

DECEMBER 8, 1983

Up until a few days ago the Shortgrass Country has been warm and kind and restoring. Passing through you'd never have suspected how harsh the spring and summer were. Not much, in fact, has been said or written about the strange late fall as most of us were too edgy from fear of frost to discuss the abnormal pattern.

However now that the cold fronts have started hitting, the countryside looks frost burned and shriveled. Far too much bare ground is showing. Yesterday I drove down to the Mexican Border. On the way, I saw acres and acres of white limestone rocks and very little grass. I'm sure I don't have to explain to you what that means in Texas. We'd all be better off if we didn't know.

On that same day, we got in a load of corn from up on the plains. The delivery was timely because President Reagan signed a bill at the same time forcing the Dept. of Agriculture to start selling drought areas corn at a 25 percent discount. I don't think they were holding up waiting for me to get ours in the granary, but it was sort of strange it all happened in that sequence.

But before I forget, I want to tell you something that you may have forgotten. That is, in case your troubles and cares become so heavy that you have to ask the Government for help, get down on your knees and pray that whatever those troubles are, are relieved before the Government can come to your rescue.

Don't misunderstand. I am not spreading that to support a political doctrine. The only political belief I can afford is the grand theory of the politics of necessity. I just want to warn the young and remind the old of that awful truth. Had the Government sent us one more load of rotten hay during that drought of the '50s, Texas would have been permanently contaminated by mold and mildew. If it makes my compadres happy get some government grain, then it's sure okay with me. I just can't afford the savings myself.

The newspaper account said that the corn was No. 4, 5, and sample grade. I'm not sure but I think "sample grade" is the same as a No. 6 grade. I think in the days that we discovered a No. 8 Okie calf and a class F movie, we rated corn in the sixes. Don't bother to check me, just don't buy any No. 6 corn unless your going to rough a few old Rhode Island red hens through the winter.

Not everything about the late frost worked to our advantage. All my life, we've been using frost as an arbitrary date to postpone painful decisions. I guess if it hadn't ever frosted in the Shortgrass country we'd be trying to hold 25-year-old cows and sheep at a worst age. Sometimes I think ranchers are lucky they do come under the laws of nature. It's a cinch we need some sort of protection from ourselves.

The drought has been as bad as the newspapers said it was. For once we haven't been playing on your sympathy. I wish Mr. Reagan hadn't had to force Secretary Block to act. We may have to ask both of them a favor one of these days. I don't want to run my string out on com I can't see. I took a cowboy back to Mexico yesterday for being too hardheaded for his own good. You don't suppose that'd apply to this case, do you?