

AUGUST 10, 1978

Within 20 air miles of the ranch, 10 inches of rain fell the first part of last week. We gauged anywhere from a high of three inches to a scant half of an inch. I know we were lower than the rest of the country, but how low I can't say as the people were so excited that everyone wanted to talk at once. For the record, just say that the Shortgrass Country's hot dry spell ended on the first part of August.

It was time for relief. July heat had baked the land to microwave proportions. Sheep had been so hot that their wool was parched. Sixty pound lambs were so dehydrated that the needle grass and burrs in the pelts weighed more than their carcasses.

However, I was more concerned about the banking community than I was the herders. Last winter's catastrophe had pretty well taken the ranchers' risk from the picture. Even though the market went up in the spring, the banks still were holding a big part of the equity in the herds. I keep a close check on our outfit. As volatile as the sheep and cattle markets are, I sure don't like to have over about 30 percent of our money bet on the deal.

I have a good system of getting along with jugkeepers. By doing business by mail, I don't visit the bank except during the stock show and the steer roping. Back in the '50s I learned that bankers didn't want to be reminded of close calls. I developed the habit of only going by on request, or visiting during the weeks when all the bankers are dressed in cowboy regalia and in a Western humor. I found that it made our relationship a lot better. You know even a chicken raiser doesn't like to see a basket of brown eggs.

My method won't work all the time. I see bankers every day in the outside world. They are easy to spot. Once an old boy has packed a six shooter on a gun belt or carried an interest book next to his pocket calculator, he's marked for life.

Out at the airport in San Angelo before the rains, I spotted a loan officer in a big crowd wearing blue jeans. Even out of costume, he stood out like Miss Sophia Loren at a church supper. I sure didn't ask about his disguise, but I figure he was watching for skips. As heavy as those old cows were becoming on the expense ledger and as light as they were passing across the scales, a little one-way trip to the south part of the Southern hemisphere might have tempted some of the boys. A bank is the only business I know of that can be safe and sorry at the same time. For all I know he might of been out there arranging for some of the hombres to leave town.

Not all of the rain news has been good. As you've probably heard, some areas were hard hit. But as near as I can tell at the time of this report, the Shortgrass Country has been restored. I am planning on visiting the bank before it dries out again both in the sky and in the vault.