

OCTOBER 21, 1982

Lambs or calves that have been fresh weaned this fall are going to gain more experience than weight. Our autumn grass is weak and dry. The old ewes and the mother cows look like it'll take a year for them to recover from the past three months of drouth.

The weather change had me fooled. I've been going around telling the men I work with that we were going to do so-and-so I just as soon as the cows recovered from calf weaning. We shipped our calves in late August. Normally September is a great month to heal a bunch of old sisters up from a long siege of motherhood.

Well, all that telling should have been replaced by some looking. I was so preoccupied with the market that I forgot about the grass. I wasn't looking at the pastures, I was inking out my own personal economic recovery act.

So while I was fretting about the market failures, our grass supply was falling even faster than a telex machine could calculate. By the time I got around to working the older cattle, I was hoping a gate would slam shut on me hard enough to kill the pain.

Herders, as you may have learned, are only right for one day on each deal. The way things change in 24 hours, the glands that fuel a cowman's ego stay overworked. As long as I've been around the great game of woolies and hollow horns, I never have decided whether we kept our business dealings secret because we wanted the privacy, we were ashamed of most of them, or were afraid we'd be the cause of some weak hearted soul going into shock upon hearing the report.

I no longer try to cover up my mistakes. After I dropped being in a partneship, I found out that covering my trail was taking more time than making a trail. About four out of every 69 trades turned out decent. When anyone asked me how our calves did, or how much our lambs weighed, I often told them the truth.

Profound thinkers like Abigail Van Buren and her sister claim in their columns that folks aren't perfect. I only disagree to the extent of saying that cow and sheep herders are the exception in that we are perfect, but have to live under imperfect circumstances. Until I lost my notebook, I kept count in 1974 of all the cowboys that knew beforehand of the big market wreck of 73. I wish I was able to tell you how many of our colleagues anticipated that awful drop. The fascinating thing about it was that every one of these brilliant hombres was wearing hats and boots of about the same age as were worn by those of us who'd been caught unaware of the disaster.

Frost is going to be a big jolt to the rangelands. However, the market does have a better tone on both sheep and cattle. I may hold on a few weeks more. Volcanoes, I've read, are changing the weather. Though it's a long shot, the seasons may switch and we may all be in for a big surprise.