UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Region Eight
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Regional Conservator

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TENANT HERDING IN THE CUBA VALLEY

Regional Bulletin No. 37
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As it is generally understood, tenancy relates primarily to the use, under varying contractual arrangements of non-ownership, of agricultural land. In urban areas it refers principally to the renting of homes. In a range area it is concerned with the leasing of land and the renting of livestock. It is this last form of tenancy that is here called tenant herding.

In 1840 one of the early travellers (1) to this area observed and commented on the existence of a partido system, a system by which an owner of large numbers of sheep rented these sheep at a constant rent to herders who agreed to accept full responsibility and pay the entire costs of operations.

Because this system is an old one, and because it was observed to have, both then and now, a predominantly Spanish-American personnel, responsibility for it has been ascribed to either a feudal system or a unique Spanish-American culture, or both.

Tenant herding, however, exists in other areas, e.g. Montana, settled long after New Mexico--areas which have no remote connection with feudalism.

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(1) Josiah Gregg: Commerce of the Prairies, 1844, page 122. Edition of April, 1933

That tenant herding is not a unique Spanish-American custom is clear from the fact that the area of tenant herding is not coextensive nor continuous with areas of Spanish-American occupation. That tenant herding is not a feudal survival seems equally clear from the organic relationship that it bears to modern forms of business enterprise.

It is sometimes argued that in New Mexico large operators who let their stock on shares are the psychological substitutes for the older Spanish patron who cared for his peons. If this is true, it will be equally true that certain rural banks in the range livestock area of the west are equally feudal and paternalistic.

These are arguments which are often advanced and arguments which grow no better with time. The similarity between New Mexico and Montana lies not in a common Spanish-American culture and not in similar feudal remains, but in a contemporary condition of land control which is characteristic of both. Tenant herding, as it is now found, begins from a concentration in the ownership or control of the grazing resources which renders the development of independent livestock enterprises virtually impossible and renders the survival of small independent livestock operations difficult in the extreme.

Tenant herding in the Cuba Valley is a contractual agreement between a large sheep owner (Bond, in this case) and

about twenty-five tenants whereby these tenants agree to run sheep on a rental basis. Bond supplies breeding herds varying from a few hundred to 2,100 sheep. The renter contracts, in exchange for the right to use these sheep, to return 20 lambs, to average 55 pounds in weight, for every hundred ewes in the herd. The tenant further contracts to rent rams from the owner, sell his lambs and wool through the owner and stand responsible for all operating expenses and all losses. The renter agrees to feed when the owner believes that his sheep require feeding, to return upon demand a breeding herd of the same size and age as that originally rented to him, and to secure this return with any sheep that he may own.

In exchange for this the tenant gains the right to the total wool clip, all the lambs in excess of 20 lambs per hundred ewes, and, most important, the right to graze his own sheep on Bond's land along with his rented herd. This privilege does not involve free use. The renter generally pays Bond 15 cents a head for winter grazing on Bond's land, 12½ cents a head for a forty-day lambing period, and 17½ cents per head for 2½ months' summer grazing in the Baca location. This charge is levied for every head of sheep grazed, irrespective of ownership.

Each of the renters in the Cuba Valley was, before he became a tenant, an independent sheep owner. Of these twenty-five only 15 have a herd of their own at present. The

remaining 10 have lost all share in ownership through the operation of this form of tenancy.

Yet, in every case it was to increase their herds and the earnings from their herds that these twenty-five became tenants. The older tenants saw in this form of tenancy a quick means of acquiring capital necessary to expand their operations. Land was then relatively plentiful and land was free. It seemed an opportunity to expand their enterprises painlessly. However, in the course of years of this type of tenancy their ownership of sheep has contracted rather than expanded.

The second group of tenants, and the larger group, has come to tenancy more recently. These were the sheep owners who found that there was no range for their livestock, who found that desirable state leases were largely monopolized and railroad leases were for larger railroad patrons, who found that National Forest lands were preempted and the public domain already overcrowded. For these sheepmen there was no reasonable alternative. Either range had to be found or the sheep business abandoned. The means to additional range was tenant herding. So another group attempting to preserve their equity in the livestock business by this means have gradually lost their equity.

At present, 10,000 of the 23,000 sheep in the Cuba Valley are rented. Of the 5,000 goats, 1,000 are rented. Of

the 5,000 cattle, 1,000 are rented. Even natural forces have been marshalled into the service of increasing tenancy. Since the safety of the owner's herds is secured by the renter's sheep, every severe winter and every kill by predators serves to deplete only the tenant's herd.

Should that exceptional series of events occur whereby the tenant herder accumulates livestock of his own or increases his ownership of livestock, we have evidence from another area to indicate the probable consequence. In the Jemez-Tewa area in northern New Mexico where this situation occurred, the renter terminated his contract with Bond and attempted to establish himself as an independent sheepman. Range was not available to him. He was obliged to dispose of his sheep holdings. His sheep were purchased by Bond and issued to him on a rental basis.

Tenant herding in the Cuba Valley, then, is neither an historical accident of geography and culture nor a vestigial remain of feudal forms. It bears an organic relationship to the complex series of factors which make up contemporary conditions of land use. These same circumstances have a variety of expressions here and elsewhere. A concentration in the ownership of resources will express itself variously. Tenant herding is but one of these expressions.

USE OF GRAZING LANDS IN THE CUBA VALLEY
(In Cow Months)

Where Grazed	Total Area	Cabezon	Guada-lupe	Casa Salazar	San Luis	La Ventana	Cuba	Regina	La Jara	Pine-steja	Unclas-sified
Public Domain	56,240	8,054	9,915	5,589	12,628	684	8,325	1,098	5,742	4,205	0
U.S. Forests	19,044	0	1,440	3,400	0	0	10,463	615	2,244	0	882
Privately Owned Used	38,225	553	1,078	1,640	3,114	1,329	14,368	2,556	6,697	2,336	4,554
Privately Owned Rented	37,206	120	36	0	849	2,445	12,955	114	18,129	1,925	633
TOTAL	150,715	8,727	12,469	10,629	16,591	4,458	46,111	4,383	32,812	8,466	6,069

Source: Soil Conservation Service Dependency Survey.