

## Ag World



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### RECREATES ERA OF THE LATE 1880's

## Farmer-Built Sod House

An authentic sod house recreating the historic sodbuster era of the late 1880's, complete with an interior furnished just as it would have been in pioneer times, is now open to the public on the farm of Stan and Virginia McCone, of Sanborn, Minn.

You're welcome to stop by and take the grand tour. And, if you really want to relive history, you can write ahead for reservations for you and your family to sleep overnight in this authentic sod house which sleeps five on two double beds and a single.

The 36 by 21 ft. structure, with 2 ft. thick walls cut from native prairie sod, fulfills a childhood dream for McCone. In constructing the "soddy," he had to first build a sod cutter to harvest the virgin prairie which he found on some bottom land south of Sanborn.

The sod was cut in 1 ft. widths, 4 to 6 in. deep, and later sectioned into 2 ft. blocks which were loaded on a hay rack and hauled to the McCone farm.

In building the sod house, the McCones piled row after row of sod blocks, one atop the other, staggered like bricks for strength, grass side down and the cracks filled with loose dirt.

McCone estimates that 300,000 lbs. of sod were used to build the house. The roof, made of 24,000 lbs. of sod, rests fully on the "soddy's" sturdy walls.

McCone set the door frame and windows into the sod walls as they went up. The floor, roof, window frames and door are made from planks cut from fir beams salvaged from an old Minneapolis flour mill. The chimney bricks are from a 112 year old

kiln in nearby New Ulm.

Log rafters support the wooden plank roof, which was first covered with tar paper and then with a 3 in. layer of sod, grass side up.

The McCones furnished the interior with authentic furnishings dating back 100 years — wood burning stoves, beds, quilts, a dresser, wardrobe closet, wash stand, lamps, table and chairs, commode, rag rugs, a leather fainting couch and curtains.

"At one time, there were thousands of sod houses on the prairies, but there were no blueprints showing how to build them," says McCone. "You just built what you could with what you had to work with. If you had the resources, you built a splendid sodhouse. Some were two stories high, with gables, and were filled with fancy furniture that came in big freight wagons.

"But, if you had your family with you right off the train and it was late September, you might have built a humble, modest dwelling with a blanket over the doorway. A lot of people came onto the prairies with nothing more than a wooden barrel for a table. Their sod houses were small and had dirt floors."

The McCones seeded 10 acres in front of their sod house to blue stem grass "so it will be surrounded by authentic prairie just like it would have 100 years ago." Their farm is located 1 mile east and 1/4 mile south of the junction of highways 71 and 14 north of Sanborn in Southwestern Minnesota.

For more information, contact: Stan and Virginia McCone, Rt. 2, Box 75, Sanborn, Minn. 56083 (ph 507 723-5138).



Photo by Judy Miller, Cottonwood County Citizen

Families can make reservations to sleep overnight in the authentic sod house, which sleeps five.

**Editor's Note:** Most of what goes into Ag World stems from story ideas sent to us by readers. This special section of FARM SHOW touches on the lighter side of farming and ranching — everything from human interest stories, to unusual hobbies, to unique things farm families are doing for fun or profit.

If you've read or heard a good Ag World type story you'd like to share with others, send it to: FARM SHOW, Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.



"Hairless" calf was born with hair only around its eyes, its ears, and on its belly.

### "SKIN AS SMOOTH AS A BABY'S BOTTOM"

## Ever Seen A "Hairless" Calf?

A Minnesota farm family found out how fast news travels this spring when one of their beef cows gave birth to a rare, "hairless" bull calf.

"We've been featured in local and state newspapers and a local TV station did a story on the calf. Calls have been coming in from everywhere. One caller even gave us a recipe for a hair-growing tonic that involved the use of castor oil and whiskey," says Marian Duncan of Ceylon, Minn., who along with her husband Wayne are the owners of the unusual Hereford/Simmental calf.

Nicknamed "Baby Face", the calf is normal except for its lack of hair. At birth, on March 23, the calf had hair only around its eyes, in its ears and on its belly. Although the skin showed pigmentation where the light and dark hair should have been, it was otherwise "smooth as a baby's bare bottom", according to the Duncans.

"The biggest problem with raising the calf is the weather. We're not sure if we should let him go outside because we're afraid he'll get sunburned. People have suggested we should use suntan lotion," says Marian, noting that an animal scientist told them the hairless condition of the animal is probably the "freak" result of a recessive gene that only shows up in 1 out of 20,000 animals or so. Hairless animals usually have other problems, too, so they're born dead or don't survive.

At three months of age, as this issue of FARM SHOW went to press, it appeared the unusual calf might be sprouting a normal crop of hair. "It's too soon yet to tell whether he'll develop a healthy hide that would protect him from the sun and flies," Marian says.

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