

FEBUARY 2, 1978

Wet snow and drizzling rains teased the Shortgrass drouth to a standstill. We had as much as 12 inches of snow at the ranch one spell. Things began to look up after 10 months of dry weather. Some follow-up moisture like say a 10 foot tidal wave about 100 miles long would be all it'd take to point this old country toward a good spring.

Cattle galloping after the seed wagons had already seasoned the ground before the snow and rain fell. Sack-broke beggars running and spreading thin residue in every direction had added quite a bit to the dry ground. Evaporation and frost thawing from their mouths was helping relieve the drouth. Lots of folks cuss cattle without counting the advantages. Feed grounds are enriched by their waste material; dead cow carcasses are excellent sources of phosphorus.

Cattle broke my family three times after they came to Texas. But the old cows weren't entirely to blame for the wrecks. People ask too much. Pioneer cow people threw up pole houses or dugouts on the free land before they checked on the return. Bean pots overflowed and flour barrels were filled. Folks still haven't learned that cattle economists and high living are incompatible. An old cow just has one calf a year and four teats to feed him. She's going to be a good mother first and take care of the owner next. In about 98 cases out of 100, the owner is left out. If you want to get down to the specifics, the same odds can be transposed into years, except some centuries the breaks are a little more in favor of the calf.

Fellow that I've worked with so long wanted to feed our cattle extra during the snow. I wasn't about to add any hay to their daily handout of range cubes. I may not know nutrition but I know these old black grafters. Next thing that would've happened after feeding them hay for a few days would have been buying straw for their bed grounds.

My maternal grandfather drove a right nice touring car as long as he didn't have any way to feed his cattle but the prickly pear that he roasted on a pitchfork over a wood fire. Once mills and sacks and pickups and cubes and troughs were invented, he was lucky to have a six cylinder coupe to drive to the bank for the money to buy wonder rations. After that, cows had to be moved to keep them from eating pear. It never has been too good for anybody since then.

Cake is still falling on the frozen ground. Ten warm days would make sheep feed. At least the dust settled and hope is restored. We've made it on a lot less promise. I'm ready for a break.