

## History of the Fidlín-Sturgeon Brand

Dear Walt

The Garbanzo Trail of Journalism swings much closer to home this week. I remember when we first met years ago at Clint Josey's ranch near Denton, Texas. Many miles, many pastures, and oceans have been crossed since then.

We'd talked on the phone about dung beetles a few times but there you were. Walt Davis, A true cowboy, bigger than life. Great Hat. A cowboy with a degree from Texas A&M. A cowboy with a quest for knowledge and a cowboy with a love of grass.

You were leading a group of about twenty of us through a part of Clint Josey's pasture that had never seen the plow. One could hardly take a step without running over worm castings on top of the ground. A few steps later was an image I'll never forget. One moment we were all walking along. The next you were bending over picking up some Little Blue Stem. You were transformed as you stood back up with that prairie grass in your hand. There was a twinkle in your eye as you started telling us about forbes and the tops of grasses. The prairie had come alive around us that day at the Rendezvous.

In the spirit of a living prairie you explained to me how we had to get people to stop chemically worming their animals. Our animals would be way healthier and the dung beetles would come back. Years ago you knew that chemical worming had run its course.

"You gotta have your animals healthy, Mark!

There's a lot of people using diatomaceous earth, kelp, apple cider vinegar and great mineral salt."

In the last year I've met more people that don't worm than I have in the last ten years combined.

This summer was a funny time because you told me it was the first time in fifty years you didn't have any cows. I think it was because you didn't have any fences at your new ranch yet. The funny part was that it was the first time in fifty years that I did have cows. I must have been about ten years old when my grand parents butchered the last cow at our ranch in Fair Oaks.

I've been doing a lot of pasture restoration around here the last couple of years. The foundation of these projects being compost tea applications with a supplemental addition of Sea-90-Sea Solids. Trying to get dung beetles reestablished here has been difficult due to the fact that many ranchers here are still taught that their animals will die if

they don't chemically worm. That mantra is still heard quite often here. What could I do? I told them about people like you and other pasture genius's I knew but I still didn't have any first hand experience.

That all changed when I got a call from my old college roommate Doug Fidler in February. Through the years he befriended this guy named Carl Imper who in his nineties had lost most of his sight to macular degeneration. He was still a very active person who traveled all over his five acre property everyday. Four and one half of it were in pasture with a farm pond. He asked Doug if he knew anyone who was interested in using his pasture this year. Fidler called me and told me about Carl's question. I don't think I waited over ten seconds before telling Doug that I knew two guys who would be perfect. Two guys looking to get into the grass fed beef business.

"Who?"

"You and Me."

"Oh yea, Ya know Mark I know two guys who might have a couple of yearlings we could buy. I used to work with these guys Tom and Mike. I think one is a black angus and the other is 3/4 semetal."

Bryan Hostick, owner of Atomic Cowboy Trucking, from Oklahoma and cofounder of Garbanzo Journalism, told me we had to be the Fidler-Sturgeon Brand. The violin and the big fish brand was born.

Two weeks later Doug called me on my cell phone.

"Hey Mark! Tom is delivering the cows. He's backing up to the gate. He wants to know if we want them wormed?"

"No."

"How about a black leg vaccination?"

"Hold on a second. I'll call Will Winter.

Will answered on the first ring in Minnesota.

"Will it's Mark? Should we vaccinate for Black Leg?"

"No, your cows will be healthy."

"Thanks Will. I owe you a bottle of wine."

I later learned that Joel Salatin doesn't vaccinate against black leg either. It's been years since he's had any. He once read in an old farm journal that black leg was caused by puncture wounds. He'd been trying to get his cows to stamp out some blackberries by putting the salt licks inside the blackberry thickets. Once he didn't encourage his cows to go into the blackberries he didn't have anymore problems with black leg.

Tom dropped our herd and we were ranchers. After years of

telling people they didn't have to chemically worm. We had our own cows. So after all these years of telling people about your recipe we were ready to start our free choice program.

Doug sprayed three applications of compost tea with an addition of a pound and one half of Sea-90 per acre each time.

We started using a variation of your recipe almost immediately. Basically it was a quarter Sea-90, a quarter Thorvin's Kelp and a quarter Permaguard Diatomaceous Earth with with enough apple cider vinegar to bind the mixture together. Fidler is the ranch chef and executive in charge of daily operations since I live one-hundred and eighty miles away.

Carl had always said we had fishing rights that went along with our grazing rights. Occasionally I asked Doug if he had fished the pond yet but I always got a negative answer. He is a very serious fly fisherman who fishes all the famous fly waters like the Northern Umpqua, parts of the Rogue and some renowned stream down by McLeod, California. I was on a herd visit sometime in August when I again broached the fishing question.

"Why don't we go now?"

It was getting late but we made it up to Carl's place about a half hour before dark. I was being questioned as to how long it had been since I had fly fished on the way through the pasture. I admitted that I hadn't had a fly rod in my hands for thirty or forty years. It was a beautiful summer evening. It was starting to get kind of dark. Mallards were landing all around us. We were on the West bank and started casting. The tranquility quickly evaporated as Doug started yelling at me.

"Ten to Two Ten to Two Your back cast is hitting the ground. Don't you know the right fly casting posture?"

I think my back cast hit the ground again, I'm not really sure because about two seconds later my rod bent in half and shortly thereafter I landed a four and a half pound large mouth bass. While I was bringing in my fish, Douglas(Ernest Hemingway)Fidler quietly landed a bluegill that might have been an exaggerated four inches. We laughed so hard all the way home. Ten to Two.

All summer we continued to hear dire warnings that liver flukes would be overtaking our herd if we didn't use Ivormec Plus. All summer our yearlings got older and bigger with very shiny coats. Our manure piles were an entomologist's dream the diversity was so great in every