

MARCH 25, 1982

Warm days and sappy grasses are trimming the fill on the Shortgrass herds. Late February showers have brought up exactly the right amount of pickings to put the cattle on the run. The old ewes are mending a little on the fresh weeds, but the overall picture is one of a spring weakness that produces lots of thin residue and plenty of patched hair and protruding ribs.

Our yearlings are showing the most life. Heel flies are running them from thickets to the next bare spot. They are not as crazy about the new green stuff as they are fearful of being bitten below their hock line by a heel fly. They've probably lost 50 pounds a head in the past 30 days. I'd planned on a short-feed winter for the young cattle. I was hoping to develop a strain of cows that didn't have to be soaked in cottonseed meal dust to give a quart of milk a day.

Heaven knows their mothers and grandmothers have been loyal supporters of the imported sack industry. It's a wonder the area's feed mills haven't offered to buy semen from our herd to increase their volume. I suppose the only reason the millers haven't is because the whole Shortgrass Country is covered in old nannies that collapse from the time the autumn leaves turn color until way past the May Day celebrations.

The outbreak of heel flies is my fault. Several pour-ons and sprays will control the grubs in cattle that hatch the flies. But invariably, we spray our heifer calves too light to get full control I've heard enough horror stories from the old days to practice caution even though the drug peddlers claim that a full jolt of their medicine is about as dangerous as an old maid's powder puff.

In spite of the chemical companies' claim that their products are safe, you never can tell whether they mean safe for you, or safe for them against a pending lawsuit with the E.P.A.

Government regulations have become so complex that arsenic can be added to lemonade if the label is worded right. The companies, I fear, aren't as concerned about what we eat or drink, as they are about what the inspectors read and test.

For example, the safest place there is to buy your breakfast cereal is at a pet shop. Right on the premises, you can check the bird cage troughs and see what the birds are eating. Anything that won't hurt a canary sure won't knock over a 200 pound man. Those little old yellow birds not only eat the right kind of food, they feel good enough after lunch to sing a right pretty song, and you know darn well that never happens to the patrons of fully inspected hamburger stands and chili joints.

We've started back using ashes and burned motor oil to doctor our herds. The price of discarded oil and burned mesquite wood is more in keeping with the value of our patients. Of course the results aren't as fantastic as the modern drugs provide, but saving a 1982 model calf isn't as important as it was a few years ago.

A scant quarter inch of rain is all it'd take to solve our problem. From the way the cows bawl to the feedwagons, you can't tell pain from habit. The heel flies will be gone in a few more weeks. I shouldn't feel too bad about neglecting those heifer calves; their parents have a long record of neglecting me.