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Kansas Farm Bureau....Insight

Greg Doering, Kansas Farm Bureau

The legacy of round barns

The ubiquitous image of a farm includes a red barn, which historically took that shade because iron oxide, or rust, was added to the linseed oil to prevent mold and fungus. It also added the red hue that became synonymous with barns. Despite a wide variety of pigments to choose from today, tradition still means there's plenty of red barns across the countryside.

Aside from color, a barn also conjures up specific shapes. A sturdy, square structure with a gable or gambrel roofline. That's what the barn on my grandparents' ranch looked like growing up. It wasn't red because it was built during World War II and a lack of material meant the plentiful limestone rock was used for the walls.

Inside there was an alleyway down the middle lined with stalls on either side with a grainery in one corner. Hay storage was on the second floor with cut-outs above the stalls below for feeding. Aside from housing horses or the occasional bottle calf, the barn became outdated shortly after it was completed. A low ceiling on the first floor meant nothing larger than the Ford 8N tractor could fit inside.

For a brief period in the early 20th century, a subset of barns were not traditional in any sense, rather they were round or nearly so. The technical term for these structures is nonorthogonal, which is fancy for not orthogonal. That's fancy for lack of perpendicularity.

Fewer than 1,400 round barns are estimated to have been built around the turn of the last century, mostly in the Midwest. George Washington has a 16-sided structure on his Mount Vernon estate, but it was New Yorker Elliot W. Stewart's octagonal barn built in 1874 that really started the wheels turning on round barns.

Stewart touted the structure's geometric advantages relating to cost of construction since a cylinder's exterior surface allows for a larger interior volume

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39p41

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ACCEPTING BIDS - Russell County Commissioners will be accepting sealed bids for the sale and removal of the white goods/metal stockpile located at the Russell County Landfill until 9:00 a.m., Mon., May 5, 2025. For specifications contact Russell County Highway Dept., 4288 E. Hwy 40, Russell, KS 67665 or call (785) 483-4032.

40n42

HELP WANTED

HELP WANTED - Farm help wanted. Experience preferable. (785) 698-2292. Leave a message.

40n41

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REQUEST FOR INFO - (1) Prior public transportation past 15 years in Lucas and Russell County. (2) Required permit for public transportation bus and car. (3) Fenced area in City or City property or park for Dog Park Exercise Area. Requested by No Limit Ventures for future public and private commercial development. Send information to Jeffrey Boddiger-owner of No Limit Ventures, P.O. Box 172, Lucas, KS 67648-0172.

40n40

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than a rectangle.

According to an article from University of Kansas geography professor James R. Shortridge, Stewart's ideas spread westward and reached Kansas in the early 1880s when two octagonal barns were built in Shawnee County. The next record of a nonorthogonal barn was a 12-sided structure built near Olathe in 1903. Kansas' first pure circle barn was erected in Harper County the following year.

The majority of the 41 round or roundish barns in Kansas were built in the following decade. Shortridge's research shows no strong correlation between farm practices and where the barns were built in Kansas. Local influence appears to have played a key role in the construction of round barns. If you were in an area where one irregular barn was built, there's likely to be another one nearby.

That's likely how Marshall County became home to three circular barns in less than a decade. The first built a few miles east of Blue Rapids in 1906 and the last was constructed southwest of Marysville in 1914. The middle barn was finished in 1913 by Benton Steele, who was a prolific architect and builder of round barns from Indiana.

Charles and James Drennen commissioned the barn for their Hereford breeding operation, and it's still in use today. Herefords still graze along the bunks lining the perimeter nearly every day, and heifers still calve under the conical roof.

The most recent estimate of 24 round barns still standing in Kansas comes from Shortridge's article in 1999. Some are being preserved by owners on working farms and ranchers, others have found new life as event venues while others are being worn away by Kansas weather.

While red barns are the best known image of rural architecture, the brief building burst of round barns have left a legacy across the state as well.

"Insight" is a weekly column published by Kansas Farm Bureau

Answers from Post Rock Extension

Sandra L. Wick, Post Rock Extension Agriculture Agent, Agronomy,
K-State Research and Extension

Is there "yellowing" showing up in your wheat fields?

WOW.....the wheat around northcentral Kansas is looking pretty good considering our growing conditions. Some places have been fortunate to receive the needed moisture at the right time, while others still continue to have limited moisture and the wheat is showing some concerning conditions.

So, if your wheat fields are turning yellow, just want are some of the causes?

Cold weather injury at the tillering stage. A sudden drop in temperatures after the wheat has greened up, but before it reaches the jointing stage, will burn back the top-growth, often giving the field a yellowish cast but not necessarily reducing yield potential. This injury is likely cosmetic, provided the growing point is still healthy. I have dug up wheat around northcentral Kansas and split the stems to find the developing head and haven't found any damage yet. Variety release from winter dormancy can also affect the extent of the symptoms, as early varieties would have been less cold-hardy and thus likely sustain more injury.

According to our Mesonet Weather Data Library stations in Jewell, Mitchell and Osborne and Smith counties, the average minimum temperatures ranged from 19°F to 28°F from April 6-7, 2025. So, depending on your wheat growth stage, there could have been some damage.

A disease that can also start showing up is the **Wheat streak mosaic complex**. This viral disease is vectored by the wheat curl mite. Yellow areas in the field will appear in the spring around the jointing stages of growth; usually on field edges adjacent to **volunteer wheat** either last fall or this spring. If you remember, we had many fields last year that were infected with this virus primarily because of the uncontrolled volunteer wheat. Leaves will have a mosaic of yellow streaks, stripes, or mottling. Plants infected with wheat streak mosaic are often smaller than healthy plants. There are two additional viruses, Triticum mosaic virus and High plains mosaic virus, that also result in similar symptoms.

Drought conditions can also be showing a yellowing of the lowering leaves which is just mother nature's way of survivability of the plant. Some areas may also be showing these conditions.

What about fertility concerns in the wheat crop? Nitrogen deficiency

could also be a problem out in the wheat. As the crop starts to grow in the spring, its nitrogen (N) demand increases and it is common to see N deficiency, especially while the temperatures are lower and not much N is mineralized from the soil organic matter. Nitrogen deficiency causes an overall yellowing of the plant, with the **lower leaves yellowing** and dying from the leaf tips inward. Nitrogen deficiency also results in reduced tillering, top growth, and root growth. The primary causes of N deficiency are limited root growth to uptake nutrients, insufficient fertilizer rates, application problems, applying the nitrogen too late, and the presence of heavy amounts of crop residue, which immobilizes nitrogen.

Similar to nitrogen, the crop's **sulfur** requirement increases in the spring as it takes off on reproductive growth. Due to a decrease in sulfur deposition in the rainfall, there has been an increasing number of fields with sulfur deficiency symptoms in Kansas in recent years. Sulfur deficiency can also occur where soils are cold in the spring due to a reduced rate of release of sulfur from organic matter. The symptoms of sulfur deficiency are very similar to nitrogen deficiency. However, **sulfur deficiency** differs from N deficiency in that the whole plant is pale, with a greater degree of chlorosis (yellowing of plant tissue) in the **younger/upper** leaves.

Please contact me if you have any questions on your wheat crop and I would be glad to visit with you and come and take a look at your wheat fields.


Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Sandra may be contacted at swick@ksu.edu or by calling Smith Center, 282-6823, Beloit 738-3597, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on Facebook at "Post Rock Extension" along with our "Ag News Roundup" every Friday. Also remember our website is www.postrock.ksu.edu and my twitter account is @PRDCrops.

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