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## Review of Rich Grass and Sweet Water: Ranch Life with the Koch Matador Cattle Company

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*Rich Grass and Sweet Water: Ranch Life with the Koch Matador Cattle Company.* By John Lincoln. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1989. Illustrations, maps, index. xv + 148 pp. \$19.95.

Ranch life doesn't lend itself well to paper. The lifestyle of the cowboy or cowgirl is not something that can be reproduced easily. The subtleties of nature, its weather, beauty, ruthlessness, and its serenity are too complex for most authors to conquer easily. Too often ranching books become simple recitals of where, when, how much, how large, how many, how bad, or how good. John Lincoln's *Rich Grass and Sweet Water* is one of the few books that is able to portray successfully the life of the cowman.

Lincoln served as the bookkeeper and later manager of the Matador Cattle Company, a huge and far-flung ranching empire, from 1968 to 1983. This large agribusiness is a subsidiary of Koch Industries, Inc., a Wichita oil and gas corporation. Fred Koch, the corporate founder, was born into modest circumstances in Quanah, Texas, in 1900, educated at MIT, and went on to invent several processes to improve petroleum refining. He began building his ranching empire in the 1940s, compiling that first ranch forty acres at a time. By the time Koch died in 1967, the Matador Cattle Company had grown to include Montana's Beaverhead Ranch, the "Bug" Ranch in Wyoming, and the Matador Ranch itself; a historic Texas enterprise well known in the industry. These ranches brought the Matador Cattle Company to nearly one million acres. Following the death of Fred Koch, his sons Charles and David took over the management of Koch Industries. The boys continued expansion of the Matador Cattle Company through the depression in the ranching business that began in the early 1980s.

Lincoln formats the book by thorough chapters on each of the ranches in the company. His book is a good primer for those not knowledgeable of the ranching industry. He explains working techniques and styles in a straightforward and easily understood manner, discussing the peculiarities of each ranch and strategies for overcoming particular problems.

Often in ranching the important role of the employee is not emphasized. John Lincoln, and apparently Matador, placed great responsibility on the shoulders of their ranch managers and were highly successful because of it. Lincoln relates company policies of promotion from within and gives the reader a short profile of each of the managing families on the ranches.

Later chapters deal with ranch purchases following the death of Fred Koch. Particularly good is Lincoln's discussion on the 1971 lease of the Garvey Ranch, a huge Nevada operation of over a million acres. Lincoln takes us through a complete year on the ranch and explains Matador's liquidation of its Garvey involvement.

John Lincoln retired from the Matador Cattle Company in 1983. His affection for the job, the land, the people, and the cattle are readily apparent in this highly readable book.

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