

FEBRUARY 25, 1993

The Texas Commissioner of Agriculture said a few weeks ago that young people are the principal exports from rural communities. It's been realized a long time that college opportunities, military service and bad influences like commencement speakers and school teachers cause the young to move off an leave July sheep working sessions and January row crop plowing.

Necessity is another strong impetus to move away. The several-generation inherited patches of farmland and cut up ranch pastures increase the exodus where keeping an extra collie dog can be a hardship, much less feeding a second family.

If ranching and farming ever supported a lifestyle equal to the cities, historians failed to be quick enough to catch the period. Pinpointing an agriculture boom takes a sharp-sighted analyst. Scanning one page too fast in a reference book can make a writer overlook the biggest hollow horn windfall of a decade, or the loftiest milo prices of all seasons.

Herders and farmers outrace recessions so bad, there's no match. By the time the banks started failing in the early years of the 80's, we'd already had a drouth, an over-expansion of the cow herd, and three or four disasters around the grain elevators and cotton gins, that'd of shook the windows of every brokerage house on Wall Street if stocks had taken such a plunge.

Out here, things have been so tough for so long, we are starting to profit from the bad times. Like last week, I was inquiring about a couple of newspaper scribes in San Angelo. My main lead reported that these two august gentlemen of dangling particples and floating adjectives has opened a cabinet shop. At first, the news was stunning, however, after thinking it over, the longer the recession lasts, the more inclinations we are going to have to launch new careers.

Unless Mr. Clinton and Mrs. Clinton come to the rescue, we are going to have more one-man bands and back alley cabinet makers and home-based hot tamale shops than Mexico City has straw hat weavers. It's also possible the President and the First Lady understand improvised circumstances ahead of time. Their home state has fielded many a chicken picking factory and a lot of small time saw mills. Up in the north-eastern ranges ao Arkansas, quite a few sidelines like stretching coon hides and making unstamped corn whiskey hold life together.

Human ingenuity increases during desperate periods. A pressed flower uncovered in an old family Bible may be all it takes to put a housewife to drying every petal and bud in her front yard, so going from punching a typewriter to nailing shelves together doesn't sound far-fetched.

On the last quarter of '92, government statistics showed the unemployment rate down because of the jobs provided by election day in November. The news was heartening. We already knew by December in Texas we were going to have a special election in May. Christmas seemed happier knowing there'd be extra jobs in the spring.

I didn't make a call on the new cabinet makers. From what I've seen of converting cowboys to carpenters, I am going to hold off making an order.