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Shortgrassers Have Deep Distrust Of Almost Everything

By Monte Noelke

MERTZON — The professional peacemakers in the United Nations are lucky they don't have to look after the Shortgrass Country as a separate body. Without 20 years of preparatory training men of U Thant's ilk wouldn't last a month in these parts.

The main difficulty is the way my people treat money and business. The natives here look on any size proposition as if the Commandments had gone out of use a century ago. Neighbors distrust neighbors. Kinfolk watch every move their relatives make. The chances of convincing one of them that you are an honest man are comparable to the odds on J. Edgar Hoover hiring H. Rap Brown as his private bodyguard.

Last week I received a reminder of this widespread trait. One of the oldtimers out here administered the lesson when he came by to look over the Boss' sale bucks.

By the time this old whelp had gone through the herd and searched for every flaw that has ever been heard of in a woolled creature, a casual bystander would have surmised that he was doing research work on the defects in range breeding stock.

He had to have his hand on each buck in the pen. He had to look at their teeth, part their wool, and give their physical condition a going over that would do credit to a large veterinary clinic.

We wouldn't have had all this trouble with him if the cowhand helping us had paid attention to the coaching session I'd given him prior to the appointment. I had painstakingly shown him how to display a sheep's mouth without giving the buyer time to build up any doubt. It's a simple procedure. All you do is grab the beast quickly, roll back his lip, and call out his age as you release him.

There's nothing dishonest about this method, and it always saves a lot of time when you're hot on a sheep trade.

As it was, we spent all morning making a trade. If the bargaining had lasted past noon, I'm sure the cowhand and I would have been fortunate to end up with our pocket knives.

It beats me, why these hombres are so suspicious. So what if I missed the birthday on those bucks a spring or two? Some of the best breeding animals in all sheepdom have eventually turned into broken mouths.

However, it helps to get one of these lesions once in a while. The next buyer that shows up won't catch me using some dull-brained waddie who can't learn how to put a trade over.