

# Winter Range and Livestock Wintering Practices on the Northern Great Plains

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My brothers and myself own and operate the Jahnke Bros. Ranch at Log Valley, about 90 miles west and north of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Our outfit, brand FY left shoulder, totals 70,000 acres, of which 3,360 acres are deeded. Located along the south bank of the South Saskatchewan River, the country is rolling uplands at about 2,300 feet, with steep draws and coulees dropping about 700 feet in 2½ miles to the river.

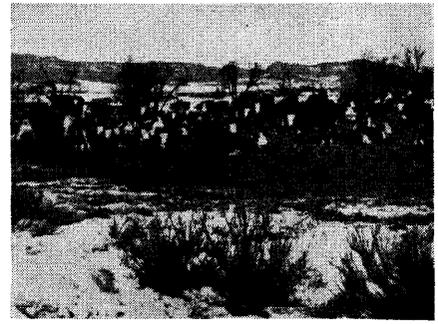
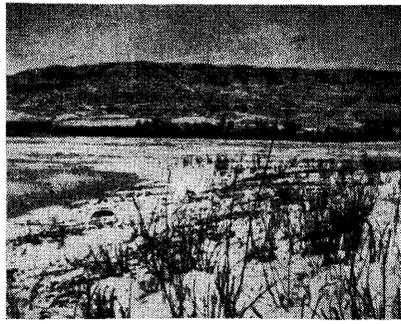
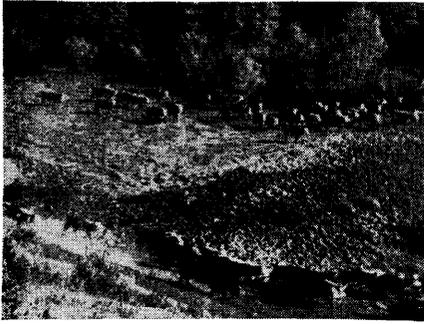
Our range, at the northern edge of the Great Plains, is Mixed Prai-

*Ben Jahnke's dad was born in Manitoba and came to Saskatchewan in 1903 to homestead on 160 acres. Ben and his brothers Pete, Elmer and Bruce grew up on the ranch, and each bought a share of the ranch in 1936. In 1952, Ben, Elmer and Pete formed the Jahnke Bros. Ranch, after the death of their father. Ben at one time was well known on the Canadian rodeo circuit as a calf-roper. He is married and has two children, a boy and a girl. He is President of the Saskatchewan Stockgrowers' Association, and has been a director for eight years.*

rie with needle-and-thread, blue-joint, blue grama and Junegrass being the common grasses. About 25,000 acres, mostly river breaks with good shelter and browse are used for winter range. Besides grass we have various bushes which are eaten by the cattle. These are high in protein and minerals and make good winter feed. We have chokecherry which the cattle use quite readily, pasture sage which grows thickly on the flats, and poplar tree leaves which are picked off the ground after the trees have shed their leaves. We think young willows are our best browse. Cattle eat willow leaves and shoots readily and do well on them.

## Our Feeding Program

We feed what is considered good for this country. To provide hay we cut about 175 tons of upland grass hay. Cutting every third



Winter range conditions on the Jahnke Brothers Ranch on the South Saskatchewan River. (Left) Cattle on winter range showing poplars. (Center) Trees along the South Saskatchewan provide shelter. (Right) Bedding ground and brush shelter.

year, we get a yield of about  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton per acre. In addition we cut about 65 tons of slough hay, 40 tons of crested wheatgrass hay and 70 tons of brome and alfalfa hay every year. In a winter like the last when we began feeding in November, we may use up to 1,000 tons of hay, but in most winters 350 tons are enough. We grow grain on 1,000 acres of cropland, mostly oats and barley. In addition we buy some grain, usually wheat.

#### Winter Range

We baby our winter range, never using it too heavy, as it is the most important part of our range. No stock are grazed on it from mid-May to mid-October. In November the calves are weaned averaging 345 pounds from our 600-650 cows. An average calf crop will run 92 percent. After weaning, the calves are run out during the day, and then fed 5 to 6 pounds of grain in the evening, two parts oats to one part wheat, coarse ground. They are fed near water and given a

good warm bed. The average number of days they are fed like this depends on the season, but this program is followed until the grass is green, approximately 150 to 160 days. Calves wintered in this manner will gain weight.

We select heifer replacements in the spring and feed the remainder for baby beef, or short feed them. The yearling steers are treated the same way as the calves, only fed six to seven pounds of grain, with barley instead of wheat, because barley is cheaper than wheat. After wintering they go out to grass, this time to be finished and sold. This usually takes till September. The reason for this is that by September the grass is cured, and this means the fat has a better color and the shrink is less.

#### Good Management Pays Off

Last September I sold 200 head of two-year-olds, the top-cut at this time. These steers were loaded at the stockyards at Teakle and weighed off-car, twelve hours later

at Moose Jaw averaging 1,088 pounds, at 18 cents a pound. Reloaded and shipped some five hundred miles to Winnipeg the average shrink off-car was 62 pounds. They graded 147 U. S. Choice, 42 U. S. Good, 11 Commercial, and dressed 53.4 percent. We figure on a loss of  $21\frac{1}{2}$  percent to waterbelly (urinary calculi) in the first winter, and an additional 1 percent loss of two-year-olds.

Our cow herd rustles out all winter, feeding on cured grass, and browse. They graze out as long as possible and we seldom have to feed for more than three or four weeks. When feeding is necessary, they receive the oldest and poorest feed on hand. On the average the loss is very small, over a period of years being less than two percent. We keep abundant feed on hand for winters like last winter and most people had to feed 100 to 120 days.

**Robert W. Lodge, Dominion Experimental Station, Swift Current, Saskatchewan, helped in the preparation of this article.**

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