

NOVEMBER 6, 1986

If frost doesn't come pretty soon, the internal parasites in the sheep out here are going to be gnawing through the hosts' stomach walls and becoming external parasites. Every old sister around is suffering from droopy and discolored lips from the constant drenching. On my outfit, we've fired enough test shots clearing the drench guns to take up the medicine budget of a normal year. After waiting over a half of a century for this much grass, I'm afraid we are going to trample it down while gathering our sheep so often to drench.

The wet summer not only kicked off this landmark siege of stomach worms, but it also ruined our source of a natural wormer. Until the floods filled the lakes that supply San Angelo, the city was pumping water from the bottom of a salty lake up north. The stuff smelled like a dishpan that'd been used to clean catfish. The taste varied somewhere between the quinine mixture designed to cure malaria and the rust that accumulates in car radiators. But diluted correctly with well water, it'd knock stomach worms over like a skeet expert dropping toy ducks at a carnival booth.

We discovered how potent it was a short time after the salt bottoms started flowing in the city's mains. In those days a commercial sheep drencher operated out of San Angelo. He carried a barrel of city water in the back of his pickup to dissolve the packaged worm medicine. One spring during shearing we got so shorthanded and short tempered the sheep doctor so upset that he forgot to add the powders that were costing some 20 odd dollars per packet.

Before we'd noticed the mistake, we'd already turned about 1500 head back to the pasture. However once those ewes got the taste of that water out of their mouths, they started doing better than the ones we'd hit with the regular recipe.

I was so impressed with the results in the sheep that I started drinking a pint a month myself. Also, I kept a big bottle around the house to dope any of my boys that looked pale or drawn. Sometimes on the second course, I'd have to twist their ears to get a spoonful down their throats. But by the next spring, our hair was slick and shiny, and I believe I had more energy than I'd had in years.

New products hit the market every year. There's a big market for wormers. The township that controls the salty lake, I'm told, won't sell in small orders. I sure don't want to wish San Angelo any bad luck, but I do hope their fresh water supply doesn't last so long that it ruins mine and my sheep's health.