

Lots of sheep and cow herds in the Shortgass Country are probably being fed all the protein they can stand. It isn't easy to find the ones feeding hay, because once we start throwing out the baled stuff, the end is so close that little needs to be explained about feeding procedures.

This is not to say that other reports from the drouth range stations aren't exciting and fulfilling. Take for example such chilling tidbits as first calf heifers prolapsing, or perfectly healthy cows struggling in calving until they have ruptured a vital artery.

If those two aren't thrilling enough, what about a short course in two or three dreaded bovine diseases that pop up when the herd is under the stress of dry weather; or if that doesn't do the trick, maybe an epidemic of night blindness and pinkeye combined will do.

Last night on the way home the times came even sharper in focus as I drove by a pasture of ewes that had the first of our early lambs hobbling along with their mothers out in the dry stubble. In a flash, I thought of the few winters that we've had grass and weeds that nourished our sheep until they gave more milk than their lambs were able to drink. And of how much I cherished those tiny forbes and slim leaves of browse and minute stands of grass hidden under the bushes.

We have a tinge of green stuff where the blizzard in December split our pipe lines. Between the water tanks and the troughs and along the underpinning of the ranch hoses where broken pipe leaked after the thaw, there's a pretty good start a green feed coming.

True, it'd probably look scant to an East Texas or Louisiana fellow, but this old country out here has a lot of surprises. We used to think it was so terrible that sheep died off from bitterweed poisoning in the winter, until we saw how enriching all those decaying carcasses were to the ground.

As reported before, this drouth means business. Every week until it starts raining again, the weak and the timid are going to be culled from the bunch. If that greenhouse effect they keep writing about does happen, we'll have tough times without any plumbing leaks to subirrigate our winter pastures.