened to a tomato farmer who was meeting the produce market by plowing under a crop of fruit that wasn't worth picking. He'd brought a box of tomatoes as a gift before his tractor jockey turned them under.

Three days before, Child Who Sits in the Sun had bought the same size tomatoes for 69 cents a pound in a Shortgrass supermarket. The difference being that the ones back home were packed with the rotten spots down and these didn't have a blemish on them.

I didn't ask for details. What good is it to know of the tomato scandal. Grocymen and packers are already sensitive to nosy people. Folks who go around picking holes in their business overlook the amount of contests and trading stamps that they rebate to their customers. It costs a lot of money to pack tomatoes. And you know from the size of the retail spread that meat packing is high priced.

The tomato farmer goes in the game ahead of the livestock portion of agriculture. One of these days, he's going to pull a protest that will attract attention. Worthies up in Washington can stand printed criticism. Imagine them under attack of overripe tomatoes. Strong armed farmers could bring a rapid interest in solving the supermarket mystery. Our hope was the cow chip throwing contest over in Midland would switch to fresh material. When it became apparent that the Junior Chamber of Commerce was going to use dry chips, we missed the chance of attracting attention to our cause. Distance was their goal. I never did care as much how far one could be thrown as how near it came to a live target. Preferably, close to a live target that could stand before a group without knowing one iota of where a cow's tail hung and claim that he understood.

It was Child Who Sits in the Sun's idea to take this trip. She was tired of the restless nights and 22 minutes of naps that characterize the cow wreck.

I know she's right, but it's hard to escape the cow game. Hearing about valuable tomatoes being wasted doesn't help, even if you don't understand.