

## Shortgrass Country

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Widespread cases of cow buying fever have struck the Shortgrass Country. Non-exotic range cows are in hot demand. Prices on exotic breeds are right at the gold market. Cow brutes have become worth more than any item not locked behind vault doors.

High calf prices are the come-on for the cow deal. Steer calves bumping the \$200 mark have baited the trap. Tall grass covering the countryside has completed the selling job.

Dual-crop ranching has been on the way out for several years. Sheep, as most of you know, require more labor than cows. Labor has been so short that the geriatric hospitals have posted guards around the old cowboys' ward. Hombres who had help have been so frustrated by the quality and expense that they'd have been better off owning a minority interest in a one-man band.

Finding and keeping a shearing crew was taking a regular spring toll. Sheep ranchers tough enough to plug a set of earphones into a jack hammer were having trouble keeping their composure during the shearing season. Men who could sit through a P.T.A. meeting without flinching couldn't stand the modern sheep peeling scene.

However, cattle haven't completely taken over the restocking boom. East of San Angelo, a stockfarmer is planning on putting in 500 head of No. 1 Mississippi bull frogs. Details of the trade are not available. I don't know what the weighing conditions, shrink, etc., are going to be. I did hear that the frogs were expected to cost a nickel a head f.o.b. the pond.

North of the ranch, another rancher was working on buying a load of the same frogs. I've been intending to see if I couldn't talk him out of going into the bull frog business. He's one of those old timers who can't sleep past three in the morning. He certainly doesn't need a string of frogs to work as nervous as he is. The first thing he'd do would be to try to gather his tadpoles before daylight. As good a hand as he is, he'd till have frogs scattered in ever direction. People who are already jumpy sure don't need to start herding frogs.

Bee ranching is being overlooked in the cattle buying stampede. In the throes of last winter's drouth, the only stocker buyer in the whole classified section of the San Angelo paper was a man wanting to buy bee hives. Grass-eating animals didn't rate a word; to the best of my memory, the bee buyer was in the market for months.

I always thought that a bee ranch close to a garden club or cemetery would beat dryland ranching. Most of the time, however it hasn't taken much of a thinker to think up a business that would beat our game.

Watching and worrying over what's going to happen to the sheep industry is nerve wrecking. Parts the Shortgrass Country won't run enough cattle to meet the demand for rawhide quirts. Australia, they say, is being vacated by old established herders. Every week, you hear of another outfit over here that's quitting.

I won't believe that the woolies are gone until the last one is turned into the lane. Sheep have made a lot of money to be forsaken now.