

APRIL 11, 1974

Shortgrass ranges are so dry that the herders stir up the top soil while fanning the dust from their hats. Dry snows and non-liquid dews parched the winter earth. Spring was sprung without any relief from the dryness.

Citizens have forgotten how to act in dry weather. Grown men go bogging into town, carrying loads of empty feed sacks. People who should know better park right in front of the banks with the feed boxes in plain sight. All the jugkeepers have to do to be reminded of the drouth is to take a half swivel in their chairs and look out the window.

No effort is being made to keep the situation a secret. Blabber mouth reporters leak market breaks every day. Livestock collateral is as well pegged as the odds at a racetrack. Matters will grow way worse as summer bank conventions near and jugsters in the feedlot areas begin comparing their expiration warrants with those of cow and calf backers down here. Bankers, like good wives, shouldn't be allowed to prowl from their home grounds. I dread to think what'll happen.

At the coffee house this morning, our new sheriff said that a law officer to the west was filing charges on a lady for spreading false alarms. The basis of the charges, he explained, stemmed from the law against pulling off hoaxes.

I suppose the law was a carryover from the time when kings objected their subjects putting ground glass in the royal churn on the days his highness wanted cornbread and buttermilk for supper.

Kings, you know, didn't mind being the hoaxer, but they sure did get cranky about being the hoaxee. Monarchs loved to tell their servants to see how many times they could run through the lion's pit without losing an arm or a hindleg, but they were void of humor if somebody slipped a dose of Sleeping Beauty potion in their goblets or juggled the treasurer's report in the wrong direction.

The sheriff's story ruined the coffee session. Only 18 hours before, I'd told my banker that I didn't figure we'd have to feed more than another week or 10 days. What I failed to tell him was in another week or 10 days of no rain, we'd be feeding the old cows glucose through their veins instead of cottonseed cubes orally.

I didn't intend to break the law against pulling off hoaxes. I was just protecting him from becoming over excited about the money that was borrowed in February and March to finish feeding.

Livestock bankers don't need to know every detail of an operation to finance it. Huge grist mills can be banked without knowing the number of weevils lurking in the bins. Bankers have ulcers too early in life as it is. Can you imagine what would happen if the cold truth had been blurted out?

As I see the hoax law in regards to ranch financing, the relationship is between consenting parties. Veteran jugkeepers know that veteran herders are going to enter their doors. Experienced bankers understand that experienced ranchers have to add a bit of color or they'd all collapse in a veil of tears that the maintenance staff of the Astrodome couldn't mop up in a full working week.

I'll swear by the Book that I didn't want to break the law. I had to. Lawyers in the Watergate affair couldn't face the truth of a drouth. Confound that lady, anyhow, for disturbing the peace of the law on hoaxes. It's mighty uncomfortable to be a fugitive of justice and be strung out by a drouth at the same time.

