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Turkey hunting is a hot item to the south of the ranch. Outfitters are bringing in hunters from the Florida Peninsula with hip pockets so loaded in dough, their turkey calls are wrapped in hundred dollar bills and their hunting licenses have to be carried in their shirt pockets.

We hear of redcaps paying \$550 for two gobblers down in Sutton County. Two hundred dollars of the \$550 goes to the herder or the landowner. Doesn't sound like an equal split of the money until you compare our usual cut of 80-cent finished cattle from the feedlot becoming \$11 a pound ribeye in a Northeastern meat market and a six-bit fat lamb converting into \$14 a pound lamb chops in Austin. So fitting the same equation to harvesting wild turkeys, instead of a \$200 take, we'd be getting a percentage of the royalty on the tail feathers to make dusters.

Last Saturday three gobblers walked into the corner of the horse trap fence and the back yard fence. The old fools kept poking their heads through the woven wire net, too dumb to jump 60 inches. I watched while I washed the breakfast dishes. Observed \$825 worth of gobblers standing within 150 feet of where Mother used to try to raise enough turkey fryers for us to eat and share with the neighbors. Badgers were the nemesis of the turkey business in those Depression

days. And by the way, her 1934 Chevrolet car cost new within 25 bucks of the retail value of three 2003 model gobblers.

As soon as I dried my hands, I called a fellow guiding hunters close by to offer my interest in the three gobblers range delivery at a hundred dollars a head. With a quick deal on the house birds, I figured I might lure enough gobblers in from the horse trap to go to Florida and be away from such misery as doctoring ringworm calves and watching milk colic lambs crumple in a haze of blowing dust.

By the time the guide turned on his cell phone, a propane delivery man rumbled over the cattleguard in the front and roared to a stop, sending \$550 worth of gobblers fleeing into the night trap and \$275 worth flying down the south fence toward the county road. Counting the loss of turkeys and adding the propane at a buck forty a gallon, the tank cost \$1300 to fill.

Once the guide understood my proposal, he said in the 09 country the season is too short to lease for turkey hunting. Guess he was right. My hunting prospects only lasted 20 minutes. The way those old gobblers sailed across the pasture, you'd of thought a propane truck was an attack vehicle.

That same week a game survey came in the mail, to be followed by a visit from a game consultant. Instructions were to fill in as much of the questionnaire as possible before

the consultant came by the ranch. At first I answered truthfully, gave the correct number of bucks killed and exact amount of income. I began to think how shoddy the charges per gun were going to look compared to all the fancy prices I hear herders quoting at sheep and goat herders' conventions and hollow horn meetings. I feared I was going to bring down everyone's average and maybe cause the whole price structure to collapse.

The more I worked on the figures, the more embarrassing the numbers looked. The truth is for professionals. In a big enough jam, like on a witness stand but not as serious as facing your wife or your husband, the truth is a good tool. But you better rehearse, and I mean write a script, or you'll trip yourself. So I just doubled the amount of income per gun, added a dozen redcaps, and averaged the horn spread at 15 inches. (My brother discovered that Great Grandfather Noelke fought in 13 battles in the War of Northern Aggression. However, before the information was released, we cut the number to six and a half battles to hold to the family's margin of accuracy.)

The game consultant was so weary from listening to other herders, he seemed indifferent to my answers. He did advise against adding the three gobblers I'd tried to sell for \$100 a head as future income. I offered to show him how big the

tracks were there by the yard fence. Would have only taken a minute, but he seemed to be in a hurry to go.

Were the turkeys to congregate on the ranch, it'd be my luck for a feed truck or propane wagon to run them into the fence and break their necks before a redcap could take a \$275 shot. Wish a witness had been around to verify the length of the gobblers' beards. Good thing they didn't jump the fence or they'd never have cleared the top wire with 18-inch long beards.