

Higher Incomes For Ranches Deserves Heartfelt Thanks

By Monte Noelke

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Page 11

MERTZON — A slow winter rain covered the Shortgrass County last week. Much of the area reported two inches or more. Citizens hovered around stoves in the coffee houses. The only outdoor activity was deer-slayers skidding through pastures.

This has been a good wet year. Nearly everybody has made some grass and a little money. Compared to other times when our forage supplies and debit columns were tragic enough to make a jailer cry, the lad had plenty to say thanks about his Thanksgiving season.

One obvious sign of the new prosperity appeared last week in the San Angelo paper. A pundit on the farm and ranch desk wrote that if ranchers would start keeping price records of their own efforts, they'd probably find they were making 25 cents an hour for managing their operations.

That was astounding news. It was already well known that ranchers' take home pay was on the increase, but no one was aware that we were drawing that kind of money.

As early as the beginning of the fall shipping season, sheep and cow people sense that we were taking a lead over the wage sale paid in isolated parts of China, and probably could turn up our noses at the backland peasant class in India. Our hopes were high but the most optimistic of our local prophets didn't think we were on the way toward making two bits an hour of our labors.

This new affluence could have serious repercussions. Mankind has never adjusted well to boom times, and my people are no exception. Though men of the cloth have never made much mileage out of the Good Book admonition that money is the root of all evil (I'm a bit fuzzy on the wording; it's been 60 or 70 years since local ministers have felt any need to even mention it).

The best approach today seems to be one of caution. The time to evaluate the effects of our increased income will be when it can be seen whether ranchers can stand making much more than \$1000 a year before taxes. Then it can be ascertained whether a self-employed stockman should be paid as well for his work as, say, labor agents in the Pygmy colonies of unmapped Africa.

One thing is for certain: At this Thanksgiving season, the old soreheads who are always complaining about us being on the fallow end of the stalk should be ashamed of themselves.