

MAY 29, 1980

Rains have changed the aura of the Shortgrass Country Hombres who were dragging along in a dry daze of gloom are showing signs of the new spring. The cow market has risen; wool and lambs have a better price tag.

Like the other trails of life, the drouth taught us some lessons. Herders are taking their time to restock their pastures. I'd estimate that it'll be at least the first of June before there's a stampede for stocker sheep and cattle that'll make the big runs on the commodity market look like a slow motion picture of "Alice In Wonderland."

Once the fever hits out here the Highway Patrol won't be able to slow down the gooseneck traffic. On the 19th of May a bare 72 hours off some of the first rains, one set of Angus pairs brought \$900 at a special sale in San Angelo. Tiger stripes and black humpies with small calves following them in the ring sounded like they were overshooting the seven hundred dollar mark by enough money to pay the immediate expenses.

In April those same cows, after the tops had sold, wouldn't have drawn enough interest from anyone except the packers to justify a side comment from the starter at the ring. About then, a milk cow trade was a big deal.

The most change I've noticed since the rains is that the citizens are becoming more gregarious. Riding alone in the feed wagons everyday had been turning people into recluses. Ranchers aren't like truck drivers. The government doesn't force us to take along a relief driver on our hauls.

Wives and children burning out on the idea of helping feed years ago. Gates with broken hinges and wire gaps soured the family going along on the feed runs. I noticed that my eight kids lasted an average of three days of wanting to go with daddy. Just as soon as they were old enough to open a gate in less than 20 minutes, I had to wait for a new prospect to arrive.

My wife Child Who Sits in the Sun never was any help feeding. She wasted so much time looking after the kids and piddling around with such chores as washing diapers and keeping house, that she didn't do much ranch work.

I got cured real fast of taking her out in the pasture when she was in a motherly way. We were feeding those hard 3/4-inch cottonseed cubes. I'd have her riding on the tailgate opening sacks and pouring out feed. Next thing I knew she'd be shelling the pickup cab with cubes and rocks so hard that it's sound like a hail storm was hitting.

One bump in the road, or a tree limb breaking off on the sideboards was all that was necessary to start a barrage. I don't guess there's a man in Texas outside of a doctor's clinic that knows as much as I do on the subject of temperamental pregnant women. I can't remember exactly but I think the last time I even had to help her pull a windmill was a month or so before number five son was born.

In the mornings 60-degree temperature cools the dew. Cattle grace until way up in the day. Old ewes scorn a pickup as if they had never heard a sack rustle.

Before I sat down to this typewriter, I made one more round of the front yard. After such a long and thoroughly dry spell, I don't want to miss the green horizon nor the song of one bird. Late springs like this may not make a poet's heart throb, but they sure are a great way to end a feeding season.