

Paint a Picture of a Cattle Ranch on the Frontier

1- Fences: There were no fences for cattle; they literally roamed free and grazed the open pastures.

2- Cattle Breeds: Most cattle were longhorns. This is a specific breed of cattle. They are characterized by their large horns, which can span several feet. They have Spanish origin.

3- Brands: Cattle were identified using a brand. The brand was registered and could only be used by one rancher. Branding was a legal mark of ownership and the only method of sorting the cattle by owner when they were rounded up.

4- Purpose of Cattle: Cattle were valuable for their thick hides, which were used to make leather. Leather was used extensively to make clothing, saddles, and gear of all sorts. Cattle were also valuable for their tallow or fat— as well as their meat.

5- Refrigeration: Without refrigeration or other food preservation techniques, beef had a short shelf life before it spoiled. Cattle had to be harvested near the markets where the meat was sold.

6- Transportation: Most transportation took place on horseback or in horse-drawn wagons. Railroads were spreading from the East, but did not yet reach many places on the frontier.

7- Horses: Horses were very important to ranch work. They provided transportation for cowboys on long cattle drives. They needed speed and agility to sort the cattle and gain control of a stampede.

8- Feed: Cattle gained all of their feed from grazing the open plains.

Paint a Picture of a Modern-Day Cattle Ranch

A- Fences: The perimeters of cattle ranches are usually fenced. Even very large areas of open range are fenced with barbed wire.

B- Cattle Breeds: Many breeds of beef cattle exist. European cattle breeds such as Angus and Hereford are the most common.

C- Brands: Cattle were identified using a brand. The brand is registered and can only be used by one rancher. Branding is a legal mark of ownership.

D- Purpose of Cattle: Cattle's primary product is beef. Hamburger, roasts, and steak from cattle are regularly consumed in fast food chains, at high-class restaurants, and backyard barbecues. Cattle processing also produces dozens of by-products including leather, cosmetics, brushes, fertilizer, and more.

E- Refrigeration: Beef can be refrigerated and frozen, allowing it to be safely stored without rotting. Refrigerated semi-trucks can safely transport beef throughout the country.

F- Transportation: Live cattle—as well their meat—can be safely transported locally, across the nation, and even internationally thanks to semi-trucks and cargo planes.

G- Horses: Horses are important to ranch work. Many ranchers still rely on horses to sort and care for cattle. However, 4-wheelers and other ATVs are also commonly used. On very large, open ranges even helicopters are occasionally used to round up cattle.

H- Technology: Technology in the cattle industry has vastly changed and improved cattle ranching. Increased knowledge of nutrition and genetics produces more beef for our food supply than ever before.

I- Feed: Most cattle graze for all or most of their lives. They can obtain energy from grasses and forage when other animals (and people) cannot. After spending most of their lives on the range, cattle finish their growth in a feedlot eating forage and grains like corn, oats, and soybean meal. This stage speeds the growth process and contributes to yielding tender and flavorful meat.