

Range Maxim: Goats' Browse Level Equals Anxiety Level Of Owners

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MERTZON — The shortgrass country has been noted for its ability to season and harden employes of the USDA since the first of these hombres were sent here in the '30s. It is well accepted that this community has no equal when it comes to molding smooth-cheeked apprentice check writers and stage-frightened range advisors into firm-handed, deft-tongued veteran members of the vast bureau.

In particular, the Soil Conservation Service agents have profited by this area's tempering process. Many an agent, accomplished in the field of solving erosion and grass polishing problems, owes his success to a tenure of service in the short grass country. However, today's SCS representatives don't seem to be developing the fortitude of their predecessors. They appear to be allowing the region's custom of having the dry periods extend over into the wet season become too personal a problem. And judging from the way they will let any little comment upset them, they may have a slight touch of the range fever which has made native shortgrassers a notoriously temperamental race.

Such a lack of response to our famous treatment was brought to my attention the other day when our SCS man and I were hosting a young banker to a cup of coffee in the local drug store. Normally the conversation would have been limited to the fishing prospects on the nearby creek, or some other earthshaking item such as the feasibility of breaking our legs in order to miss next month's Parent-Teachers meeting. But since this keeper of the purse strings was present, we felt obligated to discuss gloomy subjects pertaining to grass and soil management.

This led to talk regarding the stocking ration in the shortgrass country. And before either the SCS man or myself realized what we were saying, we were expanding on the carrying capacity of our locality as if we didn't know that this had been a mystery to area stockmen since the Indians made their last series of token battle to keep the white man out.

To get on safer ground, the soil protector introduced a topic he called "browse level." This technical term he defined as being nothing more than the level of the brush where goats range. It's use, he told us, was to aid in determining the stocking ratio of goat ranges.

Well, the browse level business just happened to be the ideal subject. Like many a goat herder, I have had some long-acting, nearly financially fatal lessons in the science of how thoroughly goats can prune the shrubbery, and how adaptable they are to expiring when the brush has disappeared from their reach.

So, to kind of show off in front of the banker, I seized the floor. I told these two gents that browse levels and mohair markets levels were, in conjunction, the primary factors determining the anxiety level of owners of Angora goats.

In proving this, I pointed out that when the brush was close the ground, and the hair market was high enough to keep the horn-and-hair set from wanting to run off with a circus, that the anxiety level would be stable. But in times like the present, when the Angoras are straining their spinal columns to reach branches that would choke up a silage grinder, and when the outlook for mohair sales is worse than the future of a hitchhiker on a dead end street, the human anxiety level is sure to be in outer space.

Now, a few years back, the SCS man would have accepted my theorem with polite patience. Instead, he flew into a tirade charging that scientific range management was not involved in half-baked, rancher-imaged physiological theories. He ended his vociferous denunciation by saying his job didn't require him to listen to such nonsense. He stormed out the door before I could ask him what category of nonsense his job required him to listen to.

So it ended. It was obvious that my old SCS compadre was suffering from some mysterious phobia. It was also plain that he was failing to share in the usual tempering that his fellow employes receive from our community.

But I guess he will be able to overcome his difficulty. After all, he has been able to hold up under the challenge of this dry land for a long time, and chances are he is merely passing through a phase.