Ranching with the Drought

HARRY ZAVISCH, Calliham Route, Tilden, Texas.

Ten years ago my ranch, which is near Tilden in McMullen County, was lush and green with an abundance of grass. I was using my fields as supplemental grazing, while deferring my pastures. But with three years of decreasing rainfall and five years of drought there was no supplemental grazing and little or no grass left. I tried

Harry Zavisch, with a family background of ranching extending back to colonial times, began his ranching career in 1932 with a few head of cattle and the down payment on 220 acres of land near Tilden, Texas. Over the years the ranch has been enlarged and improved, and now occupies 2,291 acres. In this article Harry tells how a program of range improvement based on brush control and reseeding helped him to survive the drought.

“My personal interests are my family and my ranch,” he says. Harry is married and has two sons. In 1956 he was selected as the outstanding farmer-rancher in the Dos Rios Soil Conservation District, and he was awarded a bronze plaque by the Lions Clubs of Tilden and Cotulla.

to protect my range by reducing my herd. But the drought was always ahead of me, and I was still overstocked. In fact, at times one cow would have overstocked my ranch.

I realized that in order to stay in the ranching business I would have to acquire more acreage or increase the productivity of my present holdings. There was no land available; therefore, I began to investigate all tried methods of brush control and range improvement.

Root Plowing

During my term as supervisor of the Dos Rios Soil Conservation Dis-

Part of the Zavisch herd grazing blue panic grass on land that was root plowed and seeded in April and May of 1957. This picture was taken on July 11, 1957, by Carroll Joe Nichols.
Harry Zavisch examining seed on blue panic grass planted on root plowed land in August of 1956. The photo was taken in July, 1957, by Carroll Joe Nichols, Tilden, Texas.

At least two pastures will be deferred each year, while using fields for supplemental grazing. Grazing on all pastures will be managed so as to leave enough stubble for the grass to recover quickly and for soil protection.

Root plowing followed by deferment pays off in an abundance of grass even during subnormal rainfall.

Conservation practices and good range management are essential to the future of the ranching industry in south Texas. Through these practices I have been able to stop erosion, control excessive runoff of rainfall, and obtain a good grass cover. Due to these improvements I will be able to more than double my herd by this fall.

Fence It Cheaper and Easier with—
The Suspension Fence

THOMAS HALFF, Chairman, Frio Soil Conservation Service District, Pearsall, Texas.

Ever since the day that "Bet-A-Million" Gates corralled a herd of longhorns in a barb wire pen in the middle of Alamo Plaza in San Antonio, the barb wire fence has been a part of the ranching business. Until fairly recently however, it has not been a tool for range management, rather it has been a tool strictly for cattle control. Now, with a better understanding of the value of rotation grazing and deferment among ranchers, the barb wire fence is truly coming into its own as an instrument of range management.

When fencing starts, it doesn't take long for the bills to pile up. Wire is expensive and becoming more so, and labor is even more expensive. Even when you can cut your own posts, as we can in South Texas, the cost is not low. Any way you look at it, fencing is not cheap.

About five years ago, on a visit to the Lasater Ranch near Falfurrias, Texas, Tom Lasater showed me his solution to the fencing problem. With very slight changes, I have successfully used his method of fence building for five years now. Suspension fence, as it is called, costs about half of what regular fence costs, and it will hold cattle just as well or a little better than regular fence. The first suspension fence that I built was around my bull trap. In the five years that it has been in use, only one bull has ever gotten out, and the total time spent on repairs falls short of an hour.

In building suspension fence, as with any fence, the corners are the key to a good fence. After trying...