

Mystery Of The Shortgrass Area Whither Goeth The SCS Agent?

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MERTZON, Texas — Natives to this land the Indians once called “the Brief Intermission” continue to marvel at the lush autumn scene. Everyone from the smooth cheeked kids to the gray whiskered sages is enthralled by the panorama of flourishing plant life that could well end up attracting every nature lover in the country, from Justice Douglas to the Flower Girl in front of the Drake Hotel in Chicago.

My people can hardly believe their eyes as they appraise our homeland covered by dense patches of six-minute grama grass laced by fertile stands of 72-hour wilt weed elevated to floral splendor by fortnight pea vine which oldtimers claim is toxic after frost and capable of producing mortal bloat during other seasons.

The days of forever-dehydrated grief followed by weeks of eternally dry miseries are passing from the scene. No longer will the old cows come out of the winter so weak that they couldn't withstand a mild case of dandruff; nor does it appear that mother ewes will ever again have to depend on the barnacle-like insects growing on the shade sides of salt troughs to indicate springtime.

The countryside is turning into a virtual forest of sheep and cow feed. For once, the first killing frost is going to do real damage.

In conjunction with the explicable change in the climate, another mystery has arisen:

The local Soil Conservation Service agent has flat disappeared.

Since the opening days of the monsoon season, I haven't laid eyes on this highly trained enemy of gulleys and washes. You couldn't prove by me whether he's been sent up north to teach the Eskimos how to grow potted lichens in their igloos. It's been so long since I last saw him tearing into the rangelands, it's doubtful if I'd recognize the chap.

If my assumption is correct, this is the first time in local history that we have ever misplaced a government official. Oh, once or twice the smart alec element claimed that the last county agent was a bit off course all during his assignment. But as you probably know, there's nothing to that kind of talk. The smooth-tongued set is always jealous of a fellow bright enough to learn how to ranch from a textbook.

It has turned out that hunting a Soil Conservationist is a much bigger job than the lay detective might think. These soil savers don't leave many clues. In fact, all I've had to go by were vague rumors such as that even before the rains the entire Soil Conservation corps was sicker of the Shortgrass Country than Mr. Johnson will ever be of the sight of Bobby Kennedy banners. Or such groundless theories as that the missing agent was so confused by the moisture on the glass of his transit that he wandered off into the wilderness.

In the end, when it became apparent that the new set of grass growing and soil conserving problems (of the wet era) could be addled by a freshman Peace Corpsman by long distance telephone, I abandoned the search. I decided that the SCS man was perhaps languishing in some far away spot, awaiting the day when his talents would again be needed.

So if the old master of rare grass seeds and fantastic retaining structures in taking a vacation from the stress of trying to help us, he couldn't have picked a better time. As it looks today, this is the year the Shortgrass Country can survive without anyone's advice.