

BeefTalk 514: Hay Mow Swings Gone Forever

At one time, the barn was the key to the operation of the farm.

Perhaps time does come to a standstill. However, if it does, it is only momentary. Perhaps the “now” does not really need to know the past. Perhaps what will be will simply be. If we really believe all that, then there is no reason to be very optimistic.

The past is important and produces the threads for the future. With no past, the future is very hard to define, if at all. That is why a recent point in time, the passing of a barn, may seem like a non-news event, but it was because it was in the family. The passing of our barn is another visual sign of “what was” is now gone.

Animal agriculture continues to change. This change strives to meet the times and expectations of today's consumer. Those expectations sometimes are hard to meet, in part, due to the lack of connectivity with the barn, which was a red hip-roofed barn common to the upper Midwest and home to many.

At one time, the barn was the key to the operation of the farm. Life in the barn pretty well shut down for the summer months, but once the early fall calves started to arrive, milk and calves kept the barn in full swing. In our case, the barn held all the cattle, horses and even sheep from time to time. The hogs and chickens had their own homes.

My earliest memories are of cold winter days with what seemed to be a very long walk to the barn. However, once inside, a whole new world of living things evolved. There were cows to milk, horses to feed, calves to pail feed and a few cats to keep the mice away.

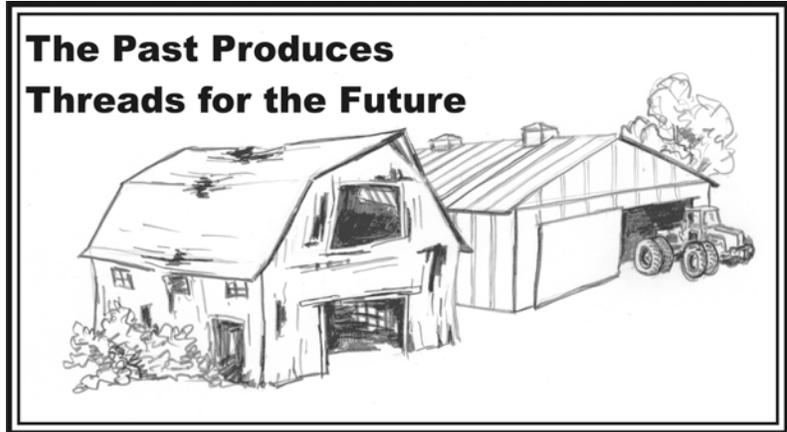
Even the slow times were not slow because the barn was like a recreation center. The numerous holes and timbers were a climber's dream and so were the swings in the hay mow. With the passing of winter, more and more hay left the hay mow, which gave us more room to swing.

The heavy hay carrier intended to bring loose hay into the hay mow was anchored on the rail to allow for maximum swinging from one wall to the next. By spring, the full swing was available to give us a ride even carnivals could not provide.

Testing the length of the rope was less than perfect and certainly not an exact science. In fact, one did not need to look up the meaning of “having the wind knocked out of you” because testing rope length pretty well assured that one would learn the definition.

An empty hay mow also could be transformed into a basketball court with the hoop sturdily mounted on a high wall.

Meanwhile, the main floor of the barn evolved through the years. There was less milk to no milk and more general livestock stalled throughout the barn. However, life was the same because the animals still needed constant care and spare time was hard to find. That is why one would be remiss if only the good memories were told. Mom spent more time than desired cleaning the cream separator and all that went with bringing barn produce to the table. The task was not easy and some days were more than unpleasant.



With all that went with the barn, life in the barn was always busy. The morning cleaning meant a stone boat and horses. Later it became a manure spreader and tractor. The gutter was cleaned daily, even during the coldest days.

Time does not even momentarily come to a halt, so the barn slowly gives way to the forces of nature. The end result is that something is missed. An upcoming generation never will get to swing in a hay mow, crawl up barn walls, explore the barn's cupolas or clean up fresh cow manure.

These opportunities are disappearing quickly and replaced by specially designed swing sets, bleachers so children and parents can watch from a distance, better safety panels and portable hand sanitizer.

I guess times change for the best. However, something is missed. As an industry, the challenge remains of trying to connect people to the food they eat.

At least for today, one fact will be forever true: The swings are gone, but the youthful memories will remain forever.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.