



Preservation Starts with You

A letter from the editor of Hobby Farms.

By Karen Keb Acevedo

A barn is a beautiful thing. When you look around your immediate countryside or drive through surrounding states, you'll see different styles, colors and sizes. Barns are icons of American agriculture dotting the landscape; the different variations telling the story of our country's evolution. What crops were historically grown here? What type of livestock was housed here? What was the prevailing philosophy of efficiency when that barn was built?

Here in Kentucky, tobacco barns rule, yet not much tobacco can be seen drying in them anymore. The tall, airy, mostly painted-black structures remind me of earlier days when a particular crop defined a region, such as tobacco did Kentucky. The Midwest is home to the clever bank barn, the West is characterized by the lofty prairie barn, and the southeast's rolling Appalachian hills beckon the rustic crib barn—all testaments to the original owner's ambitions and ideas about agriculture. Preservation of our historic barns—and the tales of personal history held within them—is important, as you'll read about in "Barns of America" on page XX, even if it's not "preservation" on a grand scale.

My barn is English-style with its unpainted wood siding, gabled roof, interior stalls and hay loft. It provides much needed shelter for my goats; and storage for implements, feed and firewood. But for all the joy and peace of mind it brings me, it also presents an equal amount of upkeep, maintenance and otherwise ... preservation.

My barn is like a shiny used car for sale on the side of the road. From a speeding distance, it looks lovely—waxed, gleaming and "like new." But upon closer examination ... not so much. There are a few scratches in the paint, some ripped upholstery and crumbs that have become one with the carpet. My daily barn once-over involves peering up at the beams to see how far the carpenter bees have burrowed (and if they've turned them into toothpicks yet); inspecting various boards for increasing water damage and rot; checking the status of the skunk den underneath the tack room; and surveying the accumulating junk pile—mostly things that just won't fit in the garage. "Preserving" a barn is a full-time job that requires time and effort. If you take a momentary break, it'll surely get away from you.

We're now entering our slow time on the farm when we have time to catch up and take stock, tidy up records and begin planning next year's goals. To your list add "Preserve barn" and aim to do something special for your barn to extend its life—pressure wash and paint it, repair doors and rotten siding; or build a storage shed for firewood and farm tools to clear out the clutter. A barn is a terrible thing to waste, so make the time and pay your piece of personal history its proper due.

Enjoy your time indoors this season with family and friends. Cherish the Earth and all of its blessings. Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas!