A Rangeland Parable

Steve Nelle

(This is a fictional anology that tells an old story in a slightly different way.)

Three masters each had a worker doing labor for them. The first master worked his worker continuously, day and night, giving him little or no rest and inadequate food. Since the worker was overworked and underfed, he soon began to work off of his limited fat reserve. The worker lived and worked off of these reserves for a short while until they were used up. As the master continued to work him, he became weaker and weaker until the worker finally collapsed. The master tried to work him still more until the worker soon died.

The second master likewise overworked and underfed his worker until he too had to work on his limited fat reserve. As this worker became too weak to work he also collapsed. But the master had pity on the worker and allowed him to rest and eat. After a prolonged recovery period the worker eventually regained enough strength to begin work again. He was, however, still in a weakened condition and was not able to perform to his potential.

The third master worked his worker hard each day from sunup until sundown. This master fed the worker well, gave him breaks and allowed him to rest at night. This master got many years of dependable service from the worker who remained strong and healthy all of his life.

The first master allowed a once-productive worker to die by over-working him. The worker would have given him years more work if the master had given him an occasional chance to rest.

The second master, even though he spared the life of his worker, lost much productive work from him, and impaired his ability for future work.

The third master sacrificed a small amount of initial production by allowing his worker to rest. This short-term sacrifice was, however, far outweighed by the long-term productivity the master got from his worker over long years.

So take heed, you masters of the range. Take care of the hardest worker on your ranch, your grassland, and it will serve you faithfully forever.—Steve Nelle, Laredo, Texas