

JUNE 9, 1983

Before the department of Agriculture thought of a quarantine against Texas we had serious border problems. Unpapered aliens poured in from Mexico. Not far behind the aliens came eagles and panthers and coyotes, plus a steady flow of drug peddlers and all sorts of smugglers. Up on our international boundaries it worked the opposite. In particular, the coyote seemed to recognize state lines as being a limit to his territory.

So as dreadful and fierce as the Government came down on us in banning our cattle, they weren't dealing with hombres that hadn't been offended before. Heifer calves, for example, in a glut in the '60s had crested at 14 ft. deep on the Texas Plains. Without any restrictions from the Feds, Texas herders have seen plenty of markets that were worse than being quarantined.

The justification of the brucellosis quarantine is to punish the hot-bloods that won't test their cattle. The rest of us are guilty because of having complied with the law and being punished for non association of the guilty ones. Looks like our sentence is going to put us up on our tiptoes and make us whistle shrilly enough to trip the sensors on the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad down on the Mexican border. Of all the trouble I have even been in, this is the first time I've felt like I was serving for the other guy. Talk about many for the few. I never saw so much smoke pumped in the wrong hole on such a huge scale.

Last week at the special calf sale in San Angelo, on receipts of over 4000 head of calves, more than 1400 head were heifers that went out of state. The quarantine was stopped by a restraining order before it went into effect on that sale day. I was plenty sensitive to the subject, as I had a half load of 700 pound long age heifers that brought a whopping \$6 bucks a head more than my neighbor's 440-pound steer calves.

Had I been bucking a quarantine, it would have taken all the yearling heifers I've ever seen to match just a few head of steers. There I had kept those straight tail cattle 12 months more than the young steers and only had six dollars to cover 100 bucks worth of grass and feed.

I was so heartsick going back to the ranch that I tied a white handkerchief around my face, up under my nose. The last time I felt that bad, four doctors diagnosed it as a terminal condition. I can't remember exactly the cause of that calamity. However, I'm sure it had something to do with either cattle or sheep, because about nine-tenths of the grief that's happened in this lifetime could be traced back to four-legged animals, especially hollow horns and woolies.

Cattle ranching is a self-destructive business. The government might be hasty in setting up an expensive quarantine. The high grain prices resulting from the new PIK program shows promise of eliminating a sizable amount of herders. Also, the drouth that's raged around the state and finally centralized in the Shortgrass Country could well be a fine measure to control the traffickers in horns and hides.

Brands are going to be mighty hard to read on the new crop heifers. Who knows when they may have to be turned out on the public roads. I wish people were more even-

tempered. I'd like to spend the rest of the drouth, however long that is, with a modicum of peace.