

FEBRUARY 21, 1980

Ice and mist have covered the Shortgrass Country several times in the past few weeks. Herders and their understudies have been chopping lots of ice and pouring out plenty of feed on the frozen ground. Sheep seem to be holding up under the fierce weather, but as to be expected their hollow horn pasture mates are drawing down to a late winter stance of hair and bone.

Spirits, however, are good. Markets prove that great hope for spring is being regenerated. Thick layers of ice puffed up the ground and allowed the small showers to make a slush. Two warm days were enough to start a few weeds and tiny shoots of grass in protected places. We don't have any deep soil moisture, but we do have some promise that far exceeds the dry whirlwinds of the summer and fall.

The calves that came in November and December look good to me. Several head have had to be doctored for pneumonia. I've noticed the difference in calves dropped in a drouth, but handling them in the pens, you begin to see that a calf that's had to work for a little bit of milk develops more stretch than a calf that doesn't.

Feeders have been screaming for a long lean cattle. I believe if they'll overlook the pronounced pot bellies and ignore the pointed ends, the '79 and '80 models are going to fit the bill.

The ones we've been doctoring don't have an ounce of fat. The way the hair has slipped from their ears to their shoulders makes them look long and lanky. Chronic scouring has distracted from judging the hindquarters; however, I think the calves that live will be immune to feedlot stress.

Of course the pneumonia caught us unprepared. We figured on having dust pneumonia. Instead we had the worst kind- the dust and wet weather, low-fever pneumonia.

Ranch experts say our biggest fault is not keeping records and making long range planning charts. Well, I can add a thing or two to that subject. Several winters on this outfit it would've taken an extra hand to fill out the death certificates and prepare the coroner's reports. Everybody else was busy doctoring the living and dragging off the dead.

Things like that pop into your head during hard winters. The captain of the Titanic had an excellent log of the trip. I'll bet also that he'd known for years not to run over too many icebergs with a ship. What he needed to study and plan was an excuse for dry docking ships in the winter and using the time sitting around a coal stove, charting a summer cruise.

The object of our game, anyway, is to leave a few patents and a registered brand at the courthouse for our kids. Whether they know how many calves dies in the winter of 1980 won't change the deeds of trust. As you can see, I'm pretty upset today. I guess it's been a harder winter than I'll admit.

April is going to be the big change. We may never have a hard day after then. I can't wait to send these old calves to Kansas. They're going to be standouts by the fall.