

# Facilitating Improvements

Cattlemen can consult a variety of resources when considering facility design, improvement.

by *Crystal Albers*

**F**rom corral panels to crowding pens, feedbunks to fence posts, cattlemen need a variety of equipment to keep their facilities — and their cattle — in working order. After all, good facilities are an essential part of safe, effective cattle operations. Without the proper tools, a producer's effort could be futile.

But where can cattlemen go to find facilities information, detailed sketches, dimensions or even funding to fit their unique management needs and varying landscapes?

Today's producers have a wealth of resources when making long-term management decisions such as facility changes, says Larry Turner, associate dean and associate director for the University of Kentucky's Cooperative Extension Service.

They just have to know where to start.

"First, they've got to assess what their short-term and long-term goals are for their operation," Turner says. "Then, they should contact their local Extension office in their county and talk to an agent there who can put them in touch with state resources."

## Local resources

**Extension agents.** Local and county Extension agents can be a valuable resource when it comes to implementing improved cattle facilities, Turner says.

They're aware of local, state and federal funding options, and they're typically informed of regulatory issues that fluctuate from state to state, he notes. And, local Extension agents can put producers in contact with some good example facilities nearby.

**Neighbors.** Although consulting your neighbor down the road may not be the most scientific method of gathering data for your new or improved facility, it's a start. "It's a really good idea to visit other types of facilities that are fairly new that can give you ideas, good or bad," Turner says. "Talk to the producer there who

has just put in a facility or has had a facility in operation for preferably a year or two. See what they would have done differently and what they like about the system."

Ken Hellevang, an Extension engineer at North Dakota State University (NDSU), also recommends visiting local facilities to develop ideas. "It's always good to visit other folks to see what has worked for them. Extension specialists, too, work with a lot of different people, so they gain the expertise of being involved with lots of different buildings," he says. "The key thing with any building project is to spend a lot of time up front researching it. With something like a building or facility, you make a decision, you live with it for years."

**State specialists.** Land-grant universities offer a vast array of resources, including state specialists who can answer specific questions regarding the economics, investment and design elements of building or improving cattle facilities, as well as waste management issues and nutritional concerns. "All of these planning aspects need to be laid out to be tailored to the particular operation. Answers to those types of questions are typically available through land-grant universities," Turner says.

**USDA service centers.** Federal funding and cost-share programs are available for many cattlemen who meet Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) practice standards, says Mark Kennedy with Missouri's NRCS. However, program availability, funding levels and application deadlines vary greatly among states. Kennedy suggests contacting an area U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center to determine available programs. Conservation stewardship programs and local soil and water conservation districts may also offer cost-share funding, he says.

Optional funding could be utilized in states like Kentucky, where Turner says some tobacco settlement agreement funds are used for cost-share funding for facility upgrades and development.

To locate a USDA service center, which houses the Farm Service Agency (FSA), NRCS and the Rural Development agencies, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

## Other outlets

A seemingly endless collection of publications and online tools can assist cattlemen hoping to develop or improve facilities and equipment. Most Web sites require Adobe Acrobat® Reader software to view plans or other publications; however, the program is free and is available for download on many of the sites.

The following services represent just a handful of available resources.

**MidWest Plan Service.** A university-based publishing cooperative, MidWest Plan Service (MWPS) publishes and disseminates research-based, peer-reviewed agricultural building plans and related publications. The service was established in 1929, and, today, it distributes materials developed by outreach programs of the USDA and



12 North Central land-grant universities.

Although most publications and building plans are available for relatively marginal costs, free material and other resource links are also available at the organization's Web site, [www.mwps.org](http://www.mwps.org). While there, cattlemen can browse the 2004 catalog and post orders online or view some of the free publications and building plans available for download. Some materials can be purchased online using a credit card for direct download, eliminating shipping and handling fees. Request a catalog or place orders by phone at (515) 294-4337 or 1-800-562-3618, by fax at (515) 294-9589, or via e-mail at [mwps@iastate.edu](mailto:mwps@iastate.edu). MWPS is located at 122 Davidson Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa 50011-3080.

**Natural Resource, Agriculture and Engineering Service (NRAES).** Formerly the Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service, the NRAES is a cooperative of 14 eastern land-grant universities. It was established in 1974 to increase public availability of research developed by member universities. View NRAES publications, available for purchase, at [www.nraes.org](http://www.nraes.org). Major credit cards are accepted, and checks should be made payable to NRAES. For more information on quantity discounts or for a free catalog, call (607) 255-7654. Fax NRAES at (607) 254-

8770, or e-mail the Cornell University-based service at [nraes@cornell.edu](mailto:nraes@cornell.edu). The cooperative's mailing address is NRAES, Cooperative Extension, P.O. Box 4557, Ithaca, N.Y. 14852-4557.

**Canada Plan Service.** The Ontario, Canada-based service contains mostly free information and building plans on its Web site, [www.cps.gov.on.ca](http://www.cps.gov.on.ca). Visitors to the site can choose among a multitude of plans, including complete cattle-handling facilities, working chutes, crowding gates, portable hay feeders, grain and hay storage facilities, and more.

**Oklahoma State University (OSU).** OSU offers cattlemen a vast array of building plans through its Plans and Building Information Service. Browse through detailed plans and publications for cattle-handling facilities, machinery storage sheds, horse facilities and more at <http://biosystems.okstate.edu/pbis>. Several free plans and publications are featured here as well. For additional information call the plan service office at (405) 744-5425.

**University of Kentucky (UK).** The university provides several resources on its Web site, [www.bae.uky.edu/ext/Livestock](http://www.bae.uky.edu/ext/Livestock). By clicking on the beef link, visitors to the site can view a variety of publications on livestock systems, including handling

facilities, grain and hay storage, feeding facilities, and more. The site also features a calculator and tools option, which allows users to rate their existing facilities and easily calculate things like fencing costs. Another UK Web site, [www.bae.uky.edu/ext/PlansList](http://www.bae.uky.edu/ext/PlansList), provides a multitude of downloadable plans, complete with measurements.

**North Dakota State University (NDSU).** NDSU has included approximately 1,000 plans on its site, [www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/abeng/plans/index.htm](http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/abeng/plans/index.htm), Hellevang says. The Web site includes plans from the former USDA Cooperative Farm Buildings Plan Exchange as well as other sources.

**University of Missouri (MU).** MU Extension has resources available at <http://muextension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides>. Although many of the plans are links to MWPS or other sites, the listed plans could serve as a useful compilation.

**Colorado State University (CSU).** CSU's Cooperative Extension Resource Center's (CERC's) site, [www.cerc.colostate.edu/Blueprints/blueprints.html](http://www.cerc.colostate.edu/Blueprints/blueprints.html), much like the MU site, contains plans from other universities, the MWPS and more, but it offers a unique compilation. Links to cookbooks, CD-ROMS and videos are also provided.

