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Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

Early sheep shearing has been going on about a month in the Shortgrass Country. All the market report show the wool trade to be centered somewhere between gloomy and desperate. But I suppose that if all the great basins of the world, and all the inactive volcano craters were filled to overflowing with unsold 12-month fleeces, those of us addicted to the woolie game would arise the next morning and start buying more sheep.

Big chances, however, are occurring in the preparation of the wool clips. Last year, Australians were brought over to teach our wool graders how to sort and bale our product so it'd be more acceptable in international channels.

A week ago the manager of the wool house in Mertzon advised me that as sluggish as the market was, I'd better think about putting my April harvest up in the Australian fashion.

We'd just finished the early shearing. Fresh on my mind was how shorthanded we'd been around the pens. But when I asked him where the other sheep outfits had been finding the four or five extra hands the deal requires, he started reeling off a list of ladies' names that sounded like the roll call for a 16-piece all-girl orchestra.

That very morning, on the two-way ranch radio, I'd overheard wives accepting assignments that would've broken the spirit of a big crew of men. One outfit on the channel was topping off a sheep shearing exercise by peeling their hair goats. Just as the FM station on my pickup switched to ballads of broken hearts abandoned lovers, an old gal who'd been cooking for the shearing help and rounding up in her spare time told her other half that she was leaving him a note on the kitchen table.

I never did find out what was in that note. All the sad music about the coffee in her cup being only 16 minutes old and the locks being changed and such like had over-fired my imagination.

She was still penning goats the last I heard on the radio. Until my neighbors are caught up, I am not planning on adding any extra work.