



April 19, 2024 (Day of the Colonial Militia)

#2

Cattle in the McCroskey Township

Gary Thomas was a life-long farmer of the land along DeSmet Road. Many of the now existing residential addresses were once empty land worked by him and his sons. He worked the 80-acre parcel from which I bought my current homesteading portions over 25 years ago.

He told me once that he never lost money raising cattle, but he never made money growing crops. The bank would lend him money, year-after-unprofitable year, to raise more wheat, but it would never lend him money to raise cattle.

It didn't seem to make sense. But bankers see a different picture. If the local grain elevator, seed company, fertilizer company, etc. are borrowers too, they need the business from the farmers to make their payments to the bank, for sums which far exceed the debts of the farmers. Do the math. Bankers are in the business of banking for a profit, whichever way it comes.

Do I make money raising cattle? Nope. But I don't have to pay retail prices for steaks and hamburgers. I have food security. Local farmers sell hay that is priced fair. So, I'm breaking even.

Sheep in the McCroskey Township

The land is not as fertile as it was fifty years ago when Thomas was raising crops. Without expensive fertilizer inputs, cropland production is not profitable.

The soil needs to be renovated by the presence of ruminants: sheep and cattle. Sheep are better at renovating pastures than cattle, but they don't like the tall stuff. The cattle will eat what the sheep don't like.

I think to make crop production profitable again one or two decades of dolomite and borated lime is necessary to raise the *ph* and release lost trace minerals. Acidic soil locks up the nutrients, which requires the compensation of more expensive fertilizer to grow crops.

Predators & Spring Lambs

Sheep don't protect themselves. For thousands of years, they were creatures gentle enough for even children to manage. But the watchful care of the shepherd was needed.

Here in our township, the least sign of weakness of a newborn lamb will invite the swoop of the eagle, hawk or owl. Crows are a menace, gouging the eyes of a newborn lamb if it doesn't get up soon after birth.

Dog packs are more of a danger than wolves or coyotes. A harmless family pet regresses to its primal state if it runs with a pack of dogs. Excursions of such packs from the local villages are rare, but unnerving when they occur.

Fencing

Moose, elk, and deer do not respect fences. Every year, fence lines must be walked and repaired. Even then, a wind storm can blow down a tree which destroys a section.

For many years, Benewah County was surrounded by open-range counties.

Why? Jack Buell was County Commissioner for decades. He wanted the world safe for his logging trucks. He didn't want the liability of his heavy-peddled drivers running over someone's cow. So he passed a county ordinance that made Benewah County closed-range: cattlemen must fence their livestock in.

The speed limit on DeSmet Road is 35 mph. Locals are careful; drivers from elsewhere are not. DeSmet Road is used as a short-cut for a lot of Washington-bound travelers. They are usually in a hurry. Truckers will often use it by-pass the scales. Sometimes, I like our bumpy roads. It slows people down.

Wildfires and Insurance

Several years ago, lightning started a fire in the forest to our north, on timber land now owned by Haeg Farms.

Luckily, it was in the daytime and we saw the strike. With the help of friends and neighbors, we were able to contain it within the first hour. Local firefighters arrived to put it out and took the credit, of course. But our diligence and early response prevented the burn from destroying more than an acre.

The McCroskey Agrarian
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This year, I had a hard time insuring my mother's cottage at the back of the property. A dozen companies turned us down because of the risk of wildfire. If you think that what happens in California, stays in California, think again.

Because eco-fanatics and PG&E have neglected good forestry management, brush fires have been the result with devastating losses. State Farm Insurance alone has canceled 72,000 California policies in 2023.

We finally got a carrier, but even though the house is 50 feet from the treeline, many turned us down.

If you missed the first issue of this newsletter, you can find it at the website: savebenewahcounty.com

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Next issue: Gardening for 2024, Stories missed by the Gazette, and the State Legislature fiasco.

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