

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

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An open letter to the thief or thiefess who stole 60 salt blocks from the Noelke Ranch warehouse

Dear Brother or Sister in Epidermis only:

Unless you have added stealing newspapers to your line of work, you probably don't read this newspaper. Nevertheless, I have to start trying to contact you somehow, because I need to tell you not to feel bad about breaking in our warehouse and packing off a ton and half of salt.

The reason you found the place locked was to keep the coons and the rats from hauling off feed in big orders. Jointly, those two varmints have done enough damage without having a 12-foot unlocked door to operate through. In fact, for your information (and apparently you are interested in animal nutrition) the coons and rats have done a lot better on the livestock feed than either the livestock or the owners. Unlike yourself, however, they have specialized in the \$70 a ton line and ignored the \$23 salt. It might pay you to think that over as time goes by. You can figure the difference by subtracting 23 from 70.

Had you looked by the steps on the warehouse dock, you have saved using your bolt cutters on our lock. The key was hanging there on a 12 inch piece of baling wire. You must have been awful eager to load the salt to overlook the key. All last winter, I hung the buttons of my coat on the wire every time I loaded the pickup. You may need to see one of the eye doctors over in the wool capital. San Angelo, I've been told, has some good ones.

To ease your mind, the ranch doesn't plan to pursue or prosecute you for your misdoings. In our time, right on our home grounds, old ewe traders have hooked us worse than the price of 60 salt blocks. Lamb and calf buyers have run up bigger scores using no more armament than a No. 2 pencil. Over the past 20 years, tally sheets have hit us a lot worse than bolt cutters or nocturnal locksmiths. On many deals, we'd have been ahead if the customer at hand would have settled for his part in salt.

So don't be ducking and dodging the law in fear that we are upset over one bit of salt banditry. The warehouse you broke into wouldn't start to hold all the hombres who have given us the old hocus pocus. The Astrodome would, but our ranch warehouse wouldn't do it, even with a subway conductor arranging the seating.

The first half of 1970 must have meant hard times for you. However, you'd do better if you'd quite stealing from ranchers. Being a crook, you probably know the sad story about the mean kid who started out stealing hubcaps and ended up having enough money to buy a high price, gas burning automobile. Don't think the same fate won't befall you. Some of the brokest ranchers in the early days of this country were fellows who got over loaded stealing cattle. They did real well as long as they stole wagons or pitchforks, but once they got the urge to be cowmen, they went broke flatter than the coast of Holland. Think how horrible it would be if you got unlucky and stole a whole ranch.

Please don't fail to scan the opening of my letter. I mean it when I say that we are brothers or sisters in epidermis only. Our hides may be the same color and identical in texture. But from there under, we are as different as mustard weed is from pig thistle.

Yours with limited regards and certain reservations about your honesty, M. N.