

Shortgrass Country

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8-20-70

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Skies over the Shortgrass section have been colored by a dark haze. Weathermen says the peculiarity is caused by smoke drifting from the Ohio Valley. Each morning the sunrise is an eerie orange color.

The overcast is thick enough to shade the ground. For years I've been telling these people that the Northerners were going to send us something beneficial one of these days. But the local hombres wouldn't believe that the uplanders weren't going to be forever wrecking our farm bills and pulling such stunts as encouraging foreign imports to ruin the market for our products.

Now the bad mouthing must stop. Untold smokestacks full of free Yankee smog are arriving hourly. The sun's rays have been defused to the extent that the heat waves have tempered a full degree. Lambs and calves, of course, are going to benefit by the cooler temperatures. Best of all, the advantage isn't costing a copper coin of tax money. No federal or state agency has an override on the deal. Believe it or not, the northern industrialists are sending the smudge freight free.

I've been hoping the soot would settle to ground level. Livestock in all stations need any from of filler they can get. The few remaining sprigs of forage would be improved by a carbon tinge. Television shots of the citizens who live in the smoky cities prove that smog keep humans in good flesh. You never see any of the New Yorkers who aren't going into the winter in top shape. You know if it's that good for people, it'd help cattle and sheep.

Health fanatics rage that air pollution is going to ruin the country. That I don't know, because no one has been able to prove in the last 40 years that the country wasn't already ruined. You'd have to ask someone besides a dryland rancher to find out if the country was ruined. There are hombres out here who'd claim that once you break a horse's back from his forelock clear back to his tail, it's no use to keep worrying about his saddle sores. (Shortgrassers are great hands to talk in parables. Most of them have been deeply influenced by their mothers reading them the Bible during acute dry spells.)

Two more weeks of this dry weather will make everybody pray that the smog hits the ground. Ranges are already so hard that the horned toads are having to eat twice as many red ants as they did a month ago. The barn sparrows that shed their feathers early last spring haven't been able to gain the strength to grow new plumage. Poisoned air may kill us, but drouths aren't particularly popular times for an insurance company to take on a bunch of new customers either.

Weathermen don't say how long we can count on the sky to be covered. The Shortgrass atmosphere will hold dust in suspension for days and days, but that doesn't mean that it'll hold foreign matter for that time.

It'll be just our luck for the smog to drift on down to Mexico and give their cattle a boost. However, by then the politicians will have it under foreign aid and the velvet will all be lost to bureaucratic expense accounts.