

JULY 18, 1974

Some of the sheep outfits are already turning out their bucks. Shortgrass herders, like everywhere, fall right back into the same traps. Last winter, woolies were keeling over to a degree that the entire crop of the Red Cross backed by the Salvation Army couldn't have hauled off the dead.

Accompanying the die-off was the awful news that the last market outlet for dead wool had closed down. On standby of the wool business ending, the outfit that had been weaving the dead wool was none other than the one that had been selling us lined denim coats at a fancy price.

I don't know which hurt the worst. Without the stability of dead wool income, sheep ranching in the Shortgrass Country seems as foolish as betting on a reindeer giving more milk than a Holstein cow. Thinking of a winter without a lined jacket to turn those 45 mile an hour north breezes meant for sure that frost-bite shortribs would catch us all.

Shepherders, however, have already broken the International Olympic record for never hearing any good news. The last time we had a favorable report, an old boy from California stopped at a filling station out west of here and reported that he had a new baby and was thinking of feeding him lamb chops when he was ready to wean.

Other than that, the whole deal has been dragged through a valley of tears and disappointments that broke more hearts than all the blonde headed gals that ever tried to go to Hollywood.

In their campaign to cover the rangeland with coyote hair and eagle feathers, the environmentalist claim that sheep have brought ruination to the government ranges in the West and Northwest. Like all of us, they could have concealed their ignorance by keeping their mouths shut.

Anyone who has tasted the dust raised by cloven hoofs knows that sheep have ruined more men and banks than government ranges. Four leaf clovers and scissor bladed mountain grammas are never choked by corral sinus failure. Tall pinons know nothing of bank examiners and very little of six year drouths.

At various periods in San Angelo, I've seen jugkeepers and their customers so sick of the outland scene that a little child could have taken a pull toy fashioned in a poor imitation of a lamb and made a whole crew airsick from swiveling in their chairs.

From the times of the Good Shepards (and I never have believed that they were all good and shepards at the same time) to the last meeting of the National Sheep Herder's Assn., sheep have harmed man more than they have nature or anything else.

Test some day the definition of "ruination" by working a pen of woolies on a hot day as the humidity dances in the 80s. Neither saloonkeepers on the waterfronts nor piano players in the sporting houses ever witness humanity disintegrated on such a swift and certain course.

Corrupters of the flesh and supporters of the doctrine of Old Ned himself know nothing until see the moral havoc that can develop in a sheep corral as the punch sticks and bedlam spawn profanity and despair that reduces a man to a weakling.

It could be that the environmentalists' support of sheep killers could be a merciful way to cure us from sheep disease. But before the flag is lowered, I want the final surrender terms to clarify that the sheep did more hurting to man than they did nature.

People out here don't ask for my advice. However, allow me to shoot one parable that applies: "As man does not live upon weak 40-cent cattle and four-bit gains, he also cannot ranch the Shortgrass Country without any sheep or rain."

Confound and double blast it all. Who would have ever thought the tennis shoe business shod in boots and shaded by hats?