

JANUARY 28, 1993

Drouth loss reports are heard daily on the Shortgrass ranges. Weather failure tolls out word combinations like birth defect, womb prolapse and such thrilling deficiencies as dust blindness, deep marrow warp, exhausted lungs, and a mixture of respiratory and eye inflammation trouble that wastes away the interior of the bones.

On top of all those miseries thunderstorms veer to the east and wreck our hopes. Forty-percent forecasts of rain fizzle into minus two percent chance of a light dew. On still mornings the bellowing of hollow horns starts early and crescendos in races for the feed wagons. Woolies watch every truck passing down the road, checking to be sure to make all handouts.

About the middle of January a drizzling rain fell for two days. Some outfits claimed their gauges caught 8/10ths of an inch. Our total reading was one-half inch broken down into 50 percent rain drops and 50 percent coagulated fog. "Coagulated fog" is endemic to the Shortgrass Country. More like a dense cloud cover than rain, the moisture content of fog clots as we call it runs roughly the same as a moist mirage on such expanses as Death Valley or the Sahara Desert.

To explain it better, this unusual condition is wet enough to chill a fresh shorn goat from her horn line clear down to her hocks and the residue on a cold night will frost over on an old cow's hair until she'll thro a hump in her back that'll make a dromedary's shadow look like a draftsman's straight edge.

We've known about solidified fogs for a long time. Gray beards dismiss it and call the condition "falling weather." The first symptom is easy to catch at the ranch. Thirty minutes after it moves in, the telephone goes out. Operations like winter shearing are called off. The ground is too wet to feed on but too dry to miss a feed run.

The other night during the wet spell on the highway between Mertzson and Barnhart, police calls flashed out warnings of icy spots and reported at least one accident. The young deputies radioed back and fourth how slick the track was on bridges. Too bad the Texaco station was closed in Barhart. The long-time owner and operator of that concern could have set them straight on the difference between "ice" and "coagulated fog," plus giving them a short course on the right time to kill the double six in any class of domino game.

April seem so far away as we listen to the old cows bawling and watch the woolies sprint for the feed troughs. Be just our luck to find out these special fog banks hurt more than they help.