

JULY 2, 1981

Last summer Goat Whiskers the Younger built a new grazing system. Young Whiskers' idea originated from a South American management expert. I think you've probably seen or read about the deal. Single pastures are cut into pie shaped cells; large accumulations of livestock are concentrated and rotated on a two or three day schedule. The goal is to improve grass production and double the carrying capacity of the land.

The herders that were convinced fell to stringing electric fences in a manner that'd make the telephone company's style look like they were sub-contracting the clothes line business for trailer parks. The hombres that disagreed were as offended as if the South African had been sent over here to overthrow the ranching industry. Around the coffee houses the level of scorn reached proportions that are normally reserved for quarterbacks that fumble too much.

From the July introduction of the plan until everyone became too distracted by high priced feed and worse interest rates, I don't suppose there was a topic going among the cup and saucer crowd that reached the interest of the new grazing plan.

I enjoyed all those days of debating the subject. Early in the game, I realized that the plan was so controversial that I had an equal voice. Everybody was so heated up that they were overlooking that I didn't have enough money to rebuild our outside fences, much less the coin to cut, say, a four section pasture into 40 miles of pie shaped traps. My opinion was worth as much as the guy that had the cash to lose. It was like holding a big order buyer's seat at the auction ring without having access to his checkbook.

Anyhow, after a year in operation, Whiskers asked me over to look at his layout. Whiskers has 2500 acres divided into 14 or 15 cells. The watering in the middle of the pie is taking care of about double the normal stocking rate for our country. He has had as good a spring as the rest of us in the area. By that I mean we've had more rain than in 50 years.

The grass or the cattle didn't look like I'd predicted. His old cows were giving plenty of milk to average weight calves for the season. The amazing thing was that moving cows every three or four days had produced a stand of grass that was of uniform height. The inferior grasses and the best grasses were about the same length. Now don't get the idea that the range was clipped to perfection, but at various stops, we found this to be the case.

Like I told Whiskers, I hadn't had enough experience with that rapid of rotation system to even guess how it was going to turn out after five years of practice. Over at the ranch, we have a twin-leafed, yellow-flowered plant that makes an old cow so sick that she'll naturally spin in a circle, but that was the extent of my knowledge of circular motion on a livestock operation I guess I have seen a few thousand head of cattle run through a round chute without affecting their sense of direction or hurting their sense of balance. When our kids were little, Child Who Sits in the Sun treated lots of car sickness, but I can't remember the remedy, except I think she might have put a paper sack over their heads before we left home on a trip.

Before I'd finished my conclusions, I had to shut up. You see, we had a guest

along in the pickup and Whiskers doesn't appreciate my observations in public. He's pretty tolerant of my ideas if we are off on a trip, or maybe riding horseback alone in a big pasture. I wish now I'd saved that stuff for another meeting.

The designer of the plan has moved on to New Mexico. Whiskers is impressed enough by his first unit to spend the money for a second one. I haven't overheard much at the restaurants on grasses and fences this summer. Not too long ago, I heard of a cow deal that closed on a 23 percent interest rate, so I guess a lot of the slack time that was being spent on other folks grazing plans is being used on personal financial problems.