

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

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Sheep dog trials were added to our county ram sale this year as a means of drawing a larger crowd. At one time a beauty contest was considered. But after thinking it over, the sale committee decided that dogs and sheep would be a lot easier to sift and judge than beauty queens.

I know at those big beauty contests the judges have an awful time culling back the bowlegged and pigeon toed hopefuls. Bowed tendons or knee splints don't disqualify as many girls as you'd think. However, if the young people don't settle down, Miss Tea Bag of 1975 may have ring bones bigger than a slave's bracelet. Protesting and demonstrating are bound to be ideal ways to get crippled up.

After trying to peddle our ranch's bucks with the dog fanciers around, I wish now we'd tried to have a beauty contest. Every time you'd mention buying bucks to the visitors, they'd glance at their watches and want to know what time the dog show was going to start.

An old boy did come from way east of the Shortgrass Country to buy some sheep. Though he was hotter for action than a Fourth of July parade, the consignors had to keep him under tight herd to prevent the dog handlers from catching his attention.

Give-away bargains at the wool sales have turned every beast that doesn't have to be sheared into competition for the sheepmen. Stick-tight fleas or howling fits aren't much of a hardship compared to the agonies that accompany the woolie business. As far as that goes, a kennel full of dingoe dogs might be a better investment than unshorn sheep.

The wool producers were easy to spot in the crowd. At lunch the city folks were working over the red beans with fervor but the herders acted like they were suffering from the same frijole founder that struck during the desperate times of the '50s.

The sheep expert in charge of sifting the rams said that getting to eat good beans was one of the reasons he liked to work a show in Mertzon. A newspaper reported sitting at the same table agreed and said he'd eat beans every day if he had a chance. I noticed, however, that when the sheep sale started neither one of them cared to purchase an item that would guarantee them a bean diet from then on.

Making a fast pass by a country barbecue to eat beans is mighty different from eating them until the sound of a dry bean hitting a plate give you a gastric turnbuckle. I saw a hound dog one time that wouldn't come out from underneath the house if he could smell beans cooking. He'd eaten so many leftover frijoles that a gas bubble the size of a mammoth goiter had formed around his throatlatch. His owner claimed he was the best dog to stay on a trail in the country. The truth of the matter was that the dog never did get homesick enough to go back for a plateful of beans.

Around town the citizens are still talking about the sheep sale. It'd break their heart if they knew our biggest drawing card was our bean cookery, not fine sheep. But considering how hard it's going to be for San Angelo to live down being called the wool capitol of the world, we'd better be thankful that we have our frijole reputation to stand on.