

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Sara Hopkins

DATE OF BIRTH: April 10, 1940 GENDER: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: September 20, 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Hopkins ranch, Organ, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Beth Morgan

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: October 30, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: February 8, 2002

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Contemporary beef cattle ranching in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Interview collected for the exhibit *Inside Story of the Roadside View*.

DATE RANGE: 1940-2001

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE:

Sara Lou Cox Hopkins was born in El Paso, Texas. She's married to Dale Hopkins. Since 1969 they've lived on a ranch on the west side of the Organ Mountains. Her father acquired the ranch in 1957. Most of the ranch land is leased from the Bureau of Land Management; one portion of the ranch was traded to the Nature Conservancy. What land they own is divided amongst the larger family.

The Coxes raise crossbred cattle; Bramah-cross cattle will forage higher on the mountain and down into the flats whereas Herefords stay closer to water. On the ranch there is grama grasses, and all kinds of weeds including lamb's quarter and purslane which the cattle prefer. They raise from "two cows to eighty acres, one cow to eighty acres, up to one cow per 200 acres." The cattle are supplementally fed a liquid feed mainly during the winter months. They have five "dirt tanks" and three wells with windmills to supply water. [The wells drilled by her father were all located based on the advice of a water witch.] Mostly, it is a family-run ranch. Sara Cox and her husband fix a lot of cuts in their fences, check the cattle and put feed out, and Sara trains horses.

They've lost some calves to mountain lions; a few cows to mustard weed, some horses to loco weed, and some animals to African rue. The animals are given vaccinations for various diseases. To market their calves, the Coxes wean feed them for a month or so, before taking them to the auction barn in Deming. Most of their calves come in the spring. They check calving cows once a day and, if there is any question, twice a day. Dale usually delivers the calves by himself or with another man helping. In about a week, the mother cow takes the calf to water and leaves it there. Cows or an older bull sometimes "babysit" for others' calves.

Usually, calves are branded at three or four weeks old. Branding is ordinarily done in April or May. Sara Hopkins does the roping for the branding. They don't use a cattle chute, but rope the calves' hind legs and "drag 'em into the fire." She states that this is less distressing to a calf. They heat their branding irons in a fire; they castrate by cutting the bag off and pulling out the testicles then cutting them. She doesn't care to watch the act of dehorning. A seven-way vaccine for black leg is given when the calves are branded.

Hopkins says that you must ride and check the cattle to prevent loss of calves. They put the cattle on the flats in the summer and on the mountain in the winter. They keep bulls out with the cows year round and they need daily checking to prevent fighting and injury. Describes an anecdote where she found a bull that was "wrapped up" in barbed wire following a fight with other bulls.

Calves are sold usually at six to eight months of age. Marketing is done in September, October. During weaning, they have to put calves in a pen to prevent them from trying to find their mothers. They usually sell around seventy calves, a truckload. Because they'd had no rain in two years, they recently had to sell all their cattle.

TAPE TWO:

Hopkins feels that the greatest impact on ranching has been the drought, environmental activism, and governmental restrictions. She states that the future of ranching will get "tougher and

tougher.” “It gets tougher for young people to try to buy a ranch and . . . try and make a living. They can’t do it.”