

Ranch Wives Supply Ample Advice On Men's Winter Work Schedule

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MERTZON — No other industry gets as much advice as the ranching and farming business. County agents compete with soil conservation men to save the rangelands. The printing presses in Washington are bound to work way after dark, turning out pamphlets designed to alleviate our problems. It seems that everybody in print or on the airways wants to give us a helpful word.

Just to show how concerned about ranchmen these advisors are, one of them wrote last week that a good winter job was to clean the brush and trees from fence rows. Don't ask me how he figured that one out. Why, a man could have interviewed 95 percent of the ranchers from the Rio Grande to the upper reaches of Wyoming, and not one hombre would have been smart enough to have known that the winter months ought to be utilized in packing an axe or sprayer along an iced fence line.

As long as the Shortgrass County has been fenced, it looks like some of the citizens here would have known without being told that chopping and spraying are good winter time chores. But that's characteristic of the ranch populace. From November to whenever spring hits, they go tearing around in pickups, pouring high priced feed on the frozen ground. They flat ignore such sage advice as that concerning winter improvement of their fence lines.

Overlooking opportunities to clean up their fences is probably one of the main reasons why the stock raising fraternity is always staring off into a bottomless pit while their shirt tails are smoldering from a recent financial wreck.

In this marvelous age, a man must plan his work. Any idiot can see that going around brooding over high priced borrowed money and weak livestock markets is as useless as giving a lecture on etiquette in a New York subway. It's no wonder the ranching game is sick.

The wives out here are good hands at seeing what needs to be done. They can't be accused of failing to find plenty of wintertime work. It's part of the usual domestic scene to hear that Mrs. So-and-So has put her husband to flight because he neglected to saw any fireplace wood and nobody pays any mind to reports that Mrs. Such-and-Such has thrown a broom-swinging fit because her old man took off on an important hunting trip without finding time, before he left, to fix the water pump at the house.

No, the mother Shortgrassers can't be blamed for ever missing one winter task. Well-meaning agricultural writers are wasting their ink any time they attempt to point out something to our female taskmasters.

1969 is too new to predict what's going to befall us dryland herders. But I can tell you one thing: the scribes and agents are going to be in there pitching, helping us every way they can. And if it works like it always has before, the ranchers will just go on facing their ever growing struggles as if the word "planning" wasn't in the dictionary.

There's no telling how bad the fence rows will be grown up by this time next winter.