

JANUARY 8, 1981

Winding up 1980 took a big push at the ranch. Early morning ice spells put the old ewes on bitterweed; an over-ambitious crossbreeding program on the cows opened a hand calving clinic that showed promise of establishing a permanent foundation for the area's veterinary hospitals. To further lower my morale, I had to listen to the town hombres grieve over their income taxes. At every party, tax oppression was the topic of the evening. I actually believe that if giving up eggnog was tax deductible, 90 percent of the Shortgrassers would vote a dry ticket.

I'd never run across such injustice in our country. There I was, standing among these paper capitalists with approximately 1000 animal units of dependents threatening to either expire or fall over in some vet's waiting stall, while Caesar was preparing to wipe them out.

By the shuffling of a few chattels and notes, I could have offered them a dose of tax relief that'd require a special reading of their returns before a joint meeting of Congress. With a few strokes of the black pen on a financial statement, their tax woes could be solved for several quarters, if not several decades.

In all the tip sheets on avoiding taxes that I read, cattle are listed as a shelter. Along with holding nitro-glycerin for a long term capital gain, I can't think of a worse plaything or tax write-off than the hollow horn business. Deep sea divers are allowed extra benefits for losing their helmets underwater, but I seriously doubt that it's a popular thing in the trade.

Accountants say that the IRS is mighty suspicious of gasoline salesmen and such like that develop sudden year-end interest in cattle feeding pools. I sure can't disagree with that idea. I don't understand the rendition forms for local taxes, much less the federal codes, and I'd consider anyone that went into fat cattle as an unreliable source for tax collection purposes.

But back to these parties; I wasn't able to offer to share my tax advantages. Bitterweed sheep die too fast to sell a share anyway except on a roulette wheel. Say you signed up a group of investors one night at 10 o'clock, by daylight you'd have to get them out of bed to make a margin call.

Furthermore, sheep are so unromantic that it'd take the secrecy of a Swiss bank account to protect your group's anonymity. Can't you just see some old boy standing at a cocktail party all sported out in a blue suede coat, bragging about his solid mouth ewe gains, or charming the crowd by telling of a coup in the dead wool market. He'd be lucky if the hostess didn't spray him with Cologne. It's a flat wonder that woolie operators weren't branded as untouchables like those poor unfortunate sects of India. I normally tell people that I sell greeting cards for a living. The sigma is less and the conversation always last a whole lot longer.

Twelve warm days would put this old country on a boom. The moisture is in the ground. All we need is a little more sunshine. Taxes are a sad plight. The price of being successful must be a horrible thing to face.