

JUNE 16, 1983

June rains have changed up the drouth pattern in the Shortgrass Country. Some outfits have had 3 inches. Over a weekend they've moved from dry critical rangeland to moist hopeful land. It's going to take a lot of healing to cure the drouth, nevertheless, it does look better than before.

Drouth ranching is a big guessing game. The challenge is to try as hard as you can to keep from paying the full price that a dry spell costs per acre. I always think the next hombre is doing a better job managing the scourge. However, after it's all added up on the board, and the forced sales are minused against the big feed bills, the toll is close to the same hard deck to play for everyone.

The worst strategy I've ever used was running from a drouth. In the big one of the 50's, my Boss shipped our old cows wherever the grass and the sales talk looked and sounded the best. He got us in so many wrecks out-of-state that at one time we were so broken up that the leading quilting club in the United States couldn't have pieced us back together.

In one of those awful winters, a farmer we were pasturing with called me every morning collect to report our losses. Via a crank telephone strung across on this earth, he covered dying baby calves in snow banks while their mothers watched, shriveling in winter time anemia in fine fashion.

Money, or more money, wasn't the solution. We'd already bought his hay crop and contracted to take his in-law's grain. We had his whole family on the payroll, up to his second cousins. The only piece of equipment he owned that we didn't have rented was the telephone he used to bring me the bad news.

Often the report was so tragic that I'd buck out to the end of the telephone receiver and take a hard fall on the kitchen floor. I never did get to compare the costs, but I'm sure we could have conquered a foreign country for what we spent on pasturage and feed and labor that year.

The foolish thing is that we know better than to leave our home outfit. In the drouth of 1917, my paternal grandfather trailed his cattle down south, following the clouds, only to end up donating most of his cows to a band of Mexican cattle rustlers. At about the same time, my maternal grandfather fell for a grass partnership that emptied his sack so clean that the ears stood out like mileposts on a flat road.

Last week we sorted off the thin end of the cows and calves to put them on the best pasture left. Not so much to help those old wretches recover, but to keep the rest of the cattle from thinking they were in that hard a shape.

A cow brute doesn't have a full length mirror to check her appearance. Holding cattle together according to their ages is like having to go to your 35th class reunion every Monday morning of your life. I think cattle people ought to be held in small bunches. Then it'd be easy to cull out the ones that are a bad influence.

My goals are sure moderating as the drouth hangs on. Instead of wanting limitless herds grazing across a vast prairie, I am beginning to think in terms of using stalls and stanchions. But as I think I've warned you before, we are going to always be in trouble

until we breed up a cow that like to sleep better than she does to eat. We've had all the dry weather we need. Now we are going to find out how much we can take.