Livestock Management

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The management of livestock is a very large and difficult subject. A person could spend four years in college and most of a lifetime studying this segment of ranching alone. What is livestock or cow management? It is simply living with your cattle.

One cannot divorce ranch or range management from livestock management. Experience gained from living with cattle and listening to successful ranchers gives us an insight into what a complicated business is this one we call livestock management.

Economic Aspects. — Take a look at the cow and what she can do. Let's say she is worth $100.00. Ten cows represent $1,000.00—or 100 cows represent $10,000.00. A cow should produce nine calves in her lifetime. At $100.00 each for the calves, a $100.00 cow should gross $900.00. Multiply this by ten cows and you get $9,000.00. Therefore, the life expectancy of 100 cows should represent $90,000.00 income. If each one of these 100 cows misses just one calf during her life it will cost the rancher $10,000.00 of the $90,000.00 expected return. With these facts in mind it is easy to see why it is necessary for a cow to produce a calf each year.

Range Distribution. — No matter where you ranch, range distribution is a concern of the rancher. One system is to have wild cattle. They really use the range way back from water. Needless to say, this is an extremely poor system. Wild cattle reach a maximum sale weight (if you ever get them to the scales) of 600 to 700 lb. From gentler cattle, feeder cows can be marketed at 800 to 900 lb. and some even up to 1,000 lb. or more.

Range distribution is attained basically from water development and fencing. In addition to water and fencing, salting and supplemental feeding point cattle in a desired direction away from water and help in better distribution.

Distribution should include bulls as well as cows. Bulls sometimes tend to bunch up. If two bulls are running together, one bull is wasted. Keep the bulls scattered.

Expected return cannot be achieved unless cows are bred. If a cow is in heat find her a bull. This cannot be done without riding. You must keep riding! If you accomplish nothing else, the cattle see you occasionally and it all helps to keep them gentle.

Breeding Systems — There Are Two.—On flat or rolling country, seasonal breeding systems can be employed. All the bulls are placed in the cow herd and removed on certain dates. In this system calves come and are marketed in a more uniform package.

In rough country, year-long breeding systems have to be employed, as bulls are hard to locate and keep where you want them. Calving time and calving percentages are dependent on rains and feed the previous year. Yearlings produced as a result of this breeding system lack uniformity and are difficult to market. A real problem arises for the rancher employing this system. You can't talk about year-long breeding systems without marketing cattle three ways.

In marketing, again two systems are used. In gentle country heifers are weaned, individually weighed, numbered, and are put on a supplement—usually a 3 to 1 booster. They are kept in a pasture to themselves. In September these heifers are individually weighed and selection of replacements is made. If the heifer is average in appearance, but above average in weight gained, she is usually kept. If she is an average heifer, but below average in weight, she goes in the sale bunch. These

FIG. 1. Cows on "School Section", Empire Ranch, southern Arizona.

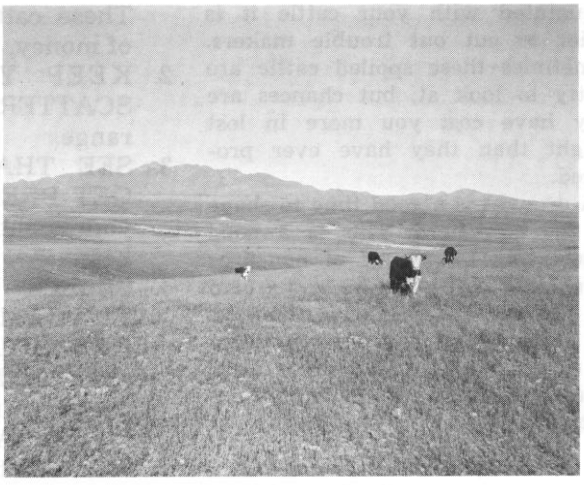

FIG. 2. Cattle on Upper Hilton, Empire Ranch, southern Arizona.

replacement heifers are not bred until April when they are two years old. Just because a heifer or bull is selected for replacement as a yearling, by no means has he or she a permanent position. They have to produce and grow out to be kept.

In rough country heifers are selected from the area where they are raised. This type of selection eliminates a distribution problem. After each day's gathering the best heifers are corraled, their tails are bobbed, and they are allowed to remain as replacements. Needless to say, there is no control over when they breed or calve.

Supplemental Feeding.—More and more, supplemental feeding is becoming an important phase of cow management. A 50 lb. heavier calf can be marketed if he and his mother have been fed. Also, first-calf heifers breed back and have a calf the following year.

Several ranchers have justified the additional cost of supplemental feeding of from $8.00 to $15.00 per head because they marketed 50 to 75 lb. heavier calves and yearlings.

Physical Management. — Another important feature in cattle management is actual working or handling of the cattle. Branding should be done when the calf is young. Catch corrals can be built over the range and if a calf is old enough to get to the corral, it is old enough to be branded. It doesn't seem to hurt a younger calf as much to be branded, castrated and dehorned as it does an older calf—and they don't bleed as much. Keep the rope on your saddle; use it only when necessary. It usually takes a cow a year to recover a roping and jerking down.

Another thing that falls under the heading of working cattle is gathering and shipping. It can't be emphasized enough that this should be done easily and quietly. More money is lost from the range to the scales than at any other time. This loss can depend on what you are selling. If calves are sold in the fall, the cows usually are with them right up to the scales, therefore keeping them quieter. During spring or fall yearling sales, the animals are usually cut off to themselves. Yearlings sometimes resemble dynamite. Any little thing will make them explode. It doesn't take very long to lose a lot of money when a bunch of yearlings run.

Several methods may be used to cut this loss. Tranquilizers have been successful. Sometimes the tranquilizers should be given to the cowboys and not the cattle, however.

As yearlings are gathered a range booster loaded with tranquilizers is effective. It really helps. When we are sorting the cattle for sale there are none that try to climb the fences. Generally all you need to do to turn one back is to step in front of it.

Money can be made on shipping day simply by the way cattle are handled. When moving cattle from one corral to another, don't crowd them. Use small wings so that you don't have to bring them by a gate several times before they go through. Every time a yearling circles a corral on the way to the scales it will cost five cents. If you are selling 100 yearlings, you can figure they cost you $5.00 every time the whole bunch circles the corral.

Another tool for marketing heavier cattle is spraying. There are several ways to relieve the irritation to cattle caused by flies, lice, ticks and other parasites and cow worriers. If a cow is fighting flies and feeding a hat-full of lice or ticks, she isn't gaining the weight she could. Each type of country requires a different approach to this problem. Where the cattle are easily gathered probably two or three sprayings during the insect season will more than pay for the cost. In rougher country this is almost impossible. Any time cattle are in a corral you can treat them and bob their tails. It just makes common sense that if a cow and calf are resting easily, not annoyed by insects and parasites, they will do a much better job for you.

Culling. — Culling is a very important feature in management of the cow herd. Culling may be done by age limits. A cow over 10 years cannot do a good job in most areas. A bull over 8 years of age is on his way down. With a few exceptions these cattle should be sold. The fall is the best time to do this. The old cows probably have a weanable calf and are in pretty good shape themselves. Also, you know how much feed you have to go into the winter on and can figure how deep to cut cow numbers. By riding and being

acquainted with your cattle it is easier to cut out trouble makers. Sometimes these spoiled cattle are pretty to look at, but chances are they have cost you more in lost weight than they have ever produced.

A drought is a good time to shape up the cow herd. This is a good opportunity to get rid of non-producers, and cattle that haven't grown out the way you expected them to. It's better to cut from the top down; in other words, older cows first. Younger ones can stand hard times a little better.

Summary

In summary, all these items are important in handling and management of cows.

1. HANDLE WITH CARE: These cattle represent a lot of money, both now and later.
2. KEEP YOUR CATTLE SCATTERED: Use all of your range.
3. SEE THAT YOUR COWS GET BRED: Make sure that your cow brings a calf to market.
4. SELECT YOUR BEST REPLACEMENT HEIFERS AND BULLS: In any herd some cattle are better than average, and some are below average. Any time you keep over one-third of your calf crop for replacements (bulls and heifers) you are slowing down the progress and improvement of your herd.
5. SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING PAYS OFF: Both increased weights and improved calf crop result.
6. LIVING WITH YOUR CATTLE: Taking a page out of Morrison Standards of Feeds and Feeding—"The eye of the Master fattens his cattle." Let's revise it slightly to "The eye of the master gets his cattle to market."
7. CULLING YOUR HERD: Cut your cow herd to fit your grass. Get rid of old cows and bulls, non-producers and trouble makers. There is no room for sentiment towards an old pet cow in this day and age.