

It's Hard To Console Shortgrasser Suffering From Surplus Of Feed

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MERTZON — Most ranches here in the Shortgrass Country are in better shape for a July than at nearly any time since the Indians labeled this section the “Home of the Sun God.”

Now this doesn't mean we are planning to cut prairie hay from July to frost. Nor would I lead you to believe that our reserve of subsoil moisture is such that a 2 or 3 inch rain wouldn't set off a joyous clamor that would make a college beach party look like an old maid school teachers' reunion. That isn't the case at all.

The elements, however, have been exceptionally generous this summer. For once, our long range outlook has been extended from the normal five-day period to 21 days in the future.

Still, not all shortgrassers are pleased with this unexpected improvement in conditions. Specifically, a rancher came by the house the other day wearing a frown that would make an old time banker's normal countenance look like a miracle of face lifting.

He said his trouble consisted of 14 inches of spring and summer rainfall. Yes, incredible as it may seem, this long time resident of the Shortgrass Country, who has spent 96 percent of his adult life straining his eyes to see a rain cloud, or ruining his physical and financial well being in search of places where it had rained, was now in the hitherto unheard of shape of having too good a spring and summer.

If his suffering had stemmed from a drought, or one of the eternally occurring mishaps that hit the country about every 24 hours, there would have been a backlog of remedies to offer. But, pray tell, what can a shortgrasser do to console a fellow citizen who has had too much moisture?

There are numerous solutions for a dry spell. A man can, for example, sell out and seek employment with the pick and shovel gangs of Mexico. Or in a tight, he can always stay around home, peddling fruit in the summer and wood in the winter.

Blight and plagues can be softened by taking up some diversion like managing lady wrestlers or doing part time work as a referee in a man-versus-bear act. The list of cures for a rancher's well known calamities is endless. But there's nothing in or out of the manuals on ranching to advise what to do when the rangelands become too wet.

The only hope I could suggest was that August would provide its normal 31 days of grass-parching weather. Of course, as I told him, he might get lucky and have a dry spell during the latter part of July.

This did little to cheer him. Over and over, he kept saying the tall grass was weaning his lambs from their mothers. His old cows were going to stretch their stomachs until they would never be able to get by in a normal year. In his eyes misfortune had struck. He could see no salvation unless a prairie fire or a scourge of grasshoppers came to the rescue.

Before he could move to the second verse of his sad tale, the Boss showed up. He quickly forgot the agony of the tall grass and, happy as a jaybird, was planning a heads-up domino game.

In retrospect, this ranchers' dilemma is hard to explain. Maybe he dreamed his grass was too rank. Or perhaps the July heat, plus the length of time prior to this year that he had much feed, might have caused him to suffer midsummer hallucinations comparable to those which usually strike shortgrassers in midwinter.

At any rate, you can safely bet a new saddle against a six-pack that it won't be long until the local elements solve his problem. All he has to do is hang on, and the time will come when dry west winds will come whipping across his pastures, wilting the grass back to normal.