

CEM IN KENTUCKY

AUTOMATED BARN HELP

TAXES AND RECORDS

# *the* HORSE

AN OFFICIAL AAEP  
MEDIA PARTNER

YOUR GUIDE TO EQUINE HEALTH CARE

## GOOD BARNKEEPING

## FARM EQUIPMENT

What's new in tractors, trailers, trucks,  
and implements

## EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION

Best practices when hiring

\$4.95 US

\$6.00 CAN



7 25274 84578 1





# Good BARNKEEPING

Careful barn design planning and regular maintenance can mean a longer-lasting, safer structure that's more efficient to use.

BY JEANNIE PUTNEY



**A**ll horse owner wishes they had more time with their horses. For those who keep horses at home it is always a struggle to keep up with regular farm and barn maintenance and have enough time left to enjoy the horses. Performing proper building maintenance at regular intervals can save money and make the structure safer, and it can leave you more time to spend with the four-footed critters. Many tasks can be accomplished on an as-needed basis, leaving some simple safety checks and maintenance for each season.



Whether your farm includes a barn, sheds, or outbuildings, planning ahead is the first step. "Maintenance for your facility actually should begin when planning," says Mary Harcourt, co-author of *Complete Plans for Building Horse Barns Big and Small*. "Laying out the facility to make maintenance easy and affordable helps enormously," she says. "Likewise, construction of buildings and materials used can make maintenance easier." She says thoughtful planning allows for more time spent with your animals and less at the end of a pitchfork.

Linda Weatherbee of Circle B Barn Co. in Massachusetts agrees that many maintenance issues can be prevented in the planning process. "Our goal is functionality and buildings that are as maintenance-free as possible," she says. "We want buildings that breathe. A barn that is really weather tight is great for people, but not so much for horses. They need constantly changing air because of their sensitive respiratory systems."

Architects have spent years trying to design the perfect barn, one that will allow a horse to be a horse and allow owners quality time with their animals. John Blackburn, president and senior principal of Blackburn Architects in Washington, D.C., focuses on quality designs that are healthy and safe for horses and decrease operational and maintenance costs.

"Poorly designed and improperly placed buildings may cost you more money in the end," he says. According to Blackburn, constructing barns and service buildings on higher ground is one of the first steps towards an economical, efficient structure. He also emphasizes the importance of natural lighting: "It's free, so let's use it ... If we can design a barn that is lit naturally all day long and ventilates naturally, we're 99% there."

Barn design and placement can help reduce monthly maintenance, but what about pre-existing structures? "If you have a barn you inherited, learn where your problem areas are and be prepared to address them," says Harcourt. "That'll eliminate a lot of maintenance."

One of the easiest ways to build a maintenance plan for your farm buildings is by season. The extremes of each season obviously vary depending on geography, but the following list is a good starting point.

## Spring

Anna Sharp owns a private farm in South Carolina. She says spring is when



To help prevent barn fires, make sure electrical devices that have been stored all winter, such as stall fans, are free of dirt and are in good working condition before putting them back into use.

she checks her automatic fly spray systems. "They are very low-maintenance," she says. "I check the water level once a month. You can press a button to force them to come on to ensure they are working and there are no clogs."

Sharp says power washing her farm buildings is an important preventative measure against mold. She also checks the tack room's HVAC (heating and air conditioning) unit in preparation for hot weather. Because termites can be prevalent in the South, Sharp checks and treats for pests each spring.

Having and checking a generator is one spring necessity, according to Harcourt. "You should have your barn adapted to be generator compatible, in the North for snow and in the South for hurricanes," she says. "I have my well on my barn electric system so even in a loss of electricity, I can have water for my horses and for my house. I can live with a flashlight and candles, but not without water."

Therefore, she recommends checking water systems before extreme weather, such as when pipes might freeze.

She agrees with Sharp that termites can be a problem and says she termite-proofed her barn when it was built and has it treated every five years. Harcourt finds it to be a great investment, especially since her barn is attached to her carport, which is attached to her house.

Spring is the best time to inspect your

roof, according to Larry Swetnam, a retired University of Kentucky agricultural engineer. "Roofs should be checked periodically and following any high wind occurrence," he says. "A visual inspection should identify any loose shingles, tin, metal, or other roof components which could be repaired before they become major issues."

Spring is also a good time to focus on maintaining the outside of the barn. Weatherbee says treating the structure with some sort of stain is the best way to preserve the integrity of the wood. "Direct sunlight is the worst thing for any wood-sided building, so prevention is key," she notes.

## Summer

In many areas, summer means it's time to break out the box fans, as horses spend more time in stalls to beat the heat. Ideally, the fans have been cleaned before they were stored, but a cursory check is a good idea. Sharp inspects all fan cords to ensure there are no exposed wires.

Because she doesn't have automatic waterers, Erin Novelli, who owns a Kentucky layup and broodmare farm, provides each horse with an extra hanging bucket in the summer—three total in each stall for mares and foals, and two for everyone else. She also makes sure stall salt block holders are full and secured tightly in place.

Novelli recommends keeping an eye out for hornet nests, which seem to show up near shavings sheds, and birds' nests,



# Good BARNKEEPING

which she often finds in her barn's cupola.

Roxana Reed has owned commercial and private barns in New Hampshire, Maine, and Kentucky, and she currently breeds show horses and Arabians at a farm in Shelby County, Ky. Reed says two of her most important daily summer tasks are picking out run-in sheds and watering aisles. "It is important to water aisles regularly if horses are in, especially if you have an indoor arena connected to your barn," Reed says. Keeping the dust down

to winter. According to Novelli, accumulated leaves beside the barn are the perfect invitation for bugs, whether you have a wood-sided barn or not.

Cleaning out gutters before freezing temperatures set in is also a must for Novelli, who recommends thoroughly washing dead bugs and dirt from screens and fans before storing them for the winter. "Getting rid of summer bugs will help fans and screens last longer," she says.

Novelli says fall is her preferred time to check all light bulbs. "It's a heck of a lot easier to climb up on a ladder in the fall than once it gets cold," she says. Both Novelli and Sharp wrap all exposed pipes each fall as a precaution. There are two common products used to insulate pipes; one resembles tape and the other foam. This can also serve as a reminder that hoses should be unhooked from spigots before freezing temperatures set in.

Checking for and repairing places where rodents can enter the barn is another important part of winter preparation. Novelli tends to find rodent nests in her electrical boxes. Swetnam says once you find the openings where rodents are getting in, use mesh wire, aerosol insulation, steel wool, or one of many other materials to close and secure the problem areas.

## Winter

Many farm owners who live in colder climates use insulated buckets or bucket heaters. Novelli recommends cleaning them before they are stored so all that's left to do is hang them up come winter. Those with automatic waterers should check the heating element before temperatures dip below freezing.

Some maintenance tricks are learned the hard way in winter, says Novelli, such as digging around barn doors so they don't freeze in their tracks. She also oils the top track of sliding doors. In the winter you should also make sure the ground is even where horses walk. "I rake the gravel in front of the barn to ensure the area is level so there won't be puddles that collect and freeze," Novelli says.

Because her first foals are born in January, Novelli spends much of the winter busily preparing for their arrival. This includes disinfecting buckets and stalls and checking foaling cameras before mares arrive.

## General Upkeep

Most of the maintenance around the farm should be done on a daily basis. In fact, the problems tend to be minimized when you keep on top of them, says Novelli. Keeping aisles clean is a must for her because clutter can be a safety hazard. "Don't let trash pile up (in receptacles) in your barn," says Novelli. "If you have a constant problem with trash, get a dumpster. You're just asking for bugs and mice and for some horse to get hurt."

Flushing wash stall drains is easily forgotten. Cleaning up after your horse helps, but often you'll still need to have the drains snaked to eliminate clogs.

Cobwebs and dust accumulate all year-round says Novelli. "It is a pain in the neck, but if anyone has ever seen a horse that has been bitten by a poisonous spider, they'll understand," she says.

Swetnam recommends not putting floodlights or spotlights near hay storage, because dust, cobwebs, and hay are incredibly flammable. "Incandescent or fluorescent lights are a much better choice," he says. Blackburn says he's heard stories about people who flick on a light in their barn and have an explosion from the dust that has built up.

In general when maintaining your farm structures, Swetnam says, "Think like the building." When you see stall walls covered with sweet feed from a messy eater, clean them up. When a stall door is tough to open or makes a lot of noise, oil it. Always be aware of how barn upkeep could affect your horse's health. Check smoke detectors and batteries as well as fire extinguishers every time there is an extreme change in weather. If you have to clean manure or urine off of a surface where there is little to soak it up, apply some hydrated agricultural lime. And make sure the ground underneath stall mats is level.

## Take-Home Message

Maintenance is a normal part of horse farm ownership, but Harcourt says if it is practiced regularly it will promote safety and preserve farm structures. "Many of the barns in my book were over 30 years old and are still very solid structures, probably because they are taken care of." 🐾

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeannie Blancq Putney is an award-winning freelance journalist, marketing communications consultant, and photographer based in Kentucky. She enjoys dressage and eventing and is an Appaloosa fanatic, but she happily reports on all breeds and disciplines.



Check tank heaters to make sure they are in good repair before freezing temperatures hit.

keeps horses healthier. Her horses tend to only use their run-ins when driven in by storms, but she still cleans the manure out of them to help keep flies out.

Most barn owners weed-eat their fence-lines and around other structures throughout the summer. "I do it at least every two weeks in the summer," says Sharp. "You've got to keep the grass, or anything, away from the base of your barn. As pretty as mulch can be, make sure not to mulch up next to the barn," or you could attract insects, cause wood rot, or create a fire hazard.

Swetnam concurs, adding that controlling water and moisture that could affect your farm structures is key. "Vines, although attractive, may hold moisture, which can prove to be very destructive to wooden buildings," he says.

## Fall

Fall leaves can make for a picturesque setting, but you need to rake them away from farm structures, especially going in