

Rural Builder



by
SHIELD
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Serving The Construction Trade For 60 Years

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SEPTEMBER 2026
Vol. 60, Issue 7

**SLIDING DOOR
HARDWARE
MADE SIMPLE**

**SCENES FROM THE
POST-FRAME
BUILDER SHOW**

**FARM
BUILDING**

REPAIR GUIDE

**BEYOND
GUESSING
BETTER INVENTORY
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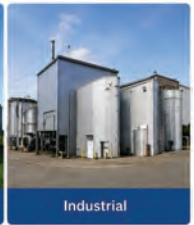
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What Doesn't Show in the Photos

There's a particular smell that hits sometime in late August — cut hay, diesel, the first hint of cool air sneaking in behind the humidity — and it tells everyone in this industry the same thing: crunch time. Pole barns going up before the ground freezes. Concrete crews racing daylight. And somewhere in a Minnesota kitchen, an editor staring down a stack of story drafts wondering if she remembered to save the file before her laptop decided to update itself mid-sentence. (I did. Eventually. After some words that will not be appearing in this magazine.)

This issue is a good one, and I say that as someone who's read every word of it roughly four times. We're digging into how builders are handling everything from sliding door hardware upgrades to the quiet but important stuff — agricultural ventilation, structural repair techniques, the kind of decisions that don't show up in a glossy photo but absolutely show up in a callback five years later. If you've ever had a customer ask "why does this cost more

than the barn down the road," some of this issue is basically your answer key.

We also spent time this cycle talking to builders who are thinking ahead — not just to next spring's build season, but to how their businesses run day to day. Software, systems, safety features baked in at the design stage instead of bolted on after an incident. It's not the sexiest part of the trade. It's also the part that keeps you in business long enough to build the sexy stuff.

As always, this magazine exists because builders like you keep answering our calls, sending photos of jobs you're proud of, and occasionally telling us when we got something wrong (thank you, genuinely — I'd rather hear it from you than find out in the comments section of the internet, which is a lawless place).

Enjoy the issue. Go build something that outlasts you.

— Kathleen Riley



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Correction: In the 2026 Source Book, the description was inadvertently omitted. The correct text is here: <https://ruralbuildermagazine.com/post-frame-garage-cost-effective-design-and-details/>
We regret the error and are happy to set the record straight.

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ON THE COVER:

Patoka Lake Winery. Photo
courtesy of Graber Post Buildings, Inc.

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Gary Reichert,
Publisher, Shield Wall Media



WORK ETHIC SCHOLARSHIP

A Farm-Grown Work Ethic

opens the door to many opportunities

BY LINDA SCHMID

Rachael Kuperus' parents never owned a farm, though she grew up in the countryside among farmers. There was a pasture at the end of her backyard, and every day she watched the farmers gather at the local diner for breakfast. Whether farming or doing any other job, her parents instilled in her a strong work ethic, in part by modeling hard work and in part by getting her a job on the farm where her dad had worked during high school. Rachael had expressed an interest in veterinary work, so the job served as an introduction to working with animals.

She started out feeding the calves when she was 14 years old. Then she moved on to milking the cows and running the equipment. During her junior year of high school, Rachael was cut from the soccer team, which gave her more time to spend at the farm. The owners were happy to have more of her time and gave her additional responsibilities.

LOOKING FOR A CAREER PATH

Along the way Rachael shadowed a veterinarian and then a nutritionist. The veterinarian was just out of school and deep in debt, and she wasn't making much more than Rachael could make as a nutritionist. Rachael viewed nutrition as a possible career choice.

Michigan State University offered a two-year Dairy Manage-



ment Agricultural Technology program. It was the only agriculture program available, and Rachael decided to try it. She had taken a lot of AP classes in high school, so she didn't have to take too many core classes, such as math and English. Instead she learned about cow reproduction, lactation, nutrition, and husbandry in general.

It was a one-and-a-half- to two-year program, but as she neared completion, a four-year program that extended the certificate program she was enrolled in became available.

Rachael completed her Bachelor of Science degree in animal science with a concentration in the dairy industry.

"APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS"

While she was taking classes, instructors told students that if they applied for scholarships, they would receive them simply because so many went unclaimed. It turned out that it wasn't quite that simple.

When Rachael began applying for scholarships, Mike Rowe's book, *The Way I Heard It*, had just come out and was all over the internet. She had grown up watching Mike on *Dirty Jobs*, so she decided to apply for a scholarship from his foundation.

"I remember that applying for this scholarship was more intense than applying for other scholarships," Rachael said. "I'd never seen anything like the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge before. It's like the



As a result of a collaboration with mikeroweWORKS Foundation (www.mikeroweworks.org), *Rural Builder* is featuring profiles of Work Ethic Scholarship recipients in each of its issues. Nearly 3,000 scholarships have been awarded to trade-school students who value hard work and taking personal responsibility. *Rural Builder* applauds these students and wants to acknowledge their choice to apply their talents to skilled trades. Thank you, mikeroweWORKS Foundation, for your continuing efforts to close the skills gap and "reconnect the average American with the value of a skilled workforce."

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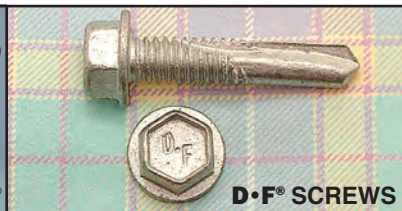
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Pledge of Allegiance for hard work, but if you are going to award the scholarship to hard workers, it makes sense to make them work for it.”

Rachael was awarded the scholarship, so the work was worth it. She attended college for three years and graduated debt-free.

WORKING IN THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

An internship at a local feed mill led to one of the positions she now holds in the industry: drone operator. Rachael explained that feed is a dairy farmer’s greatest expense. Further it is not in the best interests of the cows to feed them newly harvested silage. That is better left to dry and store for next year. The drone operator’s job is to take photos of the farmer’s inventory because the lender wants to know what is available. The information also benefits the farmer, who may receive recommendations about what can be used as an alternative for something that is in short supply.

When her internship ended, the feed mill had no full-time opening for her, but the company recommended her for the drone operator position because its staff wanted to continue working with her.

Her other position is back at the farm where she had worked for many years. However, she now helps manage it alongside her husband, the son of the farmer she began working for as a teenager.

“Managing a farm entails checking in with employees, putting out fires, and filling in for sick employees,” Rachael said. “That’s after I come home from my day job, and I work a half day on Saturdays.”

As a drone operator, she has to keep track of the weather because the drone costs \$6,000 to replace. She connects with farmers, sometimes helping them by walking cows or doing whatever else they may need.

“One of the things I love most about my work is that I get to spend a lot of time outdoors at both jobs, though I do have to spend some time each week on reporting,” Rachael said. “As a drone operator, I get to go to different farms and talk to farmers, vets, and others. I go to conferences and meet people from all over the world, and I get to compare agricultural processes here with those in other places.”

ADVICE FOR PEOPLE STARTING OUT

“Keep your ears open, and don’t be afraid to try something new,” Rachael advised. “I had absolutely no interest in drones, but when the opportunity was offered, I gave it a shot. Don’t be afraid to network through people you know.”

Think about what you enjoy. “People who want to go into the trades want to run their own crew, be the boss, and be outside,” Rachael said. “White-collar people are generally looking for other things. Whichever way you choose, there are many opportunities out there.”

Rachael and her husband are about to embark on a new opportunity of their own. They plan to open a farm store that will offer beef and a few other farm products. We wish them success in this new undertaking! **RB**



The Kuperus’ new farm store.



Rachael capturing data for a haylage density report.



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IMAGE COURTESY OF I-BEAM DOORS

Track, Trolleys, and the Truth About Sliding Door Hardware

Not all sliding door hardware is created equally and picking the wrong track or trolley can cost you a lot more than a callback. From post-frame barns to commercial warehouses, equestrian facilities to rural retail, here's what every builder needs to know.

Walk into any farm supply or building products showroom, and you'll find an entire wall dedicated to sliding door hardware. Tracks and trolleys — sometimes called carriages — come in a dizzying range of profiles, gauges, coatings, and load ratings. For contractors and owner-builders, the sheer variety can be paralyzing.

The good news: once you understand a handful of key variables, matching the right hardware to the job becomes straightforward — whether you're hanging a rough-sawn pine door on a hobby barn, outfitting a 200-foot dairy facility, rolling out a series of aisle doors in an equestrian center, or finishing a large-opening commercial warehouse. Sliding door hardware is not one-size-fits-all, but it is learnable.

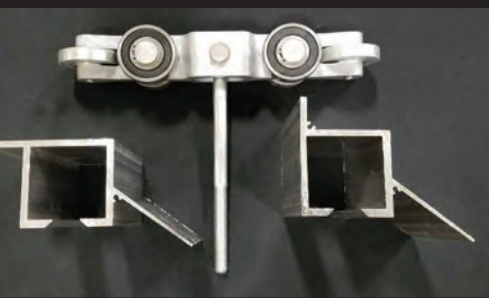
This guide breaks down the differences in door track profiles, material grades, and trolley designs, and explains when each option makes sense across the full spectrum of rural and commercial building types.

WHERE SLIDING DOORS SHOW UP — AND WHY IT MATTERS

Before diving into hardware specifics, it's worth acknowledging how broad the universe of sliding door applications actually is. Each building type presents a different combination of door weight, use frequency, environmental exposure, and aesthetic expectation — and those variables drive hardware selection more than almost any other factor.



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Post-frame agricultural buildings. The classic application: sliding doors on pole barns, machine sheds, hog confinements, dairy freestall barns, and commodity storage facilities. Door weights range from a few hundred pounds for a simple equipment passage to well over a thousand pounds for a paired steel-panel door on a large drive-through bay. Environments range from relatively benign (dry equipment storage) to severely corrosive (livestock confinement with constant ammonia and moisture).

Commercial and light industrial buildings. Metal-frame and tilt-up concrete buildings in rural markets increasingly use sliding doors on loading docks, shop bays, and storage areas. These applications often involve heavier door panels — insulated steel, hollow-metal, or aluminum — and high cycle counts from daily commercial use. Hardware must perform reliably under conditions that would exhaust residential-grade systems quickly.

Equestrian facilities. Horse barns present a unique combination of demands: doors that open and close dozens of times daily, an environment with bedding dust and manure moisture, animals that lean and push against closed doors, and owners who are acutely aware of aesthetics. Stall doors, wash rack entrances, and aisle doors in equestrian builds typically demand mid-grade to heavy-duty hardware with robust anti-jump retention and smooth, quiet operation.

Hobby barns and residential outbuildings. Backyard workshops, small livestock shelters, garden sheds, and residential garages with sliding doors are the lightest-duty end of the spectrum. Door weights are manageable, and cycle counts are low, but these customers are often hands-on DIYers who will install the hardware themselves and return for replacements if it fails early. Quality entry-level hardware with sealed bearings is appropriate here; cutting corners on grade rarely saves money in the long run.

Rural retail and agritourism buildings. Farm stores, event barns, wedding venues, and agritourism facilities use sliding doors heavily for both functional access and visual appeal. The barn-door aesthetic is a design asset in these settings, and hardware that looks industrial or cheap undercuts the brand. These applications often call for hardware that performs well and presents well — powder-coated black or galvanized-bright finishes that complement exposed-wood interiors.

Cold storage and specialty agricultural facilities. Refrigerated produce storage, grain handling facilities, and similar structures may use insulated sliding panels of substantial weight. Cold storage environments create condensation and freeze-thaw cycling that are particularly hard on hardware

finishes and bearing seals. Specifying sealed-for-life bearings and hot-dip galvanized or stainless components is not optional in these settings — it's the cost of the callback you're trying to avoid.

STARTING WITH THE TRACK

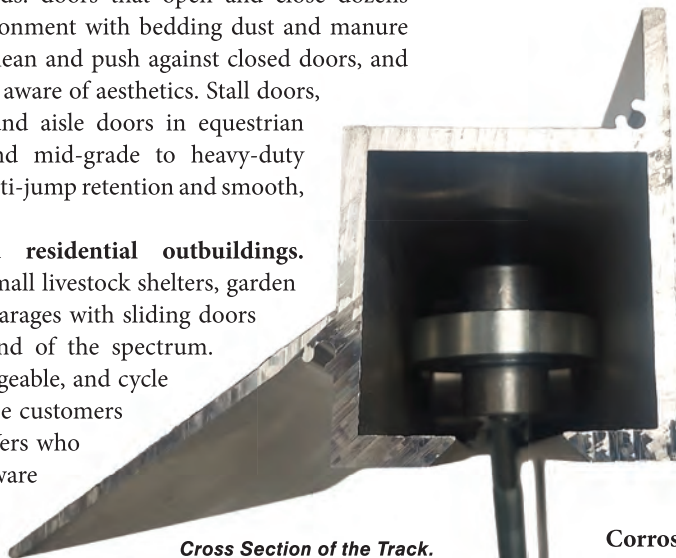
The track — also called the rail — is the horizontal beam from which the door hangs. It bears the full weight of the panel and guides every open-and-close cycle over the life of the building. Tracks are commonly manufactured from cold-rolled steel, galvanized steel, or stainless steel, and they are offered in several profiles.

Standard barn track (I-beam or structural channel). The most common profile in rural construction, this track features a flat running surface on the bottom flange and a top flange that bolts to a header or fascia board. Available in 6-, 8-, and 10-foot sections that splice together for longer runs. Typical material gauge runs 12 to 14, which is adequate for most residential-grade sliding doors up to around 400 pounds.

Heavy-duty structural track. Purpose-built for commercial, equestrian, and working-farm applications, heavy-duty track uses thicker steel — often 10 to 12 gauge — and a deeper profile to resist flex under load. When you're hanging a 10-foot-wide, two-inch-thick pine door, a powder-coated steel panel for a large equipment bay, or the aisle door on a 36-stall horse barn, this is the category you want. Some manufacturers test these systems to 800 or even 1,200 pounds of dynamic load.

Corrosion-resistant and specialty track. For livestock barns, coastal builds, cold storage facilities, or any environment with persistent moisture or aggressive airborne particulate, galvanized or electro-coated track extends service life dramatically. Stainless-steel track is the premium option for the harshest environments — food-processing facilities, seafood operations, or buildings subjected to frequent wash-downs — though its cost makes it difficult to justify for most standard agricultural and rural commercial applications.

Track length matters, too. Most sliding door systems specify a track run equal to one-and-a-half to two times the door width — enough for the panel to clear the opening completely while still distributing load across an adequate bearing length. Skimping on track run is one of the most common installation errors; it puts excessive stress on the last trolley and causes premature wear, whether the building is a hobby barn or a commercial processing facility.



Cross Section of the Track.
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UNDERSTANDING TRACK PROFILES IN DETAIL

While the broad categories above cover most purchases, track profiles vary in subtle ways that affect trolley compatibility and overall system rigidity.

Bottom flange width. A wider running surface distributes the trolley's wheel load over more steel, reducing point stress and extending track life. Heavier-rated tracks almost always feature wider flanges. In commercial applications where a door cycles repeatedly throughout the day, this difference is measurable in years of service life.

Web depth (the vertical portion between flanges). Deeper webs resist lateral flex, which becomes important on long track runs or when doors experience side-loading from wind. Commercial and equestrian facilities with wide openings — often 16 to 20 feet or more — benefit significantly from deeper-profile track.

Top flange configuration. Some tracks are designed to mount face-to-face with a header board; others feature offset or slotted flanges that allow height adjustment after installation. Adjustable systems are especially useful on older structures where headers may have settled unevenly, and on metal buildings where the girt or header tube may not sit perfectly plumb.

Mixing track profiles from different manufacturers or product lines is rarely a good idea. Trolley wheel width and bearing geometry are engineered to match specific running-surface dimensions; a mismatched combination can cause binding, accelerated wear, or in extreme cases, a door derailment. This is especially consequential in high-cycle commercial settings.



IMAGE COURTESY OF I-BEAM SLIDING DOORS

TROLLEYS: THE WORKHORSE OF THE SYSTEM

The trolley — sometimes called a carriage, hanger, or roller — is the wheeled assembly that rides the track and carries the door. Every sliding door has at least two trolleys, and heavy or extra-wide panels often use four. The differences between trolley types are significant across all building categories.

Fixed vs. adjustable trolleys. Fixed trolleys bolt directly to the

door at a set height. Adjustable trolleys incorporate a threaded rod or bolt that lets the installer dial in the door height after hanging — a valuable feature when working with rough-sawn lumber doors, on sites where the track couldn't be set perfectly level, or in renovation projects on existing structures that have settled. Most quality systems offer some degree of adjustment; how much varies by manufacturer and price point.

Wheel material and bearing type. Entry-level trolleys use plain steel wheels running directly on the track. Mid-grade trolleys incorporate sealed or shielded ball bearings, which reduce friction, carry more load, and extend service life. For the smoothest operation and best longevity in working-farm or high-cycle commercial environments, look for trolleys rated for grease-pack or sealed-for-life bearings. Cast-iron wheels are also available and are exceptionally durable, though heavier and best suited to heavier industrial applications.

Single-wheel vs. dual-wheel trolleys. Standard trolleys use a single wheel on each side of the track. Dual-wheel (tandem) trolleys have two wheels per side, doubling the contact area and load capacity. They're the right choice for oversized doors, heavy steel panels, insulated commercial doors, or any application where the door weight approaches the top of the standard trolley's rated capacity.

Anti-jump and retention features. Most trolleys include some form of track retention — a keeper plate, lip, or channel enclosure that prevents the wheel from jumping the track if the door is pushed laterally. In high-wind regions, livestock barns where animals can push against doors, equestrian aisles with active horses, and commercial facilities where forklifts or equipment may contact a door panel, robust retention features are not optional.

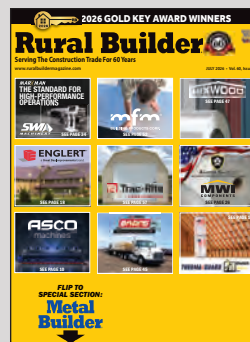
LOAD RATINGS: READING THEM CORRECTLY

Every track and trolley system carries a rated load capacity, but those numbers require some context. Manufacturer load ratings typically reflect static load — a door hanging still — not the dynamic forces generated when a door is opened hard, swings in wind, or is moved by a farm worker in a hurry. A reasonable rule of thumb used by experienced builders is to select hardware rated at 1.5 to 2 times the actual door weight.

Door weight is frequently underestimated. A 4-foot by 8-foot section of 2-inch-thick rough-sawn oak runs roughly 160 to 180 pounds. A similar-sized steel-skinned insulated panel can exceed 250 pounds. A large paired commercial door — two panels on a single header — can easily reach 800 to 1,000 pounds total. Equestrian aisle doors and wide commercial bay doors often surprise builders who haven't weighed them before.

Track deflection is a related concern. Even adequately rated track will sag perceptibly on long runs if the header isn't stiff enough to support it. Track manufacturers publish maximum span tables for unsupported lengths; following them is as

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TRACK AND TROLLEY QUICK-REFERENCE

The table below summarizes the primary track categories, their key characteristics, and their best applications across building types.

Feature	Standard Track	Heavy-Duty Track	Corrosion-Resistant	Stainless Steel
Gauge	12–14 ga.	10–12 ga.	12–14 ga. coated	12–14 ga.
Load rating	Up to 400 lbs.	400–1,000+ lbs.	Up to 600 lbs.	Up to 800 lbs.
Best use	Barns, shops, hobby	Ag, commercial, equestrian	Coastal, livestock	Food/wash-down facilities
Trolley match	Standard	Heavy-duty or std.	Matched coated	Stainless trolleys
Cost factor	Base	1.3–1.7×	1.2–1.5×	3–5×

important as matching load ratings. On commercial buildings and wide equestrian aisle openings, this means consulting span data before header materials are specified — not after the track is on the wall.

GALVANIZING, COATING, AND FINISH CONSIDERATIONS

The environment a sliding door operates in determines the appropriate hardware finish more than almost any other variable. Rural and commercial buildings present an enormous range of conditions, and finish is a functional specification, not a cosmetic one.

Hot-dip galvanizing provides the most robust corrosion protection for steel track and trolleys. The zinc coating bonds metallurgically to the base steel and sacrifices itself preferentially, protecting the underlying metal even if the coating is scratched or abraded. Electro-galvanized or zinc-plated hardware offers a thinner coating that looks similar but provides substantially less protection. Read product specifications carefully and do not assume “galvanized” means hot-dip.

Powder-coated track and trolleys are increasingly common and provide excellent UV and moisture resistance, but the coating can chip at contact points over time. Some builders apply a wax or dry-lubricant treatment to the running surface of powder-coated track to reduce wear at the wheel interface. Powder coat is an especially good choice for agritourism, event barn, and rural retail applications where finish appearance matters.

Stainless steel hardware is the right call for food-processing facilities, seafood operations, wash-down environments, and similarly demanding applications. Its cost — often three to five times that of galvanized steel — is difficult to justify elsewhere, but in those settings, it is genuinely the only appropriate specification.

Livestock barns deserve special mention. Ammonia from manure is corrosive to many coatings and will attack bare steel hardware within a single season. Any building housing poultry, hogs, or dairy cattle should use, at minimum, hot-dip galvanized hardware throughout, with sealed bearings to protect internal

components from airborne particulate.

INSTALLATION TIPS THAT MAKE THE HARDWARE LAST

Even premium hardware fails prematurely when it’s installed carelessly. A few field practices make a disproportionate difference in long-term performance — and they apply regardless of building type.

Get the header right first. The header board or header assembly must be plumb, level, and stiff enough to carry the track and door load without flex. For wood-frame buildings, a minimum doubled 2x12 is common for residential barn doors; heavier applications may call for LVL beams or built-up lumber headers. In metal buildings, track typically mounts to a girt or purlin — confirm that member is adequately sized to carry the door load before track is ordered. No amount of quality hardware compensates for a bouncy header.

Use the right fasteners. Lag screws for track mounting should penetrate solid framing — not just sheathing or cladding — by at least 2.5 inches. In steel-frame buildings, track is typically bolted to a girt with through-bolts and backing plates. Never rely on sheet metal screws alone for track attachment. On commercial and equestrian buildings, hardware suppliers can provide pull-out load data for your fastener pattern — ask for it.

Set trolley spacing correctly. Trolleys are typically spaced at one-quarter and three-quarters of the door width, measured from the leading edge. This distributes the load evenly and minimizes racking as the door travels. On doors wider than 8 feet — common in commercial bays and equestrian aisles — four trolleys spaced at the quarter points are advisable.

Install a bottom guide. A floor-mounted or wall-mounted bottom guide controls lateral movement and prevents wind from blowing the bottom of the door outward. The guide should allow the door to swing slightly — within 1 to 2 inches — but resist sustained lateral force. On equestrian facilities and livestock barns, a robust floor guide is particularly important; animals will find and exploit any slack in the system.

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Lubricate at installation and annually. Dry lubricants (PTFE-based sprays or wax sticks) are preferred over oil-based products on track running surfaces. Oil attracts dust, feed chaff, and grit — all of which accelerate abrasive wear. Sealed-bearing trolleys need little attention, but the running surface itself benefits from periodic treatment. For commercial and equestrian buildings with high cycle counts, a lubrication schedule is worth putting in the owner's manual.

MATCHING HARDWARE GRADE TO BUILDING TYPE

Hardware grade selection should follow a simple logic: match the specification to the harshest combination of door weight, cycle count, and environmental exposure the building will actually see. The matrix below is a useful starting point.

Entry-level hardware with sealed bearings. Appropriate for hobby barns, residential outbuildings, garden sheds, and low-cycle agricultural storage. The sealed bearings — which add only modest cost over plain-wheel systems — are worth specifying even here; they dramatically extend service life without requiring the owner to maintain them.

Mid-grade hardware with heavy-duty track. The right call for most working agricultural buildings: machinery storage, hay and commodity storage, small livestock facilities, and standard pole barns. Also appropriate for agritourism and rural retail settings where cycle counts are moderate, and aesthetics matter.

Heavy-duty hardware with matched trolleys. Required for commercial and light-industrial applications, large equestrian facilities, high-use livestock operations, and any door where the panel weight exceeds 500 pounds. Also appropriate whenever the building owner projects high daily cycle counts — 20 or more open-close cycles per day is the threshold at which heavy-duty specification is worth the cost on cycle-count grounds alone.

Corrosion-resistant or stainless systems. Non-negotiable for hog and poultry confinements, cold storage facilities with frequent wash-downs, coastal buildings within a mile of saltwater, and any food-contact or regulated food-handling environment. Do not substitute galvanized-look products without confirming hot-dip specification.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Door hardware is a small line item in the overall budget of any rural or commercial building project. Still, it's a component that occupies the owner's attention every single day the building is in use. A door that operates smoothly, stays on its track, and holds up for a decade without complaint is one of those small details that earns repeat business and referrals. A door that binds, jumps the track, or rusts prematurely is exactly the opposite.

The variables that drive hardware selection — door weight, cycle count, environment, and building type — are all knowable before the order is placed. Take the time to nail them down.

Weigh the door. Assess the environment. Ask about the owner's usage patterns. Match the track profile and rating to the load, match the trolleys to the track, and install everything on a header that can carry it.

The hardware is ready to do its job. Make sure the structure behind it — and the specification process in front of it — are, too. **RB**

Sources & Resources

INDUSTRY MANUFACTURERS

Harvard Products: Sliding door hardware for agricultural, commercial, and equestrian applications, including track systems and heavy-duty trolley assemblies. harvardproducts.com

I-Beam Door: Heavy-duty sliding door hardware and track systems for agricultural and commercial applications. ibeamdoor.com

MWI Components: Comprehensive technical specifications and installation guides for agricultural sliding door hardware. mwicomponents.com

Plyco Corporation: Door hardware product lines including track, trolleys, and associated barn door components; North American distributor resources available. plyco.net

TRADE & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

National Frame Building Association (NFBA): Resources and technical references for post-frame construction professionals, including hardware and structural attachment guidance. nfba.org

National Barn Builders Association (NBBA): Resources for pole building construction professionals. nationalbarnbuildersassociation.com

Metal Building Manufacturers Association (MBMA): Technical resources for metal building design and construction, including large opening and door system guidance. mbma.com

FURTHER READING

"Sliding Door Systems for Agricultural Buildings," University of Minnesota Extension: Free downloadable guide covering door selection, sizing, and hardware specification for farm structures. extension.umn.edu

NFBA Post-Frame Building Database: Searchable project and product database for post-frame construction professionals. nfba.org/resources.

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When the Bones Need Fixing

A Complete Guide to Repairing Structural Components
Across All Types of Agricultural Buildings

Every farm building tells a story. The lean of an old machine shed, a post that has slowly sunk over decades of freeze-thaw cycles, a timber-frame dairy barn with a cracked bent, a Quonset hut with a buckled rib, a roof purlin bowed under the weight of too many Dakota winters — these are the quiet distress signals that experienced farmers learn to read before a building reads them back in the language of catastrophic failure.

The good news: most structural problems in agricultural buildings can be repaired rather than replaced, saving tens of thousands of dollars and preserving structures that have served

families for generations—the less-good news: agricultural building stock is wildly diverse. A 1940s timber-frame dairy barn, a 1970s arched-steel Quonset, a 1990s post-frame hog confinement facility, and a modern fabric-tension greenhouse all fail in different ways, and they require different repair strategies.

This guide covers structural repair across the full range of agricultural building types found on American farms today — post-frame, timber-frame, steel arch, metal building systems, and hybrid construction — drawing on guidance from university extension specialists, industry associations, and manufacturers with deep experience in agricultural construction.

The principle that applies across all of them is the same: assess accurately, fix the root cause first, then address the symptom. Skipping that order is how repairs become recurring line items.

STEP ONE: KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE

Before any wrench turns, you need to understand your building's structural system. This matters more than most farmers realize. A repair that works perfectly in a post-frame building can be structurally inappropriate — or even dangerous — in a timber-frame or steel arch building, because the load paths are completely different.

Agricultural building stock generally falls into one of these categories:

- Post-frame (pole barn): laminated or round wood columns embedded in the ground or set on concrete, with girts, purlins, and metal or wood roof and wall cladding—the dominant system for new agricultural construction since the 1960s.
- Timber-frame and heavy timber: large-dimension sawn or hewn timbers joined with traditional mortise-and-tenon, pegged, or bolted connections. Common in barns built before the mid-20th century.
- Metal building systems (pre-engineered steel): rigid steel frames with metal skin — increasingly common for machine storage, processing facilities, and large clear-span structures.
- Arched steel (Quonset and similar): self-supporting curved steel ribs covered with corrugated metal sheeting. Widely used for grain storage, equipment shelter, and hay storage.
- Fabric-tension structures: steel or aluminum frames covered with woven or coated fabric membranes. Increasingly popular for hay and livestock shelter.
- Hybrid systems: combinations of the above, common in buildings that have been expanded or modified over decades.

If you're unsure what you have, your state's cooperative extension service is a great starting point. Land-grant universities including Purdue University, Iowa State University, the University of Minnesota, Kansas State University, and Cornell University all have agricultural engineering faculty who can help with identification, assessment, or referrals to qualified professionals in your area.

The American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) publishes standards including EP484, which provides design and construction guidance for post-frame buildings specifically — a useful baseline for understanding what your post-frame structure was or should have been built to handle.

POST-FRAME BUILDINGS: THE POST PROBLEM

No structural repair topic comes up more often in post-frame agricultural buildings than deteriorating embedded posts. Wood columns in direct soil contact are most vulnerable in the zone at and just above grade — where moisture, oxygen, and the

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Products & Manufacturers Referenced

• Perma-Column	permacolumn.com
• Post Protector	postprotector.com
• Planet Saver Industries	planetsaverind.com/
• Simpson Strong-Tie	strongtie.com
• Atlas Fastener	atlasfastener.com
• Palram	palram.com/ag
• MWI Components	mwicomponents.com
• Plyco Corporation	plyco.com
• Wick Buildings	wickbuildings.com
• Graber Post Buildings	graberpost.com

microorganisms that cause wood decay are simultaneously most active.

Preservative treatment has improved dramatically over the decades, but older buildings frequently used posts with treatment levels or chemistry no longer considered adequate for ground contact. Probe the base of a post in a 1970s-era building with a screwdriver or ice pick; in many cases, the wood looks fine a foot above grade but is punky at the base.



IMAGE COURTESY OF POSTPROTECTOR

Post repairs typically fall into three categories. The first is sistering — installing a new post alongside the damaged one, properly attached to existing framing and bearing on an adequate footing. The second is full excavation and replacement, which is disruptive but provides a new post in the original location. The third is installing a mechanical post base system that cuts the damaged post off at grade and transfers load to a concrete foundation element.

For buildings where excavation is impractical — when animals are present, or when concrete floors make digging difficult — prefabricated concrete post bases have become a widely used solution. Perma-Column manufactures precast concrete column

base systems engineered for post-frame construction that can handle loads higher than those they replace to embedded posts when properly installed.

Wick Buildings, one of the country's largest post-frame manufacturers, emphasizes in its technical materials that any post repair must restore the building's complete load path — not just its gravity load capacity but its resistance to lateral wind loads and uplift forces as well. Graber Post Buildings similarly notes that repair details must account for how loads travel from the roof system down through the columns and into the foundation; missing any link in that chain creates a new vulnerability.

When choosing fasteners and connectors for post-frame repairs, hardware selection matters enormously. Simpson Strong-Tie manufactures post caps, column bases, and framing connectors specifically engineered for post-frame construction, with options rated for the corrosive environments common in livestock facilities. Atlas Fastener produces structural fasteners including screw systems designed for post-frame applications. In livestock buildings, where manure gases and high humidity accelerate corrosion, hot-dipped galvanized (HDG) or stainless steel hardware should be considered the minimum standard for any repair.

WARNING SIGNS OF POST FAILURE — POST-FRAME BUILDINGS

- Visible bowing or lean at or near the base of a post
- Soft or spongy wood when probed with a screwdriver — especially at grade
- Dark staining or moisture damage at grade level
- Separation of the post from girts or top plates
- Doors or windows that no longer operate properly
- Floor heaving or cracking near column locations
- Visible lean in the wall plane or out-of-plumb columns

TIMBER-FRAME & HEAVY TIMBER BARNs

Timber-frame barns represent some of the most structurally elegant — and most structurally complex — agricultural buildings on American farms. A well-built timber frame can last well over a century. But when it fails, the failure modes are specific to the system and require specific knowledge to address.

Sill Plates and Foundation Connections

The sill plate — the horizontal timber that sits directly on top of the foundation wall — is almost always the first casualty of moisture infiltration in an older barn. Water wicks up from the foundation, saturates the sill, and rot begins. The sill may look sound from a distance but be completely compromised at its contact with masonry.

Repairing or replacing sill plates in an occupied barn requires careful shoring before any structural member is removed or cut. University of Minnesota Extension's guidance on older farm building repair covers shoring procedures appropriate for timber-



IMAGE COURTESY OF KATHLEEN RILEY

frame structures — the fundamental principle is to transfer loads to temporary supports before cutting, never after.

Bent Repair and Post Replacement

Timber-frame structures are organized around “bents” — transverse frames consisting of posts, tie beams, and rafters. Damage to a bent, whether from decay, overload, vehicle impact, or foundation settlement, can compromise the entire bay. Bent repair typically involves sistering or splicing damaged members using engineered scarf or half-lap joint details, or installing steel side plates when the timber geometry doesn't allow traditional joinery.

The Timber Framers Guild publishes technical bulletins on repair joinery and can provide referrals to craftspeople and engineers with timber-frame experience. For load-bearing repairs in occupied structures, a licensed structural engineer review is strongly recommended.

Foundation and Masonry

Stone and brick foundations common under 19th- and early 20th-century barns develop their own set of issues: spalling mortar, frost heaving, wall bulging, and drainage failures. Repointing — removing deteriorated mortar and replacing it with a compatible mix — is the most common maintenance task. Using Portland cement-heavy mortars on historic stone masonry can actually accelerate damage; a softer, lime-rich mortar matched to the original is usually appropriate. Your state's Historic Preservation Office can often provide technical guidance or referrals even for agricultural structures.

METAL BUILDING SYSTEMS (PRE-ENGINEERED STEEL)

Pre-engineered metal buildings — the rigid-frame steel structures that dominate large machine storage, processing, and commercial agricultural facilities — have their own characteristic failure modes. Because these buildings are engineered as

STRUCTURAL MAINTENANCE & REPAIR

integrated systems, repairs need to be approached with particular care.

Rigid Frame Damage

The primary frames of metal building systems — the tapered or straight steel columns and rafters that carry the roof and wall loads — are typically designed to specific load combinations. When a column is damaged by vehicle impact (one of the most common failure causes in machine storage buildings), the repair must restore not just the cross-section of the member but its precise connection geometry, because the frame is designed as an integrated system.

For significant primary frame damage, contacting the original building manufacturer is the right first step. Most major manufacturers maintain engineering records and can provide repair specifications. If the manufacturer is no longer in business, the Metal Building Manufacturers Association (MBMA) can help identify compatible engineering resources.

Secondary Framing and Cladding

Secondary framing — purlins, girts, and eave struts — is generally more accessible to repair. Damaged purlins can often

be sistered or replaced section by section. Wall and roof panels are typically available through the original manufacturer or compatible third-party sources.

Palram agricultural panels, including their corrugated polycarbonate and PVC products, are used in retrofit and repair applications where natural light transmission is a priority — common in livestock housing renovations where workers and animals benefit from daylighting.

Corrosion in Metal Building Systems

Corrosion is the defining long-term threat to steel agricultural buildings, particularly in livestock facilities. The combination of moisture, manure gases (especially ammonia and hydrogen sulfide), and temperature cycling creates an extremely aggressive environment. Annual inspection of fasteners, flashing, and panel laps — the locations where corrosion typically initiates — is the minimum maintenance standard.

MWI Components, a manufacturer of doors, windows, and ventilation components for agricultural buildings, notes in its product literature that framed openings are particularly vulnerable to water infiltration; the junction between wall panel,



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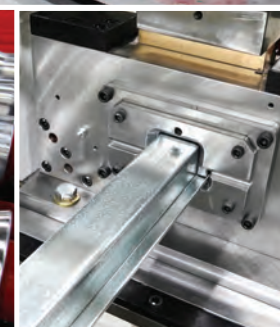
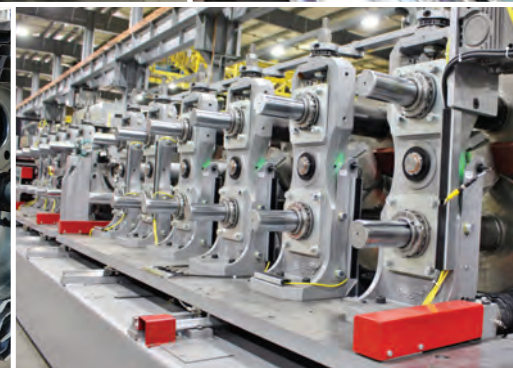
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door frame, and foundation is where corrosion problems most often begin.

Plyco Corporation, a manufacturer of specialty doors and panels for agricultural applications, emphasizes in its materials that replacement panels and door systems should be specified for chemical resistance appropriate to the building's use — a dairy facility has different corrosion challenges than a grain storage building.

ARCHED STEEL (QUONSET AND ARCH BUILDINGS)

Arched steel buildings — Quonsets, arch-rib structures, and their modern equivalents — are among the most common structures on American farms for grain storage, hay storage, and equipment shelter. Their structural simplicity is their greatest asset and, when things go wrong, their greatest challenge.

These buildings are essentially a series of steel ribs bearing on concrete or steel foundation elements. Each rib is part of the structure, and the corrugated metal skin contributes to the system's overall rigidity. When ribs buckle from snow overload, vehicle impact, or corrosion, the repair requires restoring both the rib geometry and the skin's contribution to load distribution.

Buckled arch ribs can sometimes be straightened using hydraulic jacks and carefully applied force — but this requires understanding the original geometry and working methodically. More severely damaged sections typically require rib section replacement. In either case, the building should be unloaded of all stored materials before repair work begins, and temporary shoring should be in place.

Key Repair Principles — Regardless of Building Type

- Diagnose before you repair: understand why the failure occurred, not just what failed

- Shore before you cut: never remove a load-bearing member without first providing temporary support
- Address moisture first: no structural repair will last long in a chronically wet environment
- Restore the full load path: gravity, lateral (wind), and uplift resistance all matter
- Use hardware rated for your environment: HDG or stainless in livestock and high-humidity applications
- Document your work: photographs and written notes are invaluable for future repairs and resale
- Pull permits when required: structural repairs in many jurisdictions require inspection

ROOF STRUCTURE DAMAGE: ALL BUILDING TYPES

Roof system failures in agricultural buildings typically stem from one of four causes: overload from snow, ice, or stored materials; connection failures at key joints; decay in wood members; or corrosion in metal components. Each has a different repair approach, but the process for evaluating them is the same.

Snow and Ice Overload

Snow and ice loads are the most dramatic — and often the most expensive — source of roof damage in northern states. The Midwest Plan Service (MWPS), a cooperative extension program through land-grant universities across the Midwest, publishes load tables and structural plans that are useful for assessing whether your building was designed for regional snow loads. MWPS-9, the Agricultural Engineers Yearbook of Standards, is a foundational reference.

Critically: if a building has suffered significant snow overload and visible deflection, do not attempt to shovel it from above while people or animals are inside. Unloading a damaged structure changes the force distribution and can trigger collapse.

STRUCTURAL MAINTENANCE & REPAIR

Evacuate, shore from below if possible, then assess.

Wood Truss Repair

Field-repairing a wood roof truss is more complex than it appears. Trusses are engineered as complete systems — the forces in each member are calculated for that specific geometry. A cracked chord or split plate changes those forces throughout the truss, and a repair that looks adequate can introduce new stress concentrations.

The Structural Building Components Association (SBCA) publishes the Building Component Safety Information (BCSI) guide, which includes detailed repair guidance for common truss damage scenarios including member breaks, buckled webs, and failed metal connector plates. Their guidance is clear: any truss repair in a load-bearing application should be reviewed by the original truss manufacturer or a licensed structural engineer.

Connections and Hardware

Structural engineers will tell you that in most building failures, it's the connections that give out first, not the members. Nails corrode. Bolts loosen. Timber connectors work free over decades of thermal cycling. In livestock buildings, the corrosive atmosphere from manure gases and humidity significantly accelerates hardware degradation.

Simpson Strong-Tie manufactures framing connectors, post bases, hold-downs, and truss plates used extensively in agricultural construction repair. Their connector selection tools and load tables help match the right hardware to the specific repair geometry. Atlas Fastener's structural screw systems offer an alternative to through-bolting in many repair configurations, with shear and withdrawal values published for structural applications.

When replacing corroded hardware, always step up to a corrosion resistance level appropriate for the environment. The American Wood Council's National Design Specification (NDS) for Wood Construction provides the engineering basis for connection repair details across wood-framed systems.

FOUNDATION ISSUES: ACROSS THE BOARD

Foundation problems are common across all agricultural building types, and they tend to express themselves in the superstructure long before the foundation itself looks alarming. Cracked or bowing walls, doors and windows that stick or won't latch, visible lean in posts or columns — all of these can indicate foundation movement that needs to be addressed at the source.

Concrete Pier and Perimeter Walls

Cracks in poured concrete foundations fall into two broad categories: shrinkage cracks, which are typically non-structural and hairline-width; and structural cracks, which show displacement between faces, are wider than 1/8 inch, or are actively widening. Epoxy injection provides structural bonding for structural cracks; hydraulic cement handles active water infiltration. For significant foundation settlement or wall



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movement, a geotechnical or structural engineer's evaluation is strongly recommended before repair work begins.

Embedded Post Repair at the Foundation Level

For post-frame buildings, the “foundation” is effectively the embedded portion of the post and the concrete around it. When the post itself is sound, but the concrete encasement has deteriorated, or the post has lost bearing, options include pressure-grouting the void space, installing a concrete collar, or using a mechanical post base to transfer load to a new concrete element — the approach used by products like the Perma-Column systems mentioned earlier.

Post Protector manufactures a plastic sleeve system installed during new construction that keeps the wood post out of direct soil contact, dramatically extending post life. For repair applications, this technology is a reminder that any replacement post or sistered post should be protected from the decay zone at grade using appropriate barrier or treatment methods.

DOORS, OPENINGS, AND PERIPHERAL STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Agricultural building doors — sliding, swing, and overhead — are among the most mechanically demanding components on a farm building, and their frames and headers are frequently the first to show signs of structural compromise. A door that drags, won't latch, or has developed a visible gap at a corner is often telling you that the building frame around it has moved.

MWI Components and Plyco Corporation both manufacture agricultural door systems and opening components. Both companies' technical resources emphasize that door frame installation is a structural connection — the frame must be properly fastened to the building framing, with flashing and weather sealing that prevents water infiltration into the wall cavity. A door frame that has been compromised by rot or corrosion at its base should be replaced, not just shimmed back to alignment.

Overhead door hardware — tracks, springs, cables, and operators — should be inspected annually. Failed springs and cables in large agricultural doors represent a genuine safety hazard; qualified technicians should perform replacement of high-tension components.

WHEN TO CALL A PROFESSIONAL — AND WHO TO CALL

Not every repair requires an engineer. Replacing a rotted girt, installing blocking between rafters, or repairing a door header are within the capability of an experienced farm builder or competent general contractor. But some situations absolutely require professional involvement:

- Any repair involving primary structural members — columns, trusses, main beams, or rigid frames
- Foundation repair or significant settlement in any building type
- Any building that has experienced partial or near-complete collapse



IMAGE COURTESY OF IBEAM SLIDING DOORS

- Buildings used for livestock housing or high-density storage, where failure consequences are severe
- Repairs on structures with unknown load history, missing design documentation, or previous unauthorized modifications
- Pre-engineered metal building primary frame damage — always contact the original manufacturer first

For finding qualified help, the National Frame Building Association (NFBA) maintains a contractor directory of post-frame specialists. The Metal Building Manufacturers Association (MBMA) can provide resources for metal building system repairs. Your state's department of agriculture or farm bureau may be able to refer you to engineers familiar with agricultural construction.

University extension offices remain one of the most underutilized resources available to farmers. Institutions including Purdue University, Iowa State University, the University of Minnesota, Kansas State University, and Cornell University have agricultural and biosystems engineering faculty who conduct assessments, provide technical guidance, or can connect

you with qualified engineers.

A WORD ON PREVENTION

The most cost-effective structural repair is the one you never have to make. Maintaining gutters and downspouts to keep water away from foundations, keeping vegetation cleared from building perimeters, ensuring adequate ventilation to control interior humidity, and conducting a thorough annual visual inspection will catch most problems while they're still inexpensive.

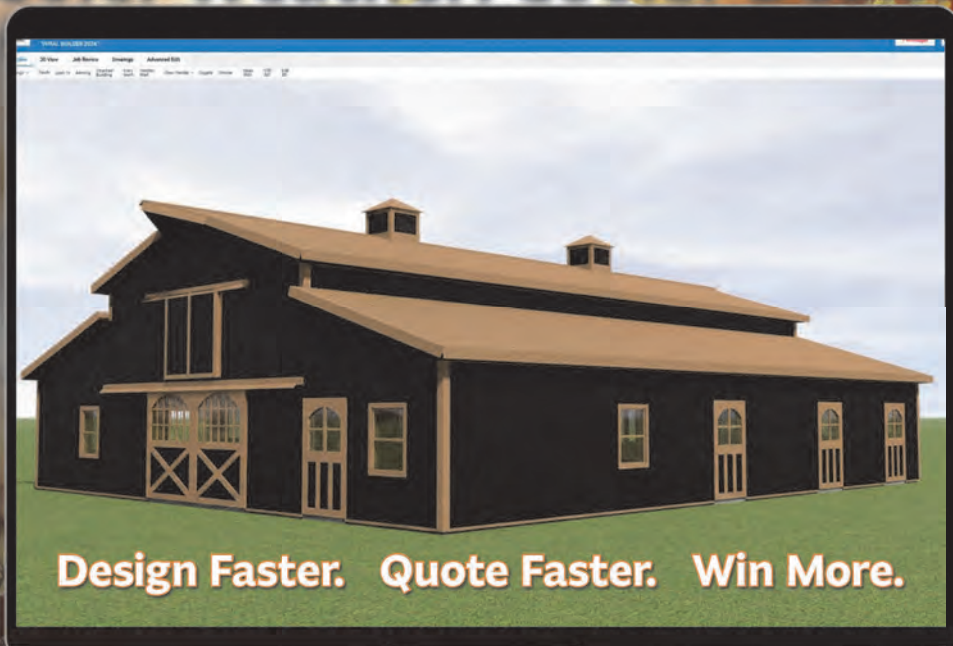
The NFBA recommends maintaining a building log — a simple record of inspection dates, observations, and work performed. This documentation keeps you on top of maintenance and can be invaluable when evaluating a building for purchase or insurance purposes.

Your farm buildings are working assets. Treat them like the rest of your equipment: inspect them regularly, address problems early, and get qualified help when the job exceeds your expertise. The cost of a proper repair is almost always a fraction of the cost of replacement — and a well-maintained structure can serve another generation of your family's operation. **RB**

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Construction Systems for Specialty Retail and Commercial Buildings

As boutique retailers, service businesses, and flex-commercial operators look for buildings that go up fast and perform for decades, post-frame, pre-engineered steel, and hybrid construction systems are all finding new footing in the storefront market.

For most of its modern history, post-frame construction has been shorthand for agricultural buildings: hay barns, machine sheds, and dairy facilities built quickly on wood columns instead of a poured foundation. That reputation is changing. Across the country, a growing share of new specialty retail and commercial construction, garden centers, farm stores, breweries and taprooms, self-storage and flex-retail centers, veterinary clinics, and boutique fitness studios, is being built using post-frame, pre-engineered steel, or hybrid systems that borrow from both. The appeal is straightforward: lower cost per square foot, faster construction timelines, wide clear-span interiors free of load-bearing columns, and design flexibility that allows a building to look nothing like a barn when the finish materials say otherwise.

For builders making the jump from agricultural work into commercial and retail projects, the fundamentals still apply regardless of which framing system is on the table, but the tolerances tighten. A retail storefront has to meet accessibility

codes, manage foot traffic and parking, control moisture and pests at ground level for decades of daily public use, and present a finished, branded appearance rather than a strictly functional one. That shift touches nearly every system in the building, from the ground up.

MATCHING THE CONSTRUCTION SYSTEM TO THE BUILDING TYPE

Commercial real estate covers a wide range of building types, and no single framing system fits all of them equally well. Understanding where post-frame, pre-engineered steel, and other systems are each competitive helps builders target the right opportunities as they move into this segment.



Standalone, single-tenant buildings are the clearest fit for both post-frame and pre-engineered steel. Free-standing stores, quick-service restaurants, banks, and other pad-site buildings on visible outparcels are typically single-story structures with straightforward footprints, and both systems handle that profile

efficiently; the final choice usually comes down to span length, budget, and the exterior finish the tenant wants. The same is true of flex buildings that combine warehouse, showroom, and light retail or office space under one roof: wide clear spans, high

ceilings, and the ability to reconfigure interior partitions later play to the strengths of both systems, and hybrid designs, steel-frame primary structure with post-frame secondary framing, or the reverse, are increasingly common on these projects.

Specialty and special-purpose buildings represent a second strong opportunity. Rural and suburban healthcare facilities, veterinary clinics, urgent care buildings, and animal hospitals are frequently single-story, purpose-built structures where speed and open interiors reduce both construction cost and time to occupancy. Agricultural-adjacent retail, farm stores, garden centers, and feed and equipment dealers remain a natural extension of the post-frame industry's traditional base.

Larger, multi-tenant formats are a harder match for either system in its typical form. Lifestyle centers and theme centers are usually built at a scale and with an architectural complexity that favors conventional steel-frame or masonry construction with masonry or curtain-wall facades. However, individual pad buildings within those developments, an anchor restaurant or a free-standing specialty shop, are still frequently post-frame or pre-engineered steel. Mixed-use buildings that stack residential or office space above ground-floor retail generally exceed what

either system is designed for in its standard form, since both are best suited to single-story or single-story-with-mezzanine construction rather than true multi-story structures; those projects typically move to structural steel or concrete framing with a different building envelope entirely. Hospitality and entertainment venues such as theaters, resorts, and casinos fall outside the typical scope of post-frame and pre-engineered steel as well. However, ancillary buildings on those properties - storage, maintenance, and back-of-house structures- are frequently built with one or the other regardless of what the main building uses.

STEEL-FRAME AND HYBRID SYSTEMS AS A COMPLEMENT TO POST-FRAME

Pre-engineered metal buildings, steel columns and rigid-frame or truss systems manufactured off-site and erected on a concrete foundation, are the most common alternative to post-frame for specialty retail and commercial projects, and the two systems increasingly show up on the same job site. A pre-engineered steel frame can carry longer clear spans, higher wind and seismic loads, and taller eave heights than a comparable wood post-frame structure, which makes it the more common choice for larger

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flex-industrial buildings, big-box-adjacent retail, and buildings in high-wind or high-seismic regions. Post-frame, in turn, typically wins on cost and speed for smaller and mid-sized single-story buildings where those higher load capacities aren't required. Many builders now offer both, or a hybrid of the two, steel primary framing with wood-frame infill walls, or a post-frame structure with a steel-truss clear-span roof, matched to whatever a given commercial client's budget and building program calls for. Exterior panel systems bridge both approaches: the same steel roofing and wall panels are commonly specified across post-frame, pre-engineered steel, and hybrid buildings alike, which keeps the finished appearance and performance consistent no matter which structural system is underneath.

STARTING BELOW GRADE: PROTECTING THE STRUCTURE WHERE IT MEETS THE SOIL

Every post-frame building's long-term performance depends on what happens at the base of each column, and commercial applications raise the stakes considerably. A retail building with a 20- or 30-year mortgage and a tenant lease attached to it cannot afford the wood decay or heaving that a lightly used outbuilding might tolerate. That has pushed many commercial post-frame projects toward precast concrete column brackets or engineered wood-protection systems that lift structural wood away from ground contact and soil moisture entirely, while still preserving the speed advantage of a post-frame build over a full poured foundation. Pre-engineered steel buildings sidestep this particular issue since their columns anchor to concrete piers or a slab foundation rather than embedding in the ground. Still, the underlying principle, keeping the structural connection protected from moisture over decades of service, applies across every framing system.

Ground-contact protection sleeves and wraps serve a similar purpose for builders who prefer to keep a more traditional embedded-post approach while still addressing the moisture and insect exposure that a commercial building's warranty and insurance requirements demand.

LETTING THE LIGHT IN: DAYLIGHTING FOR RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS

Retail and showroom environments live or die on how a space feels to a customer walking through the door, and natural light is one of the most cost-effective ways to make an interior feel open and welcoming. Wide-open truss and rigid-frame systems, whether wood post-frame or pre-engineered steel, make daylighting simple to design around, and many commercial projects now specify translucent structural panels in the roof or upper wall sections in place of, or alongside, standard steel panels. The result is diffused, shadow-free daylight across the sales floor without the added cost, maintenance, and break-in risk of large expanses of glass.

ROOF SYSTEMS BUILT FOR PUBLIC-FACING BUILDINGS

Commercial roofs carry different burdens than agricultural ones. Snow sliding off a metal roof onto a customer entrance, delivery dock, or parking area is a liability question in a retail setting in a way it rarely is on a machine shed. Standing seam and exposed-fastener panel systems on specialty retail buildings, again regardless of whether the structure underneath is post-frame or pre-engineered steel, increasingly specify engineered snow retention and attachment hardware designed to clamp to the panel seam without penetrating the roof membrane, preserving both the weathertightness of the roof and the building's warranty.

FASTENING SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURAL CONNECTIONS

As commercial buildings take on longer spans, heavier snow and wind loads, and mixed-use interior framing for retail buildouts, the fasteners holding panels and framing together carry more engineering weight than in a typical agricultural building. Coating systems, color-matching, and documented pull-out and pull-over strength have all moved from a niche request to a standard part of the commercial submittal package, and builders now have a wide field of fastener manufacturers to choose from depending on the framing material, panel type, and warranty term a given project calls for.



STEEL PANELS, FINISH SYSTEMS, AND CURB APPEAL

A commercial or retail building's exterior does double duty as both cladding and branding, whether the frame underneath is wood post-frame or steel. Builders working in this space are increasingly asked about fire ratings, especially for buildings near property lines or in mixed-use commercial zones, along with paint systems and color programs that can carry a corporate palette or a more upscale material look than a typical rural building. Metal panel manufacturers serving both the post-frame and pre-engineered steel markets have responded with expanded testing documentation and finish options aimed squarely at commercial specifiers rather than agricultural buyers alone.

DOORS AND ACCESS: BALANCING CUSTOMERS AND DELIVERIES

Specialty retail buildings often need two very different kinds of openings in the same structure: welcoming, accessible entries for customers, and durable, heavy-duty doors for deliveries and

back-of-house operations. Sliding door hardware and track systems, long used for agricultural equipment doors, are being specified in commercial applications for their durability and low maintenance, while manufacturers of translucent and insulated door and window components are seeing more requests for products that meet accessibility and insulation code requirements without sacrificing the industrial character that many retail brands want for their storefronts.

A GROWING SEGMENT FOR BUILDERS

Specialty retail and commercial work will not replace agricultural construction as the core of the post-frame industry. Still, it represents a meaningful and growing segment for builders willing to adapt their processes, and in some cases their framing system, to commercial code review, accessibility requirements, and a public-facing finish standard. The building envelope, structural connections, and site protection details that once distinguished a well-built agricultural structure from a marginal one are now the same details commercial clients are asking about directly, whatever system ends up holding the building up. For builders, that means the fundamentals of good construction, sound

SOURCES & RESOURCES

- Graber Post - graberpost.com
- Perma-Column - permacolumn.com
- Post Protector - postprotector.com
- Wick Buildings - wickbuildings.com
- Palram - palramamericas.com
- Lakeside Construction Fasteners - lakesidefasteners.com
- Wildcat Fasteners - metalwholesale.com/wildcat
- Levi's Building Components - levisbuildingcomponents.com
- Direct Metals Inc. (DMI) - directmetalsinc.com
- East Coast Fasteners (Plyco Corporation) - plyco.com
- Triangle Fastener Corporation - trianglefastener.com
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engineering, ground and foundation protection, weathertight roof systems, and durable hardware translate directly into a new and expanding market. **RB**

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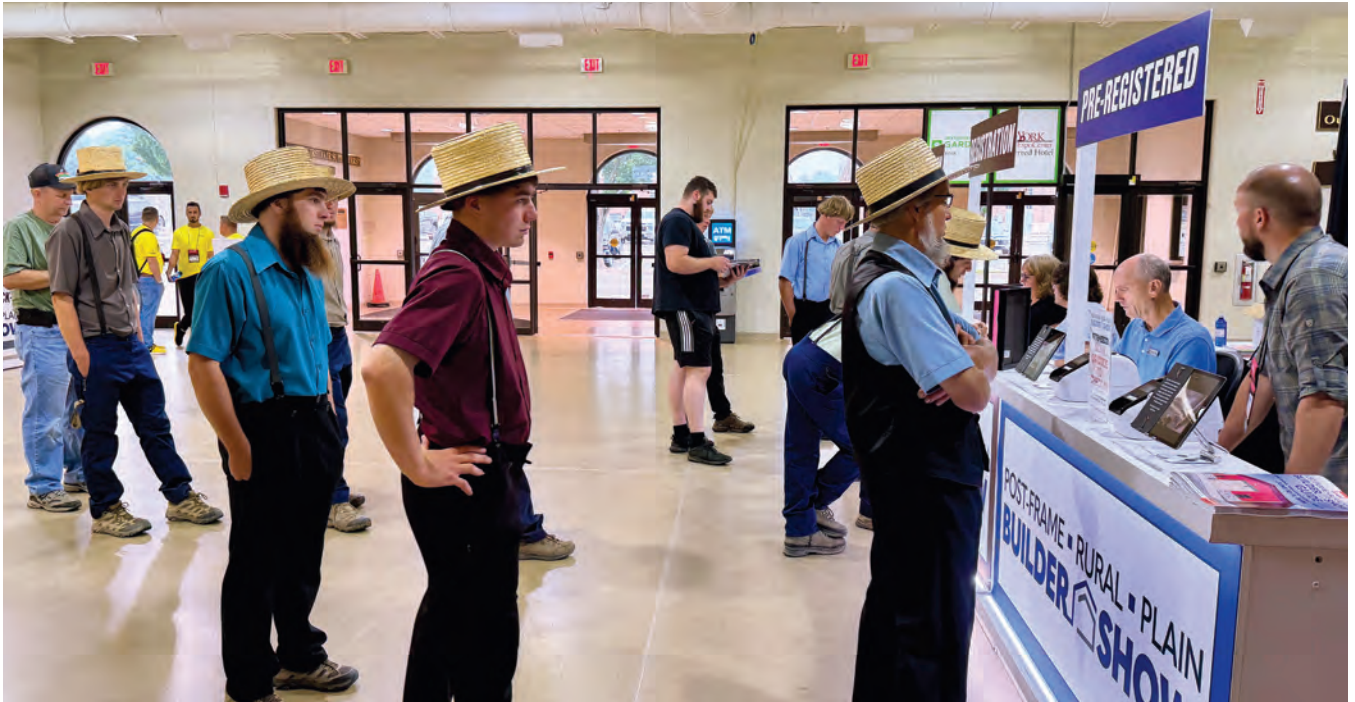
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Early Bird Check-In was a Breeze.

Post-Frame Builder Show

Scenes From Around the Show



Graber Post Booth.

A certain kind of crowd forms when a session hits a nerve — folding chairs dragged in from the hallway, people standing three deep along the back wall, phones out not to check email but to snap a slide. That was the scene Thursday morning at the third annual Post-Frame Builder Show in York, Pennsylvania, when the Barndominium Business Panel opened the day.

By 8:50 a.m. — ten minutes before the scheduled start — the room was already standing-room only. For a session slotted before the show floor even opened, that's not a scheduling accident. It's a signal: barndominiums aren't a side conversation in post-frame anymore. They're the conversation.

Randy Chaffee of Source One Marketing kept the panel moving through the questions builders actually came to ask — financing hurdles, code gray areas, and how to price a residential job when your crew has spent 20 years pricing pole barns. Panelists Cole



The United Steel Supply Team.

Wolford of Graber Post Buildings, Todd Palmer of Rigidply Rafters, Chris Miller of First Federal Bank of Kansas City, and Joe Shimp of Construction Conestoga didn't always agree on the particulars. Still, they agreed on the trajectory: the demand is real,



Attendees finding solutions and answers to their questions.



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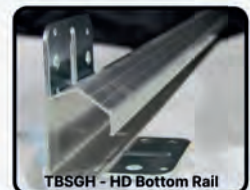
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it's growing, and the builders who figure out the financing and code questions now will own the category later. That momentum carried naturally onto the floor.

Wednesday had already set the tone for that kind of engagement. Attendees fueled up on a complimentary continental breakfast each morning of the show before the sessions even started, and the

early rooms filled fast — a preview of the standing-room crowd Thursday's panel would draw. Wednesday evening carried the hospitality further with a complimentary dinner, giving builders, suppliers, and exhibitors a chance to keep the day's conversations going over a meal instead of scattering back to hotel rooms.

Once the doors opened, exhibitors worked a floor that felt busy



Ken McDonald of Post Protector giving in booth education.



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rather than sprawling — the kind of show where you can actually finish a conversation without someone tapping your shoulder for the next appointment. That's by design. The show has always aimed for a qualified audience over sheer foot traffic, and this year's floor reflected it: fewer wasted conversations. These more attendees showed up with specific ideas and specific problems to solve. Booths ranged from equipment heavyweights like

ASC Machine Tools and Acu-Form Rollforming Equipment, to hardware and door specialists like Powerlift Hydraulic Doors and AceClamp, to hands-on education at booths like Post Protector's, where Ken McDonnell walked attendees through in-ground post protection in real time. The energy matched the morning's packed sessions. It carried through both days, from Wednesday's steady foot traffic and dinner-table networking to Thursday's after-



Van Mark demonstrated their portable bending and forming tools.



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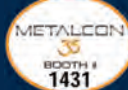
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panel rush, when more than one exhibitor reported their best booth conversations of the show happening.

A FITTING CLOSE: THE GOLD KEY OF EXCELLENCE AND METAL OF HONOR AWARDS

One of the most enjoyable parts of the show was presenting the Rural Builder Gold Key of Excellence Award and the Metal Roofing Metal of Honor Award.

Both honors work the same way: nomination and vote are entirely reader-driven. Each year, Rural Builder and Metal Roofing magazines publish a ballot



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— in print, online, and by email — and it's industry professionals themselves, not the publications' editors, who decide which suppliers make the cut. It's builders and contractors casting votes for the partners who've actually delivered for them: on-time shipments, products that hold up, a phone that gets answered when a job goes sideways.

That's what makes the award worth having. It isn't a sales award or a booth-traffic award — it's a trust award, decided by the exact audience a supplier depends on to keep specifying their product. For companies that have racked up a decade or two of consecutive wins, it becomes a running scoreboard of reputation: a tangible marker that the relationships they've built with builders aren't a one-year fluke; they're a track record.

It's a moment that pulls the whole event into focus — a reminder that behind the booths and sessions are companies that have spent years, in some cases decades, earning the industry's trust one job at a time.

Mark your calendars: the fourth annual Post-Frame Builder Show heads to the Midwest next year, taking place June 23–24, 2027, at the Century Center in South Bend, Indiana. **RB**



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Rigidply Rafters sharing knowledge about their 100% glue-laminated posts.



Formwright showed off their complete package setups with machines, tools, and trailers.



Green Post teaching about in-ground wood protection.



Strongwall Columns showed their laminated columns, pads, brackets and more.



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Where Post-Frame Stands in 2026

Every builder has a gut feeling about where the market's headed. Here's what the numbers say and how they frame the year ahead.

MATERIALS: STEADY, BUT WATCH THE FINE PRINT

After the wild price swings of the past few years, 2025 brought builders something they hadn't seen in a while — relative calm. Steel prices stabilized through the back half of the year, and framing lumber settled into a \$425–\$475 per thousand board feet range, close to historical norms. That stability hasn't fully carried into 2026, though. Overall construction material costs are running 3–5% higher year-over-year, with steel, concrete, and copper leading the increases, and forecasters expect that pattern to continue through the first half of the year.

The bigger story for post-frame builders may not be price — it's lead time. Steel fabrication windows have stretched to 12–16 weeks in many markets, up from the 8–10 weeks builders could count on a few years ago, and custom orders can run 20 weeks or more. For the bid table, that means price steel early, build schedule contingency into every quote, and don't assume this year's material cost is next quarter's material cost.

Pricing behavior has also become more fragmented than in past cycles. Rather than moving together, steel, lumber, and concrete are now responding to their own separate supply-and-demand pressures — tariffs and trade policy on the metals side, energy costs on the concrete side, regional mill capacity on the lumber side. That means a blanket “materials are up” or “materials are down” assumption isn't reliable anymore; each category needs to be tracked on its own, and estimating software or a supplier relationship that flags changes in real time is worth more than it used to be. Pricing cycles have shortened industry-wide too — updates that once came quarterly can now happen within weeks — and estimates built on last season's numbers are underpriced before the first post goes in the ground.

LABOR: STILL THE REAL BOTTLENECK

If materials are the headline, labor is the story underneath it. Industry-wide, the construction trades need roughly 500,000 net new workers this year just to keep pace with demand — a number complicated by the fact that over 40% of today's skilled workforce is expected to retire within the next five years. Nine in ten contractors report difficulty filling skilled trade positions, and nearly half say they've had a project delayed by workforce gaps in the past year. The shortage isn't evenly spread across trades, either — electricians are especially hard to find, with roughly one in five already over age 55, right as data center construction and other large commercial work competes for the same limited pool.

For post-frame specifically, this is where the category's efficiency advantage matters most. Clear-span construction, fewer specialized trades, and faster close-in than stick framing all

reduce a builder's exposure to a labor market that isn't loosening up anytime soon. A crew that can frame, dry-in, and finish a building with a fraction of the trade coordination a stick-built project requires is simply less exposed to the shortage than a builder competing for the same framers, electricians, and finish carpenters everyone else is chasing. In this environment, crews that can move fast and finish clean are the ones winning bids — not necessarily the crews with the lowest material cost.

FINANCING: RATES ARE HIGH, BUT THE MONEY IS MOVING

Construction lending remains the quiet variable that can make or break a project's timeline. Construction loan rates are currently running well above conventional mortgage rates — commonly in the 7.5–11% range depending on the lender, the borrower's credit profile, and the project type — and most lenders still require a substantial down payment along with detailed plans, a line-item budget, and a proven builder relationship before releasing funds. That's a meaningfully higher cost of capital than buyers were working with a few years ago, and it's pushing some ag and equine clients toward phased builds or scaled-back scopes rather than shelving projects entirely.

That said, industry forecasters describe 2026 lending conditions as “rebalancing” rather than tightening further. Credit standards are expected to hold steady rather than worsen, and capital continues to flow into well-planned projects with experienced builders attached. For rural clients specifically, USDA construction-to-permanent loan programs remain a meaningful path to building without a large down payment for buyers who qualify — worth keeping in your back pocket for conversations with first-time ag or residential clients pricing out a build.

A REGIONAL READ: WHAT THE MINNEAPOLIS FED IS SEEING

National numbers only tell part of the story, and for much of Rural Builder's readership, the more useful read comes from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. The Minneapolis Fed's Ninth District — Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and parts of Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula — is one of the most heavily agricultural districts in the Federal Reserve system, and its quarterly Ag Credit Survey has been sending a consistent signal through the first half of 2026: farm finances are tight, and it's showing up in building and equipment budgets.

More than three-quarters of district agricultural lenders reported that farm incomes decreased in the first quarter of 2026 compared with a year earlier, even after a strong 2025 harvest — low crop prices and a spike in fertilizer and fuel costs ate into

the gains growers expected to see. The response on the capital spending side was sharp: roughly two-thirds of lenders reported that farm operations decreased spending on equipment and buildings, with only a handful reporting any increase. Farm loan interest rates ticked up slightly even as demand for credit grew, and loan repayment rates continued to soften — collateral requirements have edged up at a subset of lending institutions as a result.

None of that means the building market in farm country is closing up shop. Regional outreach director Joe Mahon has pointed out that even as new machinery purchases slow, service and upkeep spending on existing equipment has stayed stable or even ticked upward — farmers are keeping what they have running longer rather than buying new. That same logic extends to structures: a producer who isn't in a position to finance a new combine this year may still be a strong prospect for a smaller, well-timed building investment — a machine shed to protect the equipment they're now committed to running longer, or a repair to an aging structure rather than a full replacement. Cattle operations have also fared better than crop-only operations through this stretch, since livestock income has been comparatively resilient — worth keeping in mind when prioritizing which segment of your ag client base to focus on first this year.

For builders working outside the Ninth District, the takeaway still applies: check your regional Fed bank's ag credit survey before you build out your farm-client pipeline for the year. Conditions vary meaningfully by district, and a five-minute read against your own territory beats guessing from national headlines.

WHAT'S SELLING: AG STAYS STEADY, EQUINE AND SHOPS KEEP CLIMBING

Production agriculture remains the bread and butter of the post-frame world, but the growth is happening at the edges. Equestrian construction continues to stand apart from general agricultural work — these buyers are investing more in interior, and curb appeal than a typical livestock or equipment building, and a well-executed 40x80 or 50x100 center-aisle barn with a tack room and wash rack is commanding premium pricing accordingly. Equine buyers also tend to be more willing to wait out extended fabrication timelines for the right finish package, which makes them a good fit for builders currently squeezed by steel lead times elsewhere in their pipeline.

Shop buildings remain the single most common post-frame project outside of production ag, driven by buyers who want a heated workspace, RV storage, or a hobby building with none of the compromises of a garage. Hybrid buildings — barndominiums, farm-store-and-storage combos, and buildings that mix living space with working space — are also one of the fastest-growing categories in the segment, reflecting buyers who want one structure to do the job of three rather than financing separate builds for each.

On the pure agricultural side, broader trends toward climate-

adapted farming, tighter margins, and rising mechanization are pushing demand for buildings that do more than provide shelter — think integrated ventilation, equipment bays sized for larger modern machinery, and structures built to accommodate monitoring and automation systems rather than retrofit them in later. Builders who can speak to those features during the sales conversation, not just square footage and price per foot, are positioned to win the more sophisticated ag accounts.

The takeaway for 2026: builders who quote fast, hold schedules despite fabrication delays, speak clearly about financing options, and pitch post-frame efficiency over labor-intensive alternatives are positioned to grow — regardless of where material prices or interest rates land next quarter. **RB**

SOURCES

- Associated Builders and Contractors
- AGC-NCCER 2025 Workforce Survey
- Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Ag Credit Survey, Q1 2026; industry material cost and construction lending reporting, Q1–Q2 2026.

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JLG Industries, Inc., an Oshkosh Corporation business and a global manufacturer of mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs) and telehandlers, announces the redesigned JLG® SkyTrak® 10042, 10054 and 12054 telehandlers for the North American market. Part of JLG's full SkyTrak telehandler line update, these next-generation machines deliver updated technology and serviceability.

Purpose-built for demanding construction, infrastructure, industrial and material-handling applications, the refreshed models offer up to 12,000-lb. lift capacity and up to 53-ft 2-in lift height, making them ideal for lifting heavy pallets, staging materials, supporting steel erection and handling large equipment on modern job sites.

The remastered SkyTrak 10042, 10054 and 12054 models feature updated technology and functionality engineered to meet evolving job site demands. Each model is powered by a Tier 4 Final Cummins F3.8 110-hp diesel engine and equipped with a 4-speed Powershift transmission featuring new SmartShift technology, which automatically shifts between third and fourth gears to support efficient operation.

These models also feature reimagined technology, including a new advanced control system with updated diagnostics and expanded functionality, including optional Load Stability Indication (LSI) and Seatbelt Engagement and Operator Presence (SEAOP) technologies.

Designed to support operator efficiency, the models' reworked functionality includes an electric-over-hydraulic joystick with integrated auxiliary hydraulic functions and attachment tilt controls for greater multifunction capability. Auxiliary hydraulic connections have also been relocated to the side of the boom head, supporting streamlined attachment changes.



■ CENTRAL STATES MANUFACTURING NAMES NEW VP

Central States Inc., a provider of metal building components, roofing, and building solutions, has named Melissa Dunson Vice President of Sales and Marketing for the Central States Manufacturing business.

Dunson brings extensive leadership experience in customer engagement, commercial strategy, marketing, product management, and sales enablement to the role. Since joining Central States in 2024, she has played an instrumental role in strengthening customer relationships, aligning sales and marketing initiatives, and developing programs that help customers and sales teams succeed.

As Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Dunson will lead Central States' sales organization, focusing on accelerating growth, enhancing the customer experience, and delivering long-term value to customers across the company's markets, while continuing to provide leadership over the Marketing and Sales Enablement functions of the business.

An industry veteran with more than 15 years of experience in building products, Dunson has worked closely with sales, operations, product management, customer experience, and marketing teams over her career to support business growth and strengthen and elevate company positions in the marketplace. Her customer-first approach and focus on building trusted relationships have helped drive success for both Central States and its customers.



■ RIMA INTERNATIONAL PRESENTING AT METALCON

With all the economic challenges that the world is facing, energy efficiency is a top priority. The challenge is, you don't know what you don't know, right? That's why the Reflective Insulation Manufacturers Association International is conducting an educational workshop at the upcoming Metalcon Conference being held October 7-9 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida.

RIMA International is helping to start this event off right on day one Wednesday, October 7th at Noon. The session is titled "Reflective Insulation & Radiant Barriers in Metal Building Design: Solving Real-World Thermal, Moisture, and Energy Challenges" and is hosted by industry experts Dante Ferrari, Philip Ramstack and Kelly Myers.

Metal buildings present unique thermal and moisture challenges due to highly conductive assemblies, wide temperature swings, and increasing energy-efficiency requirements. Traditional insulation strategies alone often fall short in controlling radiant heat transfer, condensation risk, and long-term operational costs. This session will explore how reflective insulation and radiant barrier systems are successfully used in metal building construction to address real-world performance challenges. Attendees will gain a clear understanding of radiant heat transfer, condensation control strategies, and how

reflective insulation systems complement mass insulation in metal roofs, walls, and HVAC applications. This session combines building-science fundamentals, code-recognized applications, and real-world project examples to help architects, engineers, contractors, and metal building professionals make informed design and insulation decisions.

■ FASTENMASTER DONATES \$475,000 OF FASTENERS

FastenMaster, a division of OMG Building Products, and a manufacturer of fastening solutions for professional contractors, has donated \$475,000 worth of its MVP Multipurpose Wood Screws through the Home Depot Foundation to support ToolBank Disaster Services. ToolBank is a national non-profit organization that provides tools, equipment and ex-



pertise for disaster relief and assistance in communities throughout the country.

The donation is part of the company's commitment to provide fasteners wherever needed most, whether to help those in need after a disaster or to teach the next

generation of PRO contractors.

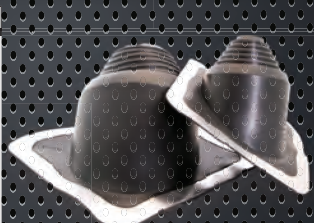
"We are proud to support ToolBank through the Home Depot Foundation, and Habitat for Humanity," said David Ellis, vice president of sales and marketing of FastenMaster. "We expect that the 2.5 million fasteners donated to those two organizations will go a long way towards helping those in need. In addition, it's critical that vocational high school students have an opportunity to practice actual building techniques with the real-world products top PROs use."

MVP fasteners are general purpose construction fasteners designed for maximum connection strength, durability and corrosion resistance. They can be used in interior or exterior applications and are ideal for a wide range of projects, including framing, decking, fencing, and cabinetry, among others. **RB**

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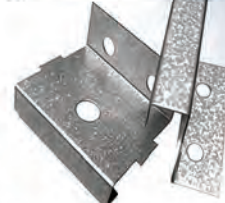


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The Lost Art of Following Through

In an industry built on craftsmanship, precision, and reputation, it's easy to assume customers choose a builder based solely on quality or price. But the real difference often comes down to something simpler: whether the builder follows through.

Years ago, while selling post-frame buildings, I met with a prospective customer to discuss a new project. We walked the site, talked through the details, and I left with everything I needed to prepare a proposal.

Before I left, the customer surprised me.

"Randy, I appreciate your time, but I'm probably going with another company."

No one likes hearing that, but I thanked him for his honesty, wished him well, and told him I'd be happy to help if anything changed.

A few weeks later, my phone rang.

"Is your quote still good?"

It was.

"What happened?" I asked.

"The other guy disappeared."

The competitor had won the project, then stopped communicating. No updates. No schedule. No return phone calls. The customer hadn't changed his mind about the building—he'd changed his mind about who he trusted to build it.

That lesson has stayed with me throughout my career.

Customers don't just buy buildings. They buy confidence, and confidence comes from knowing someone is paying attention, keeping promises, and staying engaged throughout the process.

Too often, opportunities aren't lost because another builder had a better price or a stronger product. They're lost because follow-through is missing, and confidence is slowly disappearing.

When communication stops, customers begin filling in the blanks themselves. They wonder if their project still matters. They question whether commitments are being kept. They start second-guessing the decision they felt good about just days earlier.

Silence creates uncertainty. Follow-through creates confidence. Most builders don't intentionally ignore customers. They're

juggling crews, weather delays, material deliveries, inspections, estimates, and a dozen other responsibilities. But customers don't see all of that.

They see—or don't see—communication.

Returning a phone call when you promised. Sending an update when schedules change. Letting a customer know materials have arrived and explaining a weather delay before they have to ask. These small actions build trust long before the first post is set.

My friend Marvin Montgomery, known to many as The Sales Doctor, has long shared a piece of advice that deserves repeating: “Don't quote and hope.”

It's a simple phrase, but it describes a habit that quietly costs builders more business than bad pricing ever does. A salesperson spends hours on a proposal—measuring, sourcing materials, running numbers, making sure the estimate is accurate—and then treats the job as finished the moment it lands in the customer's inbox. From there, the strategy becomes waiting and waiting for the phone to ring. Waiting for a reply. Hoping the number speaks for itself.

It rarely does.

A quote is not a conversation. It's a snapshot of information, and information alone doesn't close a job—reassurance does. While the builder is waiting, the customer is often doing something very different: comparing, second-guessing, or fielding a call from someone else who followed up first. Silence after a quote doesn't read as confidence. It reads as disinterest, even when that's the last thing the builder intended.

“Don't quote and hope” is really a reminder that the proposal is the beginning of the sales process, not the end of it. A short call a few days later—“Just wanted to check if you had any questions on the numbers”—does more than most people realize. It tells the customer someone is still paying attention. It opens the door to concerns they might not have raised on their own: financing questions, timeline worries, a spouse who needs convincing. Those conversations rarely happen unless the builder initiates them.

Follow-up doesn't have to be aggressive to be effective. Nobody wants a salesperson who calls every other day asking for a decision. But there's a wide gap between pestering a customer and simply staying present, and that gap is where most lost jobs live. A well-timed check-in shows confidence in the product without pressuring the buyer toward it.

Follow-through isn't about applying pressure. It's about remaining present, because that is what builds confidence.

It Doesn't End at Signing

That responsibility doesn't end when the contract is signed.

In many ways, that's when it becomes even more important.

For many customers, a new frame building is one of the largest investments they'll ever make. They understand that weather delays happen, suppliers miss delivery dates, and schedules change. What they struggle with isn't bad news—it's no news.

A simple call saying, “We're a few days behind because of the weather, but here's our updated plan,” often preserves trust.

Silence rarely does.

Every project encounters challenges. Communication doesn't eliminate those challenges, but it keeps them from becoming larger than they need to be. When customers know what's happening, they remain confident. When they remain confident, they're more patient, more understanding, and far more likely to recommend your company to someone else.

Follow-Through After the Final Invoice

And that leads to perhaps the most overlooked part of follow-through.

It continues after the building is complete.

A quick phone call a few weeks after completion. A handwritten thank-you note. A follow-up six months later to ask how everything is performing. These small gestures remind customers they weren't simply another project on the schedule.

They were a relationship worth maintaining.

Many of the strongest referrals in our industry come from builders who stay connected long after the final invoice has been paid.

As I think back to that customer who called asking if my quote was still good, I'm reminded that the competitor didn't lose the project because he lacked skill or offered an inferior build.

He lost it because he stopped communicating.

In today's construction industry, technology has given us more ways than ever to stay connected. Yet one timeless truth remains: follow-through still matters most.

People want to know someone is paying attention.

The builders who stand out aren't always the biggest companies or the ones with the flashiest marketing. They're the ones who do exactly what they said they were going to do.

They return the call.

They send the update.

They answer the question.

They keep the customer informed.

They follow through.

Because the promise sets the expectation, and the follow-through builds trust.

The promise starts the expectation.

The follow-through builds trust—and wins business. **RB**

Randy Chaffee brings four-plus decades of experience to the post-frame and metal roofing industries. Author of #1 Amazon Best Seller “Asphalt and Algorithms,” he is a board member for the Buckeye Frame Builders Association and the National Frame Builders Association. Find his podcast at facebook.com/BuildingWins or call (814) 906-0001 at 1 p.m. Eastern on Mondays to listen in.



BY MELANIE HESS

When Is It Time To Track Inventory?

Your Inventory is One of Your Greatest Assets, How You Track it Matters



Do you know what's on your shelves right now? If your accountant asked for a firm inventory count today, could you hand over numbers you actually trust — without sending someone out to the warehouse to count by hand? Could you say yes to a big job with confidence, knowing you can fill it, instead of hoping the materials are back there somewhere?

For a lot of building material dealers and construction businesses, the honest answer is “sort of.” QuickBooks got the business off the ground, and a legal pad or a spreadsheet has covered inventory well enough for years. But there's a point where “well enough” starts costing real money — in overordered stock sitting in the yard, in jobs delayed because nobody realized a critical item was gone, in hours burned every quarter just counting.

That's the point where it's time to look at a real inventory system — and, often, a business's first Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software.

PERIODIC VS. PERPETUAL: THE TWO WAYS TO TRACK INVENTORY

Most businesses start out doing periodic inventory: at set intervals — monthly, quarterly, once a year — someone walks the shelves and the yard and counts everything by hand, then reconciles it against the last count. It's simple, it uses tools the business already has, and it doesn't cost much to set up.

The trouble is that periodic counts are only accurate on the day they're taken. The moment a crew loads out material for a job or a customer buys the last unit off the shelf, the count is already stale. And because it depends entirely on people counting carefully, it's an easy place for human error to creep in.

Perpetual inventory works differently. Instead of counting on a schedule, the system updates automatically every time something is sold, pulled for a job, or received — usually through an ERP tied to barcodes or scanners. Order a truckload of material and unload it, and the system logs it. A crew pulls stock for a job, and the count adjusts in real time. There's no guessing and, ideally, no



trip to the back of the shop to answer a simple question.

The advantages compound from there. Owners and managers can see exactly what's on hand and what it's worth at any moment — critical for a business where too much material tied up on the shelf is cash that isn't working, and too little means missing a completion date. Real decisions about purchasing, pricing, and job scheduling get made using current data instead of a hunch. Employees stop losing days to counting and get back to work that actually grows the business. And because the data accumulates over time, seasonal swings and slow-moving stock start to show up clearly instead of getting discovered the hard way.

Perpetual inventory isn't entirely hands-off — items that slip out without being scanned can still throw a count off, so occasional physical checks still matter. The difference is that those checks can happen cyclically, whenever there's downtime, rather than shutting down operations for an all-hands count.

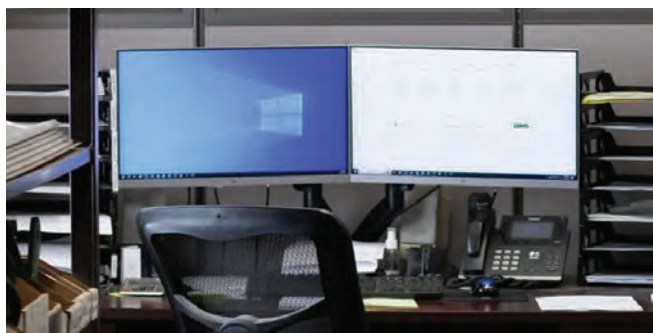


WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND

Picture a building materials dealer that stocks lumber, hardware, doors, and fixtures for sale, plus a backstock in the warehouse. Every time an item comes off the shelf and gets sold, the inventory system updates automatically. When a customer or builder calls asking whether a specific item is in stock, the counter staff can answer immediately and point to exactly where

it sits — no trip to check.

Not everything needs that level of tracking, though. That same dealer likely sells small hardware — screws, bolts, washers, and similar fasteners — out of bins by the pound or the box. Scanning every individual piece in and out would eat far more staff time than it would ever save. For high-volume, low-cost items like that, a periodic count of the bins is simply more cost-efficient. The rule of thumb: when the cost of tracking something perpetually outweighs what it saves, periodic counting is still the right call. Don't spend a dollar to save a nickel.



DO YOU NEED AN ERP TO RUN PERPETUAL INVENTORY?

In most cases, yes. Perpetual inventory depends on a system that ties sales, purchasing, and stock levels together in real time, and that's exactly what an ERP is built to do — bring the information from every part of the business into one place where it can be tracked, reported on, and acted on.

According to Koble Systems, an ERP company that has served customers since 1989 — with roughly 70% of its customer base in Anabaptist communities — most of the businesses it works with are ready to make the jump from QuickBooks to their first ERP once they've outgrown what a general accounting package and manual counts can support. That's often the same moment a business realizes its inventory tracking has stopped keeping up with its growth.

THE TAKEAWAY

Perpetual inventory won't eliminate every inventory headache. Still, it replaces guesswork with real numbers — numbers an accountant can trust, a purchasing manager can plan around, and a sales team can quote from with confidence. For a growing building materials business, the question usually isn't whether to eventually make the switch. It's recognizing the point where the switch has already become overdue. **RB**

SOURCES & RESOURCES

• Koble Systems - koblesystems.com

BY SHARON THATCHER

Building the modern beef barn

Post-Frame Project

FEBRUARY 2016 FLASHBACK

THEN & NOW: A Decade of Cattle Barn Building

The bones haven't changed much: post-frame construction is still the standard for beef and dairy barns, prized for the same reasons — fast builds, clear-span flexibility, and cost efficiency at scale.

What has shifted is what goes inside the shell. Ventilation and temperature control now get far more engineering attention, with monoslope designs and natural lighting systems built in from the start rather than added later. Manure management has grown more sophisticated too, with covered pits and methane-capture options increasingly part of the conversation. Fabric-roof alternatives have also gained ground in some markets, offering diffused light and steadier interior temperatures compared to traditional steel.

The constant through it all: farmers like Eron still treat barn design as a long-term investment in animal comfort — and their own bottom line.



Rural Builder had the opportunity of watching the building of a modern beef barn step-by-step from the ground up last summer, in fact two barns in the span of one year. It's uncommon because our offices are located in Central Wisconsin dairy country.

"I've been planning this for a lot of years," said the owner, farmer Dave Eron, Stevens Point. Starting out as farm renters, he and his wife, Robyn, purchased their current farm, then just 240 acres, in 2008.

As a young farmer with a lot riding on his decisions, he wanted to make sure he got his money's worth with his new barns. He studied his options carefully, consulted with various engineers and spent hours just watching his herd of Holstein steers to determine how to

raise contented, healthy cattle and consequently his own profits. Having building crews open to his requests, which he admits were at some times demanding, was paramount to the process. "I spent [a lot of time and money] up front to get what I wanted," he said.

Each of the two post-frame barns built by Forest Construction, Luxemburg, sit over 12-foot deep Pan-L-Bilt manure pits from Wieser Concrete Products Inc., Maiden Rock. Spiegelberg Implement, Weyauwega, provided custom work on the exterior walls and pen dividers, feed rails and gates. Eron served as his own engineer and excavator.

The larger of the two barns, 105x325 feet, was built first in the winter of 2014-2015 for finishing cattle. The smaller, 90x325 feet barn was built in 88 days over the summer of 2015 to house calves pur-



Owner Dave Eron now operates Eron Beef LLC out of two new post-frame barns, both completed in 2015, near Stevens Point, Wisconsin. The calf barn is under construction in this photo. The finishing barn is to the right.

chased at 350 pounds. Seven days after completion of the calf barn, the first shipment of calves arrived. The animals will spend about six months in each facility before heading to market.

Eron has been pleased with the results so far, with the first round of cattle requiring 10 percent less feed than his open-lot herd, and finishing for market sooner than expected. **RB**



The last three bays of calf barn (36' X 90') are reserved for working facilities and an office and utility room.



T Feeding is done inside the barn thanks to extra pillars built in the manure pit to allow for heavy traffic above.

Listening to the customer

Dave Eron said he was a demanding customer, but that's to be expected when your livelihood depends on the outcome. Both Wieser and Forest Construction spokesmen weigh in on the Eron Beef project and in general how they handle customer relations.

"One of our biggest reasons for being successful is because we listen to our customers and do everything we can to try and meet their needs. For example Dave had mentioned the square edges on our walk-through to the drover lane would be more animal friendly if they were rounded, so we changed the 90 degree corner to a miter corner. We also changed our load design for our drive-through to meet Dave's needs for his feeding-load capacity. These are just a few examples of what we do to try and give our customers the best product to fit their needs. Customer relations are very important in the success we've had in the industry."

– Dan McKinney, project superintendent,
Wieser Concrete Products Inc.

"Farming... is definitely more sophisticated today. Farmers no longer have to be just farmers, they also have to be business managers. Also our projects have become focused more on improvements technologically, and along with that, the looks of the building. It is not just the functionality, it also has to look good.

"We are a custom builder so we will tailor the project according to the individual's need no matter how demanding that might be. Dave Eron knows exactly what he wants. Along the way we put it out that if we were doing anything aside from what he envisioned, to let us know and we would accommodate that."

– Aaron Nimmer, Forest Construction,
Luxemburg, Wisconsin



Cattle drinker pads and plumbing were constructed so as not to interfere with the pit below.



Corners at walk-throughs were rounded at Eron's request for cattle safety so cattle could be moved in and out of pens without injury or bruising.



Wieser Bros. Concrete erected the pre-cast, 12-foot deep pit over a 6-inch poured Ready-Mix floor. Eron wanted drive-through feeding inside the barn, so extra posts and support beams in the pit allow for more strength above for heavy equipment.



Corners at walk-throughs were rounded at Eron's request for cattle safety so cattle could be moved in and out of pens without injury or bruising.



Dave Eron hasn't stopped watching his cows closely now that the barns are built and occupied, knowing that they will let him know what they need. An example: when the cattle started scratching themselves on the sidewall cable system, he bought them a back scratcher. Voila! "Now they don't rub themselves on the cable," he said.



(Eron discovered that an open-ridge roof is an economical option for naturally vented, slatted floor livestock barns like his.



Building the Eron beef barns became a family project when two of Dave's young sons, Sam, 11, and Charlie, 4, helped with the fun job of pounding 3,840 slat locks into the 767 slatted rubber floor mats. Dave and his wife now have a third son, Owen, born near completion of the calf barn.



A sturdy cable system is used as sidewalls, the spacing determined so that older and younger cattle can't breach the gaps and create a safety hazard.

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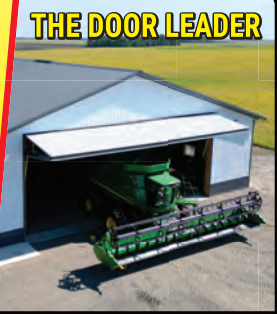
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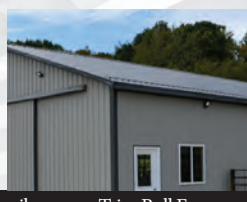
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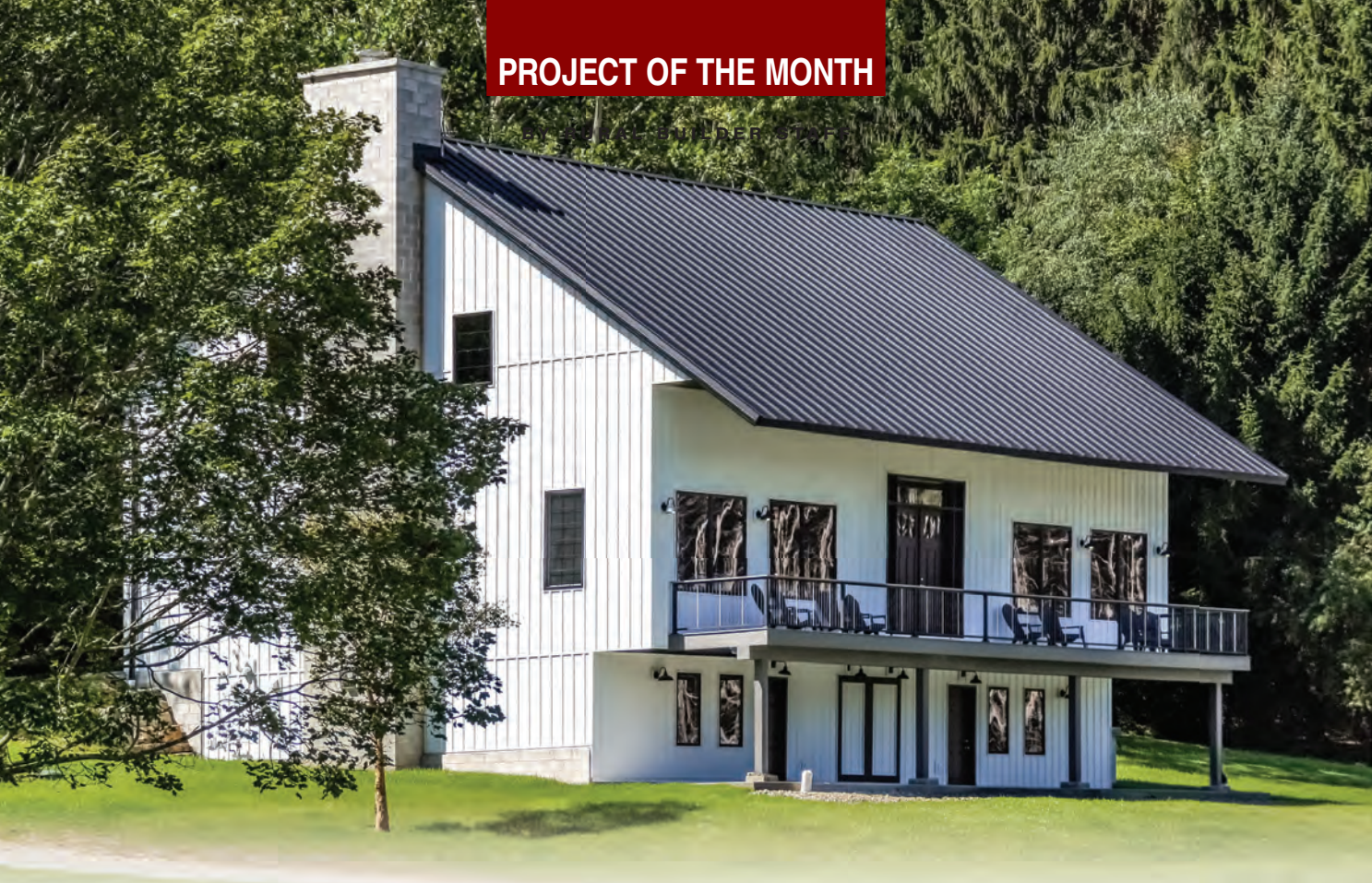
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Rural Builder
PLAIN BUILDER
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Metal Builder



Classic Rural Character

Modern Luxury

High among the rolling hills of Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, a historic bank barn stands reborn, effortlessly merging rustic heritage with modern luxury. Once a weathered agricultural landmark, this striking residential transformation—crafted by Metal Exteriors in partnership with Holmes Lumber of Millersburg, Ohio—proves that classic rural character and high-end comfort can coexist in perfect harmony.

From the approach, the home pays homage to its origins while displaying a sharp, modern edge. Crisp white Metal Batten siding endows the structure with a timeless farmstead profile, while a high-performance Metal Loc 1.5 standing seam roof adds clean architectural lines. Engineered to endure changing seasons with minimal maintenance, this durable exterior preserves the grand scale and silhouette of the original barn while giving it a sleek, enduring finish.

Stepping inside, the residence unfolds into a sun-drenched sanctuary anchored by towering vaulted ceilings and original exposed timber beams. Designed as a comfortable three-bedroom, two-bath retreat, the space balances soaring proportions with cozy residential warmth. Generous windows flood every corner with soft, natural light, highlighting the rich history embedded in the structural wood.

Large glass patio doors seamlessly connect the open interior to an expansive covered porch, where the line between indoor comfort and nature dissolves. Looking out over a quiet pond, surrounding pine groves, and sweeping meadows, the porch offers front-row seats to the tranquility of the countryside. By honoring the soul of the original bank barn and pairing it with state-of-the-art building materials, this remarkable restoration stands as a polished, low-maintenance sanctuary built for modern country living. **RB**



THE DETAILS:

Building: Residential

Building Size: 40x60

Roof Pitch: 8-12

Foundation: Existing concrete/Concrete Blocks foundation

Posts: Existing 6x6

Roof Panels: Metal Loc 1.5 standing seam roof, Metal Exteriors

Siding Panels: Metal Batten Siding, Metal Exteriors

Fasteners: Levi's Stainless Steel & Galvanized (Hidden Fastener)

Ventilation: Marco Ridge Vent

For more information: <https://metalexteriors.com>



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