

Simply Awful

Drought comes in two forms- bad and worse. For most involved in the cattle business, the drought that overtook 2011 to 2013 was devastating. Cattle numbers dropped significantly, prices of beef shot through the roof and pastures blew away. Nonetheless, this drought was not the first and is one of many to come.

“You know we live on the northern edge of the great Chihuahuan Desert, and so I guess drought is our middle name at least,” chuckled J.P. Senter, a longtime cattleman and 1959 graduate of Texas Tech University.

Senter has been involved with cattle since he was knee high to a grasshopper. From the drought of 1952 to the one in 2011, Senter said there have been ups and many downs, but one thing remained. Regardless of whether he encountered good or challenging times, Senter has always kept his “quasi-J.P.-economics” close to his heart to remind himself that the good will always outweigh the bad.

“When your outflow exceeds your income, your upkeep will be your downfall,” Senter said with a smile.

Senter had made it this far by loving what he did and kept a positive outlook even through out negative situations.

It all began in 1952 during the worst cattle year to date. Many things occurred that year that made for tough times for Senter and his family to make ends meet.

Senter ran up and down the highways of Texas from Waco to Fort Worth and Waxahachie to Grandburry, Texas. He travelled many miles trading off trailers, hauling cattle and stopping by the local sale barns for a cup of coffee while looking through sale pens.

Throughout the early 1950s, Senter and his father suffered two of the most challenging times they had ever faced before. In the fall of 1952, Senter and his family were only able to harvest five bales of cotton.

“Now that’s not saying we harvested five bales of cotter per acre. That would be unheard of. We

harvested five bales- total. That’s not just a whole lot cotton to live off of,” Senter said.

All the while, their cattle began to suffer from Brucellosis. Although Brucellosis is not related to weather patterns, it seemed to add to the struggle of the drought.

The drought in 1952 didn’t last quite as long as the most recent drought, many herds suffered from the terrible Brucellosis disease long after the drought had ended, which impacted cattle numbers even more.

It didn’t take long for the government to realize that there was a problem. Cattle numbers had dropped significantly due to the drought and Brucellosis. However, the only thing the government could do to help ranchers was establish funding and treatment for Brucellosis.

After the time of eradication of Brucellosis, the drought had ended and many people bought back into the cattle.

“Just as it seemed safe to buy cattle again, this part of the world trended right back into a drought. Just as soon as you think you can beat the weather man, Mother Nature always proves to win,” Senter said.

Once the drought of 1952 had ended, many cattlemen began to feel comfortable that the rain was coming, including Senter. It wasn’t long before Senter jumped right back into the game. He could only pedal trailers for so long until a herd of first-calf heifers that “had a touch of Holstein in ‘em” that were imposible to turn down.

Throughout all of the hardships Senter faced throughout the many years, his sense of humor, his positive attitude and his philosophical reasoning has yet to leave his side.

As Senter poured one more small glass of Crown Royal, he held up the cup as if making a toast, and said, “After this, it’s goodnight for J.P., but always remember, after I’m long gone, there is a grand but subtle difference between awfully simple and simply awful.”



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