

Short Grass Ranchers Puzzled By Change In Bankers' Demeanor

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MERTZON, Texas — Ever since the drouth of the '50s was partially arrested, the temperament of bankers here in the short grass country has shown signs of becoming more stable. No one seems to know precisely the reason for this blessed condition. Ranchers, though curious about it, do not care to make any inquiry lest they rock what they fear could be a very delicate balanced boat.

As far as that goes, judging by past history it seems safe to say that a rancher with a life-endowed majority interest in Africa's most productive diamond mine isn't likely to chance asking bankers why they're feeling so good. Any hombre who has experienced the thrill of using broken mouth ewes and hollow horned cattle for collateral isn't going to pry into the affairs of the lending set beyond whispering hello at the opening and a muffled goodbye at the end of a meeting.

This deeply instilled reluctance of sheep and cow herders to ask direct questions of their bankers hasn't kept them from doing considerable private speculating as to just what has happened to bring about such an uplift in the viewpoint of the men behind the desks. A number of suppositions have arisen; three of which are particularly widespread.

One involves a lot of complex nonsense. It is based on the fact that the President is a rancher (who, by the way, happens to be the only rancher who ever enjoyed any measure of voice in our government), and he is pleased over his daughter's oncoming marriage in August. According to this school of thought, the joy of the President has seeped down to agricultural finance circles.

This may make sense to bright-eyed young men who had nothing more to feed than a pen of three 4-H Club lambs during the dry climate of the past decade. But to the hardened sheep and cow raiser who has spent enough time circling, entering and leaving bank buildings to have circumnavigated the Red Sea several times, the theorizing has to be more concrete than some wild fantasy that a livestock banker could be swayed by some lovey-dovey affair scheduled for August — be it a love match between the Bonny Prince of Wales and his governess, or a torrid reconciliation between a redheaded milkman and his third wife.

Any rancher with even a slight amount of grey around the muzzle can attest that financiers are motivated by the figures on a financial statement. There's not one in the bunch that would loan out 15 cents on the news that Liz Taylor was figuring on remarrying all her living husbands in a single ceremony.

The other local ideas on what is regenerating the spirits of the bankers aren't nearly so ridiculous as the above. For example a much more plausible argument is that the guardians of the purse are feeling better simply because they're now getting eight hours' sleep each night instead of the restless two or three hours they received from 1962 to '57 or '58. This theory is discounted by some who claim to know bankers who still suffer insomnia from memories of long lines of stockmen filing in and out of their doors during that period.

Still another school has it that installation of piped music in houses of finance has contributed to bankers' tranquillity. It's common knowledge that the same sort of beer garden tunes will make old hens lay eggs till they begin to wonder about themselves. Dairymen have known for years that a few verses of some ditty like Milk Cow Blues or the March of the Abominable Snowman will cause an old cow to yield enough milk to satisfy half of last year's Iowa pig crop.

So it isn't out of the question to believe that if a flighty Leghorn hen or a snuffy, high-strung Holstein can be calmed by music, the same therapy will work on a wary, disillusioned banker.

Regardless of what is responsible for the mellowing attitude of bankers, men of the fading grassland are willing to accept the new era wholeheartedly. In time, the advent of this period may be compared by historians of the area to such important events as the cubing of the first cottonseed meal and the invention of the side-mounted spare tire rack.