

MARCH 9, 1972

Warm weather is blessing the Shortgrass scene. Green stubble is showing on the hillsides. Feed wagons are running, but not at the pace of previous winters.

Cattle couldn't have wintered in better shape. Old cows have accepted less charity than in many a year, and though springers still show an interest in the grass, only the pairs are seriously pursuing the pickups.

Strong prices have made the cattle easier to feed. It isn't so painful to pour cake on the ground for a mother cow that might lead in a 40-oddcent calf next fall. It's an exciting experience to see a newborn calf come waddling in. I can't ever remember being so fond of cow brutes.

Ranchmen look better, too. Lots of the moaning and groaning that accompanied 'last winter's drouth has been cured. The old boys at the coffee house are in a good mood. You have to pay for coffee a day ahead of schedule to ever buy a round.

High priced cattle are changing cow ranching from a hobby to a business. Outsiders are beginning to notice the new era.

A letter the other day to the San Angelo paper said that ranching interests smelled of commercialism. The rest of the details slipped my mind, because if you remembered everything and every time that somebody criticizes the ranchers now-a-days, you'd prolapse your memory gland. What I do remember was wondering who'd have ever thought that ranchers would ever be accused of suffering from commercialism.

Shoe clerks or secondhand car dealers probably are commercialistic. During opening and closing hours, you could describe bankers as having a slight case. But I sure wouldn't have thought of connecting that word to ranchers.

For at least 40 years, the industry has had a struggle to keep from being classified in the same category as the amateur humming bird raiser's association. Internal Revenue agents have wrecked their health trying to figure out why their ranching victims stayed in the game. And brilliant economists have been dumbfounded to explain the mechanics of the sheep and cow herding business.

Then comes this upstart of a letter writer and says that ranchers are tainted by commercialism. Why I'd as soon he'd said that Tarzan didn't really love Jane as to have come out with that wild claim. Countless weaknesses we have, but commercialism certainly isn't one of them. In fact for all-out uncommercialism, the ranch business) is a leader. Non profit religious orders that won't pass the collection plate are more materially oriented than herders. Hermits that live off yak curd and cave berries know more about money than we do.

Prophets in the livestock circles are getting impatient to see the cow boom end. Wise pundits and smart traders keep a standing prediction that anybody who doesn't sell on this week's market is toe dancing right on the brink of big drop-off.

Frankly, I'm not in such a rush to see cattle go down again. I wouldn't mind seeing that commercialism charge come true. Forty years is a-long time to stay with one hobby. It'd be a great relief to see it pay off for a few years.