Greg Blahun built this 30 by 30-ft. barn in three sections, which are mounted on skids that make them easy to move around. Each section is 10 ft. wide and 30 ft. long.

Portable Calf Barn You Can Build Yourself

Here's a good idea for cattlemen – and anyone else who'd like to have a bit more flexibility when putting up new buildings around the farm.

Greg Blahun needed new calving facilities for his 220-cow herd, but he needed shelters at more than one of his corrals. Instead of building multiple sheds, he found a simple answer. He built a 30 by 30-ft. barn in three sections, mounted on skids that make them easy to move around.

The two side sections are simply three-sided, open-front calf shelters with roofs that slope to the back. The low end of of each section is 6 ft. high and the high end 8 ft. Each one is 10 ft. wide and 30 ft. long.

The center section is open on both sides with a peaked roof that slopes to either side. The ends are closed in with overhead doors which allow easy access to the animals inside.

"The foundation for a barn is always a major expense. We eliminated it by mounting the barn on skids," says Blahun.

He built heavy skids from 8-in. dia. oil field pipe that he bought for scrap. Each section is built on two 30-ft. skids with a crossbar at each end. He used the same pipe for the frame, bolting 2 by 6-in. boards to the uprights which are then pressure-treated.

When the sections are skidded together, Blahun leaves a 2 ft. gap between each side section and center.

"That gives me another 4 ft. of room in the barn. The roofs overlap by 6 to 12 in. where the side sections fit under the peaked roof. Water runs off the center section onto the roofs of the side sections. The 4 to 6 in. gap between the roof sections lets in air and light. The wind blows a little snow in through the gap but I can plug the openings with straw bales, when necessary."

Blahun notes that you could easily modify the design so there's no gaps between the roofs.

To let more light in, he used translucent plastic greenhouse siding on the ends above the overhead doors.

Each side section has three 10 by 12-ft. stalls with a 2-ft. walk-through gate. All gates fold flat against the walls when not needed. A maternity pen, with halogen lights, is located in the center pen.

Blahun enjoys the mobility and versatiliy of his barn. "If you build a barn on a foundation, it's there to stay. I can move this barn from one pen to another or from one farm to another. I'm currently building corrals on another part of my farm where there are no buildings. I'll be able to set this barn up there in a half hour. And when it comes to cleaning, all I have to do is pull the barn out of the way and use a tractor to clean out. No more shoveling out calf pens."

He can also use the side sections alone as open-sided calf pens in the spring if there's bad weather.

Total cost of the 9-pen building was less than $5,000.

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Bale slicer will cut through both dry hay and wrapped bales. Foster does custom slicing for farmers in his area.

First-Of-Its-Kind Hydraulic Slicer Makes Big Bales Easier To Use

Willie Foster, a farm consultant operating out of Bloomington, Wisconsin, encourages his farmer clients to wrap high moisture large square bales to make "baleage". "It's one of the most palatable forages you can make," he insists. But he and his farmer customers found that unless they could chop or grind the big bales first, mixing them into a total mixed ration (TMR) was difficult.

But Foster thinks most hay processors grind hay so fine that a lot of the fiber value is lost.

He decided there had to be a way to cut up the bales enough to get them into a TMR without pulverizing the stems.

After working on the problem for a couple of years, Foster designed a bale slicer that works on the principle of a log splitter. It'll slice up both dry hay and wrapped bales.

It's basically a box frame with a ram or plunger at one end and knives at the other. You put the bale in the cage and then force it through the knives with the plunger.

Making a working prototype wasn't a simple matter, though.

Foster started with a cage made of 2 by 3-in. steel tubing and 4-in. angle iron. It measures 5 ft. tall by 3 ft. wide and 18 ft. long. At the back of the frame is a bale chamber. Bales are loaded into this chamber from the side with a skid-steer loader and bale spear.

Mounted vertically across the back of the frame are two stationary knives. "We started with regular knives like you'd find in a forage cutter, but they weren't long enough or heavy enough, so I had some bigger ones custom made," he says. The knives were made by Zenith Cutter, a Rockford, Illinois company that makes knives for forage harvesters. Foster's bale slicer knives are beveled on both sides.

At the front of the cage is a plunger-style ram, which pushes the bale through the knives. A two-stage double-acting hydraulic cylinder, salvaged from a garbage truck, powers the ram. The face of the ram has slits in it, so it can push past the knives without causing damage.

He says if he cuts the plastic off the end of a bale and cuts the twine before slicing, the plastic and twine remains in the slicer chamber, so it's easy to collect for disposal.

Foster wanted the bale slicer to be portable, so he mounted it on a dual axle trailer and added a used 45 hp Isuzu diesel engine to power a self-contained hydraulic system. The engine was salvaged from a pickup truck. He added a 15-gal. per minute hydraulic pump, valve and a 25-gal. reservoir, from Link Hydraulics, Dubuque, Iowa.

Bale slicer consists of a box frame with a ram or plunger at one end and knives at the other. Bale is pushed back through knives by plunger.

The hydraulic system was overbuilt for this application, but since it's mounted on a skid with the engine, Foster is able to use it to power a bale wrapper in the summer.

Foster does custom bale wrapping and slicing for his cattle customers, cutting both baleage and dry hay. "Once bales are sliced, it's much easier to use them in an auger-type feed mixer," he says. "And it makes hand feeding hay from big bales a lot easier, too."

He figures he has about $5,000 tied up in the bale slicer, with more than half of that being the hydraulic cylinder. That doesn't include the cost of the engine and hydraulic pump.

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