

The Future of the Range Livestock Industry¹

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A couple of weeks ago in Phoenix, more than 2,000 stockmen had a chance to learn a great deal more about the American Society of Range Management from your able President, Danny Freeman. Danny was one of the featured speakers on the 60th Anniversary convention of the American National Cattlemen's Association. And I can tell you all most sincerely that Danny made a great many new friends for himself and for the Society.

So today, I do not feel among strangers at all. In fact, I recognize many ranchers and soil technicians I've known for years. And in that fact alone, I believe, lies the greatest strength of the range management society—this close and sincere cooperation between practical and theoretical approaches to our common problems.

There is, and can be, no difference in the objectives of range scientists and of ranchers for better forage for their cattle. The only difference might be in the application of research results or in the search for practical versus theoretical answers.

First, let us establish that few, if any, of us here can do anything about the biggest problems that face the cattle and beef industry. Such things as drought, the philosophy of supports and controls, and the very nature of an industry which has millions of producing units—all run by men who make their own decisions.

Actually, if we could solve the problems of rainfall, we might not



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have to worry so much about everything else!

But the rainmakers—those of witchcraft or of silver iodide—haven't been able to do too much good, so we'll just have to work harder to make range management, cattle production, feeding and marketing more efficient all along the line.

Revolution or Evolution

There has been a lot of talk about various types of grasses, feed rations, or bulls which will "revolutionize" the production of beef. Now, gentlemen, let's quit talking *REVOLUTION* and talk about *PRACTICAL EVOLUTION*. You and I know that much of the resistance of which ranchers are accused is caused because so many scientists or promoters have talked "revolution". But the revolution usually doesn't show up. You can holler "wolf" just so long. . . .

So let's be logical in our approach to the overall problem, and let's be cautious that our enthusiasm doesn't carry us into a blind alley.

I don't believe that any rancher can sit down and quickly list all of the things that need to be done to give us better range production or to develop better management practices. I think the very fact that so many suggestions are available, or so many new ones pop up, demonstrates that a common meeting like this can stimulate much constructive thought and work.

Drought has certainly focused most of our attention on water—or lack of it. What more can we do to develop more water resources or to conserve what we have so that drought won't bother us so much? Perhaps it isn't in our field to look so far into the future, but what can we do in the areas of atomic or solar power for pumping, purifying or transporting water to where it is needed.

Have we done all the research on reseedling, have we hit upon the best answer for brush clearance or burning, and have we found any good ways to make some feeds palatable when they are "out-of-season"?

What do we know about the cow's innards—even though they're building windows so we can see inside? Is there any way we can lessen the bloat danger so that we can take more advantage of all kinds of grass mixes? And how about poisonous weeds?

Much of the research I have been talking about is certainly in the field of the practical, as well as in the realm of the theoretical. Cattlemen might be considered inconsistent in insisting on practical study while still urging theoretical study.

This is not conflicting, actually, because we have to keep an eye on the future while solving some of the ways we can meet present hard times and stay ahead of competition. I'll admit that this is a comparatively recent realization on the part of the cattle industry.

¹ Paper presented at the Tenth Annual meeting of the American Society of Range Management, Great Falls, Montana, January 30, 1957.

Poor Research Salesmen

The excuses that there is not enough research are usually laid to lack of funds and lack of encouragement and interest from industry. A lot of this is the fault of the industry indeed. But I doubt if any one in research or the Halls of Congress, for that matter, has failed to observe the increased attention which the cattle and beef industry is paying to research. I am confident that this interest is sincere and sustaining.

But I would like to make a point of one thing: a lot of the fault behind the lack of earlier interest from industry must be laid at the feet of scientists and administrators of research units themselves.

I think they have been poor salesmen. I believe that they have forgotten, or never understood, that "evolution" is understandable and acceptable to a stockman, where "revolution" is not. The cowman has seen the seasons come and go, he knows much of birth and death, and he has seen little "revolution" in the ageless grandeur of his environment.

I believe that science has badly neglected its development of "public relations" in gaining the support of stockmen for projects, facilities and general activities.

On the one hand, research findings are carefully "sat on" until duplicating study is made. On the other, wild cries of "revolution" accompany publication of research results. It is hard for the stockman to know whether he is supporting "duplication", "revolution", or some worthwhile activity.

It used to be considered excellent if research findings were generally applied within 20 years. Recent events have proven that stockmen are closing up that time lag—not overnight, but gradually. And more and more stockmen are advancing ahead of the scientists in research ranch and feedlot laboratories.

All over the nation, stockmen are demonstrating that they are willing to work for new research grants, to give wholehearted support to projects of *understandable* benefit, and to undertake on their own and through their associations many activities which will help scientists do a better job. The findings of the American National Cattlemen's Association's research committee are important. The support of state and national organizations for increased legislative appropriations can be cited as further examples. Each one of you know incidents where the "stockman's plug" has helped you—and if you do not know of such incidents, I would wager that something is haywire with your public relations.

The challenge is equal to both stockman and scientist. The responsibility must be shared. But I believe that an unusual challenge is presented directly to the scientists. They must develop better salesmanship. And they must remember that many of their salaries are paid by many "bosses"—and you can't get a raise anywhere without first convincing the boss that you merit his loyalty and support.

Future Is Bright

The cattleman is willing and able to get behind any worthwhile activity—and he is ready to be convinced that "science needs a raise!"

I know my title was "The Future of the Range Livestock Industry", and I know that I have deviated from that somewhat. But I think there is little question that the "future" for range livestock production is limited only by the boundaries of man's enthusiasm and imagination.

There is nothing ahead, barring serious continuation of the drouth and a major economic depression, which should limit the cattleman. Our cattle numbers, I am confident,

will show little change from last year when the estimates are released next month. In fact, the heavy slaughter of she-stuff during the year and particularly in the latter months of 1956 may well leave us with fewer producing units. Certainly our numbers will be comparatively high for such a precarious season as we face this spring and summer, unless the rains come. But we have halted the wild annual increases, we have begun to balance supply with demand and we have begun to make real progress in achieving efficiency at all levels of the industry.

I speak with optimism for the future with only two or three major qualifications. The drought and depression danger I've already mentioned. Another factor is that everyone in the cattle and beef industry must work at utmost efficiency and economy so that some of the inequities or flaws in our system of production, finishing, marketing, processing and retailing will be worked out.

But a major factor in our future is in how well the stockman can withstand the "get-rich-quick" seduction of those who would solve every problem by legislation. If we accept price supports and controls, for instance, we would be in great danger of forfeiting the promise of the future—and still have to pay the bill for this kind of help for generations to come.

Many problems will face us in each year of the future, some to be solved easily with the passage of time or conditions, and some to be the same as those our forefathers faced, as we face them today.

But it is through the cooperative spirit developed through meetings such as this, and through others to be held in the future, which will provide us with the practical answers for making our range lands flourish and provide abundantly through all the years—drought or no drought.