

## LIVESTOCK REDUCTION--IS IT NECESSARY?

By O. Lomavitu

### Analysis of The Situation

A number of people from various villages have asked that I assist them in understanding why the government is reducing their livestock, and it is in response to such request that I take this privilege in presenting some of the major factors before our tribe in the hope that I may be able to clarify the situation. I own no livestock nor am I employed by the government.

In order that we may understand the situation we must go back to the root of the matter and follow it to the end, for without understanding we will not be able to cooperate and our efforts will be fruitless.

Many of us will recall that only thirty years ago, even up to less than that time, our land was dense with vegetation such as (in Hopi) ahkawu, attosi, wuhsi, lehu, kwahkwi, nono, and countless other plants which are now rare, and which are now almost extinct in our areas. Deep washes and gullies were few and miles upon miles of flat lands yielded sustenance because the lands were inundated annually by the muddy waters coming from the north. Today those same lands, or what is left of them, witness to the necessity of reduction of livestock.

No longer do we pass through fields of (in Hopi) ahkawu, sweet-scented attosi, and other shrubs where beautiful birds such as (in Hopi) tawamanawu, qoqopi, and sikats'i sang and played; our moccasins are no longer covered with pollen from these bushes for (in Hopi) atsivosi, maovi, kawitna, and other inedible plants have supplanted them.

Furthermore, gentle universal showers have given way to "tsomiyoyangwu" or local "bunches" rains. The land which once sustained our people lies in agony from open wounds which defy healing, and we are forced to scatter over sand dunes in search of moisture in the hope of bringing to maturity an ear of corn so that our children may eat. Is not this so? It is all too evident that we need not dwell longer on this sad spectacle.

Those of you who rove over our land know the terrible sight of barren lands, and we all know the sickening sight of caving embankments along the washes and arroyas while the roaring waters become thicker with our precious earth. Gullies deepen with each rainfall and we look on in silence and helplessness.

What then? Obviously something must be done to check this wastage; something must be done in order that we may not be left stranded in the mirage of our unplanned ambitions.

#### Ways of Nature.

Let us first consider how nature works.

Rain and wind are both beneficial and destructive. Rain, when rightly applied, results in fruition which make our hearts glad. On the other hand, when it is misapplied it may result in irreparable loss. This is true of the wind also. Let us then see how these two forces work.

Rain is falling gently and all is quiet. We hear the musical notes of rain drops among brushes and grasses. Though it has been raining now a whole day, no streams appear and we hear our fathers saying, "This is a fruitful rain." In spring the south winds which our elders call "palasmawu" (literally, melting breeze) melt thick snow and we hear the streams gurgling down the mesa walls and slopes only to be lost in the plains below. With the coming of warm weather grasses shoot forth and our land is dressed in beautiful green. In happy anticipation we sink our planting sticks into mother earth, and in due time our children are happy with the first fruits of our labor. Remember those days?

Today what do we see? The same gentle shower (more often the "bunched rain") falls and immediately little streams appear which join to become rivulets, then roaring washes or rivers which run past our home carrying away acres and acres of our choice earth.

The difference is this: the first rain fell on land covered with vegetation. The surface of the land is covered with dead leaves and is comparatively loose and therefore absorbent. The waters run down the pores and along the roots of the plants, and those which remain on top are prevented from running by dead leaves among which they form pools and eventually soak into the earth. Mother Earth is watered and made ready for production.

In the second, the gentle rains came on land void of vegetation and immediately begin to run. There are no dead leaves to impede and the ground "bare to the core" is polished and sloped so the streams run quickly, to the ruination of our land. All this is so plain that I feel somewhat foolish to dwell so long on the subject but, I want us all to see wherein our troubles lie, so with this in mind we will now consider the matter with which we are directly concerned.

#### Livestock.

Originally our people obtained cattle, sheep, and horses from the Spaniards. Through much labor and care our people succeeded in multiplying their stock so that their sons and daughters now enjoy the benefits of their labor. Cattle and sheep increased along with horses and burros. They roamed at will over wide areas extending southward to Red Lakes and beyond to the Little Colorado River, and westward to Blue Canyon and even to the north of Moencopi; to the north they grazed at Big Mountain, and as far east as Ganado. However, in course of time these animals became numerous and destructive so that, in the words of our ancients, "the land burned up", and because of this our forefathers "proscribed" them, that is they planned and arranged for their extinction. Accordingly cattle and sheep disappeared mysteriously and we were forewarned that the time will come when, should cattle and sheep over-multiply on Hopi soil, we would experience the same consequence again.

Under the guidance of Government stockmen our cattle and sheep increased rapidly and soon reached the boundaries which their predecessors enjoyed. But the Government said, "Back, back on to the area which I, in my wisdom, marked out for you," and so we find ourselves crowded in an area interspersed with unfenced fields belonging to our people, and interminable troubles ensued.

Our livestock soon ate up the feed on the plains. This done they climbed up the slopes of the mesas among rocks in search of "tupelsoho" or bunch grass which grew along the walls. All the edible grasses and bushes were nipped before they bloomed. Each year saw less vegetation because no seeds were formed to perpetuate their kind. Our stock roamed over the land in search of feed and

water cutting deep trails wherever they went. Plants were trodden down and died. Then when the winds blew they carried away the remaining twigs; at the same time they blew earth from under the sturdier plants, thus exposing their roots. The high winds wrought havoc by carrying away the fertile top soil which they left in washes and gullies to be carried down to lower basins along the Little Colorado valley. Thus incalculable tons of our source of sustenance disappeared. What was once prizeland became, in a short while, but wasteland which it will take centuries to restore to productivity. What were at first only mice trails became ugly gullies for when water ran along the tiny trails, it found a hole in the ground into which it flowed, cutting away earth little by little until it formed deep cuts.

This is the condition of our land which we must face. Nothing can be gained by wishful thinking that the depleted land will eventually adjust itself to usefulness. Such thinking without action is self-deception.

The government, seeing this, immediately undertook to study the situation in our interest, inasmuch as it is our guardian. Time and again it sent out men versed in these matters who, unbeknown to us, quietly surveyed and studied our land. It became evident that the land was insufficient to carry so many head of cattle and sheep they found on the land. Therefore, they recommended that the stock owners should make it their aim to produce quality rather than quantity; that is, they should make an effort to raise a better breed of cattle, sheep, and horses which, it was argued, would produce as much income in fewer numbers in comparison to scrubby sheep and cattle. They would require less time and handling, consume less feed and water and yet be profitable. Goats were outlawed.

Arguing thus the government stockmen proposed and insisted on introducing the "white heads" (Herefords) and "curly wool" sheep. Many of you responded and made investments in them. You are witnesses as to the truth of that argument.

But multiplying still continued unchecked and the country became poorer and poorer.

The Government then entered upon another plan: watering places must be provided in out-of-the-way places where feed was still good but, where there was no water. Again you are witnesses because many Hopis found employment in building dams and developing water seepages. With the completion of such projects a kind of breathing space was had of brief duration. Realizing your advantages some of you increased your cattle and sheep even more which is natural and good. Ambitions were on fire! It became clear that some other measures must be adopted.

A Hopi is primarily an agriculturist, a farmer if you please. For perhaps over a thousand years he has managed to wrest livelihood from the rainless land, and is today considered by many as the greatest dry farmer in the United States. Throughout centuries when game was abundant and cattle and sheep had unlimited range, our people nevertheless "majored" in agriculture which they found more stable. As our grandfathers used to say, "Cattle and sheep are but flavors to flavor our corn mush withal."

The Government knew that we are not inclined to leave our mesas and that we would continue to plant our little fields in readily accessible places; that it takes money to accrue livestock whereas it takes but a strong back, a hoe, and planting stick to produce food.

Realizing this the Government entered upon another phase of stock reduction for all this pointed to that end. At the expenditure of thousands of dollars the government dammed a number of major washes in order to divert the muddy rivers, in season of course, on to adjacent areas which were otherwise fertile but dry, and which the Hopis might cultivate. Thousands of acres were thus put under irrigation first having been fenced, plowed, and leveled. The completed projects were placed at the disposal of our people. At present but a fraction of these lands are being utilized.

In addition to this the Government built check dams, dikes, and plowed deep furrows across slopes in the hope of checking running water when rain falls. Also it gathered seeds of native plants and planted them in places where they might grow. The wash bottoms were planted to tamarisk, willow, black locust, and other earth-retaining shrubs and trees in an effort to prevent soil from being carried away. Furthermore, it sought to control destructive rodents which eat seeds.

Today we face the final phase of the plan, the actual reduction of our livestock. For a period of nine years we have sacrificed our sheep to the demands of necessity, and now it is purposed to reduce, not only sheep but cattle as well to a still smaller number. But no one need be surprised for if we believe in the wisdom and words of our forefathers, we are going through the same process of reducing our livestock to the carrying capacity of our land. In order that we may not be left standing on barren land in fear of possible tribal extinction, or, at the least, disintegration.

This is the situation, stark and real, and it is for us to face this condition squarely and unflinchingly.

Summation.

Now here is the summary of what we have said.

(A) Through right of occupancy extending over a thousand years, a Hopi has just title and claim to the land a portion of which he now occupies, and which he uses to full extent.

(B) That a Hopi is capable of raising livestock when given adequate range which, with the infiltration of Navajos onto Hopi lands, has been reduced to but a fraction of its original size and which led to ugly squabbles between these two tribes, and within the Hopi tribe itself.

(C) That a Hopi is primarily an agriculturist and has a strong tendency to live upon the mesas.

(D) That due to lack of sufficient rainfall raising of livestock becomes harmful beyond a certain point, and that in order to preserve the soil it sometimes becomes necessary to reduce livestock.

(E) That the guardian of Hopis sought to avert such a catastrophe by adopting various means of preserving the soil among which are water developments, building earth dams and reservoirs, and diversion of washes onto fertile lands but which are dry.

Thus it should be plain to us all that the matter of reduction of livestock is neither whimsical nor arbitrary, but a case of necessity arising from the

dissipation of our land which must be reclaimed and preserved for the perpetuation of our tribe. True, the carrying out of that measure is bitter and antagonizing inasmuch as each man cares for and loves his animals as he does his own children, and that such drastic measures tend to discourage progress which may lead to despair. Being a Hopi, I feel this in my own heart and my sympathies are with you all.

Within the past nine years we have made great sacrifices toward the reclamation of our wasted land, and we are all happy because large sections of our land are once more verdant. It is within reason to suppose that should we relax our efforts our land will continue to deteriorate, and that we will have nullified our nine years' sacrifice. Furthermore, we will have to live in the shadow of eventual reduction of our livestock unless some other means are found.

Here let me remind you that the law covering reduction of livestock is necessary to the existence of our nation, and that it is applicable to all the states within the union.

Someone has said that if there is more rain there would be enough feed for our cattle and sheep. Quite true but, unfortunately we have no control over rain and cannot bring it when needed. Our ancients say that rain is had only through much exercise of heart in prayer and self-judgment; and, if so, we should stop here and examine ourselves.

In conclusion may I say that perhaps had not this war intervened we might have continued receiving full consideration from our government; also that in the face of shifting conditions in our economic life and the terrible pace of adjustment to such conditions, this may not be an opportune time; but we already advanced nine years toward reclaiming our land.

These are the facts and conditions which demand our immediate attention and we should weigh them quietly and diligently for they are vital to our security and happiness. Our land is wasted and some means must be found to reclaim and preserve it. The evils are here; they are soil erosion and reduction of livestock.

\* \* \* \* \*

November 16, 1943

CC: Sup't. Ladd  
Emory Sekaquaptewa  
Roger Qotshaytewa  
Byron P. Adams