

DECEMBER 14, 1972

Feeds and feeding are taking over the Shortgrass scene. Anywhere herders gather, these subjects dominate the conversation. Grass is still fairly strong; nevertheless the ominous time of emptying sacks and tills is close at hand.

The tone of feed conclaves is different from other years. Hombres hold up well under the strain until the subject of price is reached. Then their voices rise to crescendos that'd make a voice teacher grab for her ear plugs.

Cottonseed meal, as I'm sure you've heard, is on the verge of changing from a per-ton to a per-ounce commodity. It is becoming so precious that the sweepings in the boxcars will soon be a valuable item.

I wish I had some old rancher's clothes or some empty feed sacks to recycle. You could make pretty good money shaking meal out of the cuffs and seams at \$150 a ton. It'd sure beat pouring out feed at that cost. In fact, pulling one of those Far Eastern gasoline baths would beat dispensing feed made from meal at that price.

I read yesterday that the reason soybean meal and cottonseed meal are so high is because of the shortage of fish meal. Fish meal, so the article said, was in short supply because the Peruvian fishermen weren't catching enough fish.

That just about figures for our game. Here we are wrecked in the midst of a cold winter and the confounded offshore fishermen are too lazy to bait their hooks.

I don't know why the business was ever given the name ranching. It should be called something like Aunt Lucy's Worst Nightmare, or 400 Years of Bad Luck Molded Into One Lifetime.

Who, other than a herder, could be made to suffer from the failure of a fisherman that he never saw and never will see. You can think on that until next year and you still won't have an answer.

One of two things are going to develop from the current feed situation: Either the sheep and the cows are going to go hungry or the ranchers are going to go broke.

Neither of those two choices is as serious as it may sound. Shortgrass sheep and cattle are due a little fasting after the past good seasons. Cattle buyers claim they like cattle to have some stretch. Well, this just may be the time the stretch is stretched out over some mighty lean cow brutes.

As to the ranchers going broke that's an older song than the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Our whole economy is founded on broke ranchers. If they ever have a going broke contest, we can field more substitutes than most countries can first stringers.

I never worry about ranchers going broke. It's after we are broke that the pressure is on.

Coffee house meetings are getting sadder every morning. Hombres stare out the windows and miss the ash trays.

I hope those blasted fishermen are happy. It's sure a surprise to learn they are our enemies too.