Homeland

FARM, RANCH & HOME REALTY

FALL 2023

A PUBLICATION OF TRI-STATE LIVESTOCK NEWS

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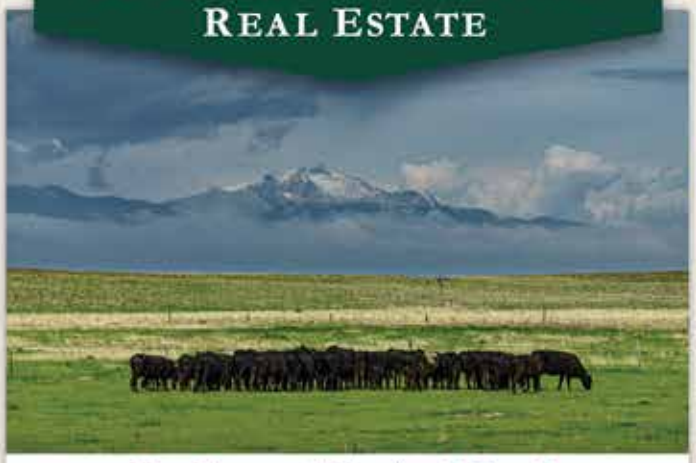

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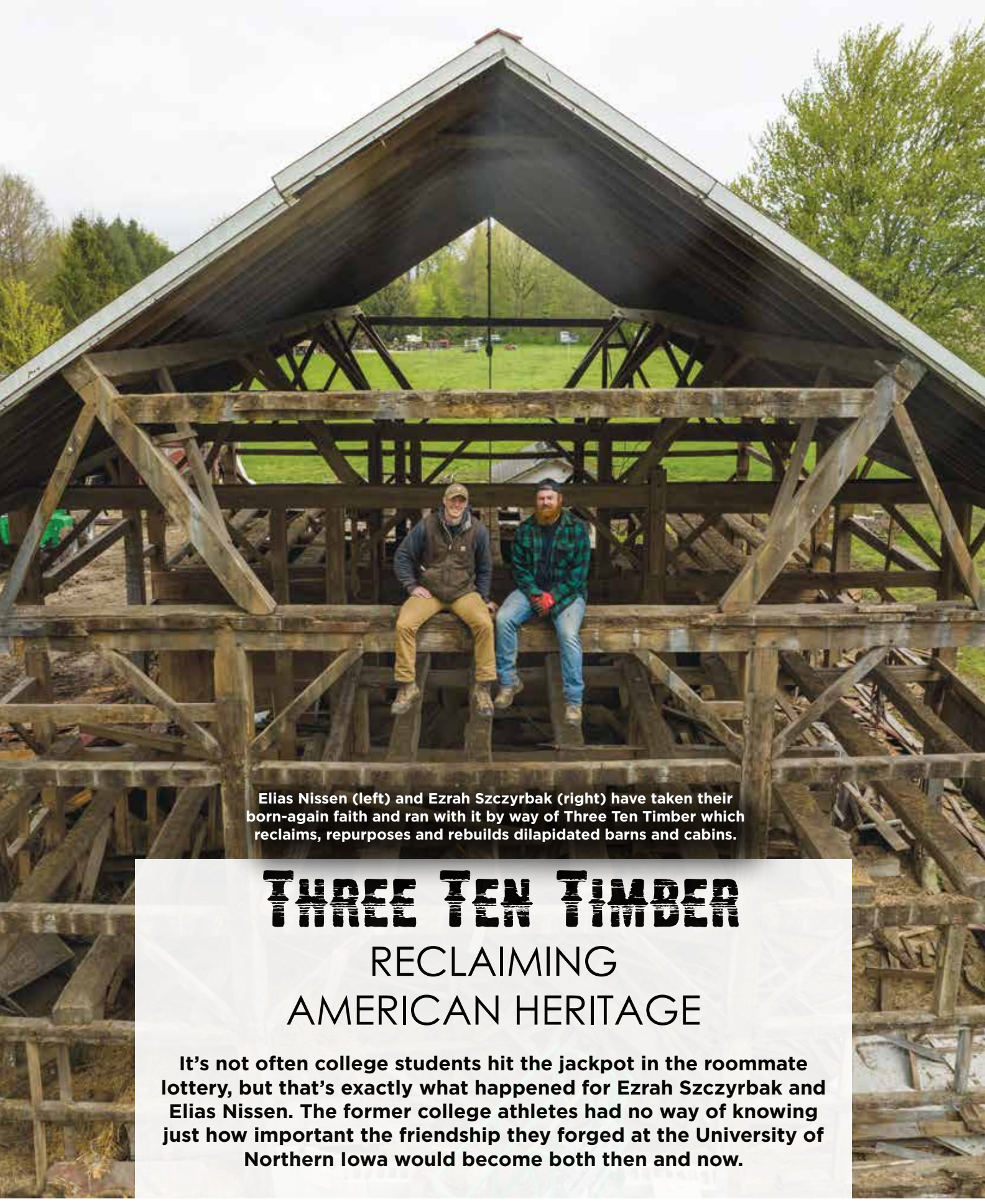


Elias Nissen (left) and Ezrah Szczyrbak (right) have taken their born-again faith and ran with it by way of Three Ten Timber which reclaims, repurposes and rebuilds dilapidated barns and cabins.

Three Ten Timber

RECLAIMING AMERICAN HERITAGE

It's not often college students hit the jackpot in the roommate lottery, but that's exactly what happened for Ezrah Szczyrbak and Elias Nissen. The former college athletes had no way of knowing just how important the friendship they forged at the University of Northern Iowa would become both then and now.

Many of the structures were built entirely by hand, which means they are held together with unique cuts and joints. This contributes to the time it takes to bring down a building and heightens the importance of the notes taken on the building during that process.

By Lindsay Humphrey | Photos by Chessfight

Accidently brought together by football, Ezrah Szczyrbak and Elias Nissen both played for the University of Northern Iowa where their time in Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) would forever change their lives.

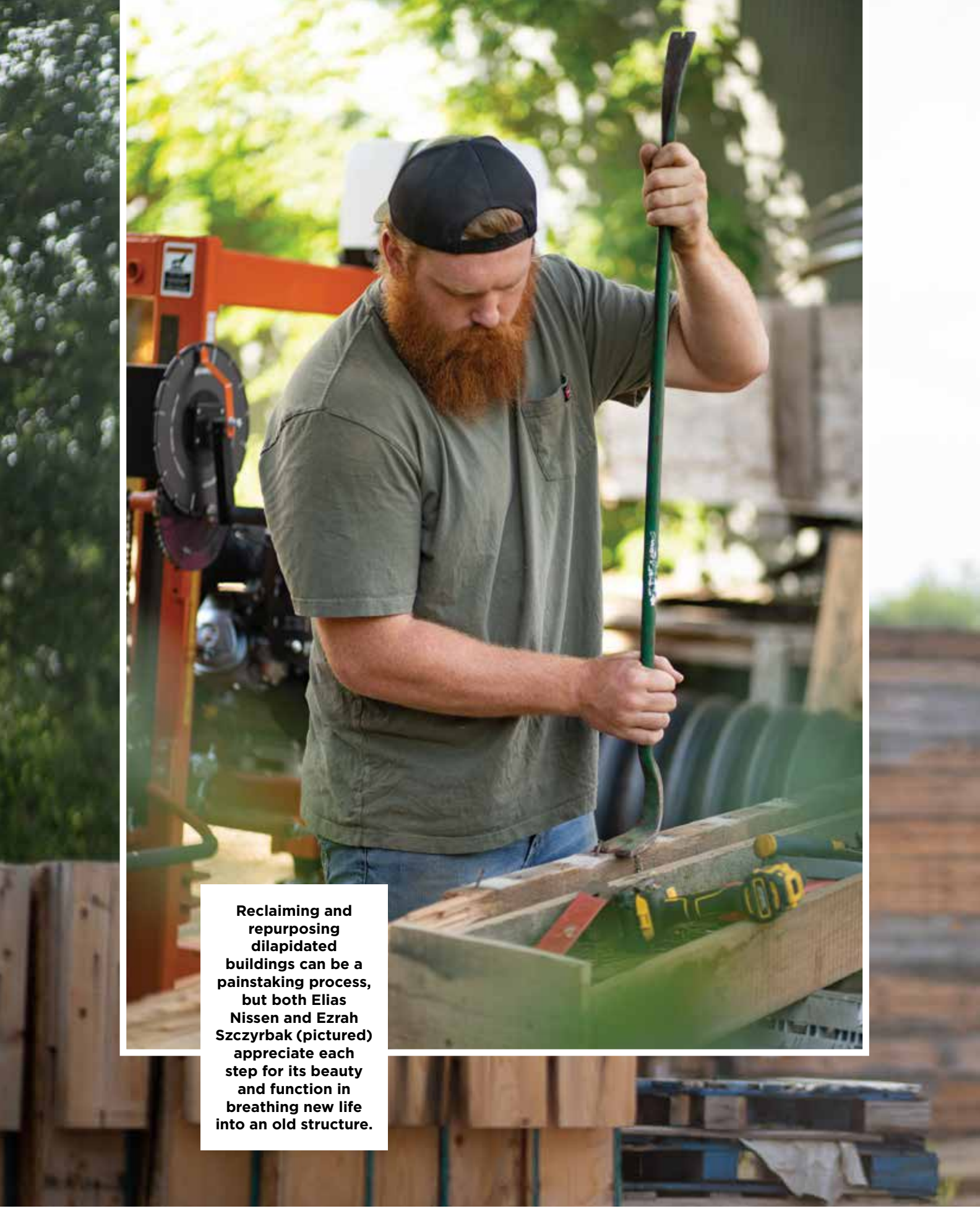
"I was kind of kidnapped by some upperclassmen to go to FCA, but I stayed because I was intrigued and had some questions that I'd been asking my entire life," Nissen explained of how he came to be a born-again Christian.

By the end of their freshman year, Nissen took a significant dip in shallow water and committed his life to Jesus.

"I noticed a change in Elias [Nissen] and I was curious about it," Szczyrbak said. "That was our first year living off campus and I had no idea how to cook, so I initially went to FCA for the free food. I ended up having a lot of questions and they had just begun a question-and-answer series. Instead of just giving us his opinion, the group leader had us open the Bible and search scripture for the answers ourselves."

It wasn't long after that when Szczyrbak also committed his life to Jesus.

This empowering discipleship experience and their newfound faith sustained both men through the rest of college and into the first few years of their careers. Later, when they became entrepreneurs, they would again fall back on their faith as they stepped on shaking ground knowing that the God who loves them would sustain them.



Reclaiming and repurposing dilapidated buildings can be a painstaking process, but both Elias Nissen and Ezrah Szczyrbak (pictured) appreciate each step for its beauty and function in breathing new life into an old structure.

Three Ten Timber

After reclaiming a building, all the lumber is transported back to their lot in Iowa where necessary repairs and replacements are made to make a building safe and useful for its next purpose in life.

INCHING FORWARD

In late 2018, Szczyrbak was a full-time teacher and Nissen worked on a construction crew. The pair came across a dilapidated barn they thought would be good for some of their personal wood working projects.

"We asked the owners if we could tear down their barn and use the wood, and they gave us approval, but it was a little bit too dangerous that we didn't end up doing it," Nissen said. "It opened the door, and someone heard about it and then asked us to tear down their barn. Word of mouth brought us three barns in our first year."

Simply a side hustle during the summer months for the first few years quickly evolved into a full-time gig when Szczyrbak took the first leap of faith. Selling individual boards online was their first form of revenue but proved unsustainable for a full-time career.

Three Ten Timber

Most of the reclamation process isn't about brute force and chainsaws, a fact that undeniably propelled Three Ten Timber forward as craftsmen.

Collaborating on a dovetail cabin, Elias Nissen (left) was able to realize his dream of rebuilding the structures they were reclaiming a lot sooner than expected.

"We turned to wholesaling barn wood, which involved taking a barn down, and then finding a buyer to take all of it," Szczyrbak said. "We considered ourselves wholesalers for reclaimed wood manufacturers who made flooring and paneling as well as for a few lumber yards."

With a background in construction and a passion for woodworking, Nissen was merely dreaming of the possibilities when he accidentally on purpose took the company to a whole new level.

"It's a lot of fun to salvage a barn, especially when it would otherwise end up in a hole or falling down," Nissen said. "I've always had the dream to rebuild these structures and find the ones that have enough life in them to repurpose and rebuild them."

The seemingly far-off idea came a bit early in the form of another college friend, Seth Snitker. His cabin building business was the perfect jump off point for Nissen and Szczyrbak to learn what true craftsmanship looked like.

"We partnered on one cabin and then another and that opened up the door for us in the rebuilding side of things," Nissen said. "It's opened up our business where we can take these structures down and give them a whole new purpose in life."

Much like their born-again experience in college, Nissen and Szczyrbak find purpose in the dilapidated boards, beams and joints of buildings long rendered useless. Just like only a true craftsman can see potential in the dilapidated, only Jesus can take the heart of man and repurpose it.

THREE TEN TIMBER

"When I decided to quit teaching, it was after much prayer and consideration with my wife," Szczyrbak said. "We felt strongly that the Lord would provide through this and find a way to cover our basic needs."

Three Ten Timber

While taking down a building, extensive photos, notes and videos are taken so they can repurpose and rebuild the structure as close to the original as possible based on the needs of the buyer later on.

The name Three Ten Timber comes straight from the Bible in the form of three verses: Matthew 3:10, Romans 3:10 and Colossians 3:10. All three verses work independently and together in the business model guiding the young entrepreneurs.

"We saw a correlation between what we do with these buildings and what Christ does in a sinner's heart," Szczyrbak said. "Jesus saw potential in us and gave us a new purpose after forgiving our sins."

That purpose is hyper focused on traditional building techniques, but both Nissen and Szczyrbak know there's far more to life than swinging a mallet physically and metaphorically.

"Any small business owner can relate to the idea of living by faith, but the ones who know Christ understand it on a much deeper level," Szczyrbak said. "We know that God is the ultimate provider, and this business could go away tomorrow and everything would be alright. He's taken care of us spiritually and He promises to provide for those physical needs too."

Running a business on faith that doesn't need fuel has kept Nissen and Szczyrbak exceptionally busy since Three Ten Timber officially launched in 2018. With more than 50 barn and cabin projects to their name so far, the pair is doing their best to keep up with the demand.

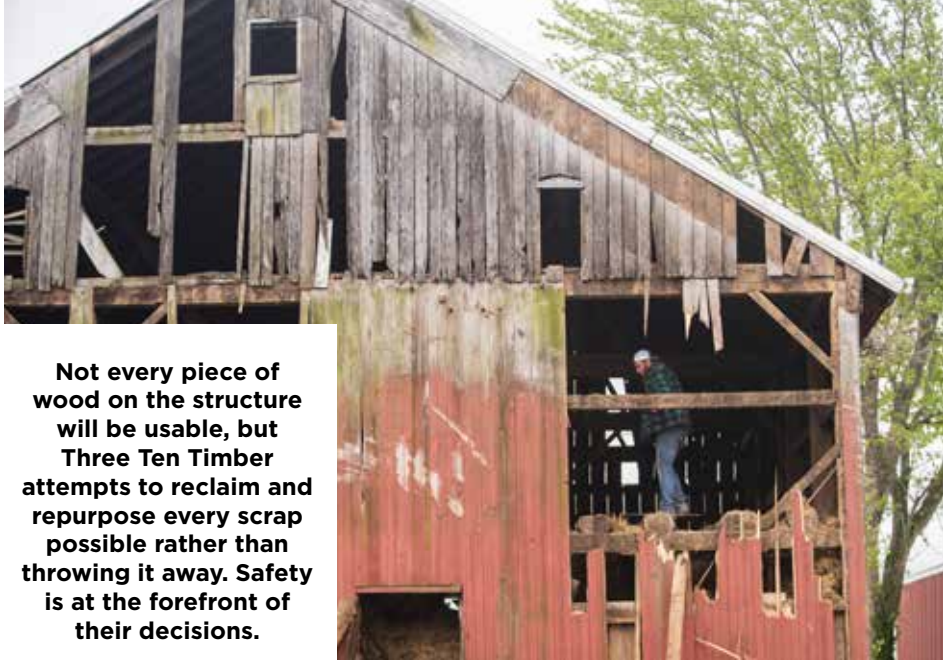
Creating structures that carry the weight of history while promising to stand strong in the future is the unspoken contract Three Ten Timber signs with each customer.

"I've always been fascinated with history and these old structures carry so much of that in the craftsmanship of the beams and joints," Nissen said. "My favorite part of this job is getting to see that uncovered, dusted off and presented in a new and beautiful way."

Tearing a barn down is a more delicate process than any chainsaw could handle. As a result, the crews inherently learn from the men who came before them in building these barns. It's a fascinating experience to learn how to build while deconstructing.

"We're taking some of the craftsmanship from the original builders while adding our own touch," Nissen said. "We're almost partnering with the people who built the original structure more than 150 years ago, in most cases, and now that structure lives on with a similar footprint and hopefully stand just as long as it did originally."

From beginning to end, reclaiming, repurposing and rebuilding a structure takes several months at the very least. Photos get the process started when a structure is considered for reclamation.



Not every piece of wood on the structure will be usable, but Three Ten Timber attempts to reclaim and repurpose every scrap possible rather than throwing it away. Safety is at the forefront of their decisions.

From beginning to end, taking down a structure, repurposing and rebuilding can take anywhere from a few months to an entire year to complete. It's a long process for a reason: they're uncovering a piece of history while striving to preserve it.

Three Ten Timber

Taking apart a piece of history that was likely built at least 100 years ago has connected both Elias Nissen and Ezrah Szczyrbak to the builders who came before them. As they repurpose and rebuild the structure, they're collaborating with the original builders while adding their own touch to the final product.

"If we think a structure is worth looking at in person after seeing photos, we'll schedule a site visit," Szczyrbak said. "After our visit we'll make an offer for the entire structure. If that's accepted, we take the structure down carefully, taking photos, notes and videos."

The structure is then taken back to their lot in Cedar Falls, Iowa, where joints and beams are either repaired or replaced as needed before it's listed online. Once purchased, the structure is rebuilt in its new home.

Since the business first started, the duo has traveled coast to coast looking for dilapidated building to breathe new life into and they've been to multiple states to rebuild them.

Most of Three Ten Timber's projects are for some type of living structure. Reclaimed wood is not only beautiful and timeless, but it also tells a story while simultaneously writing a whole new one.

For more information about Three Ten Timber, visit www.310timberco.com.

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BACK TO

Good Roots

The loft decorated and ready for a wedding ceremony.

The Good Roots farm and gardens sign displayed at their entrance.

The Irises in full bloom adding colorful life to the farm. COURTESY PHOTOS

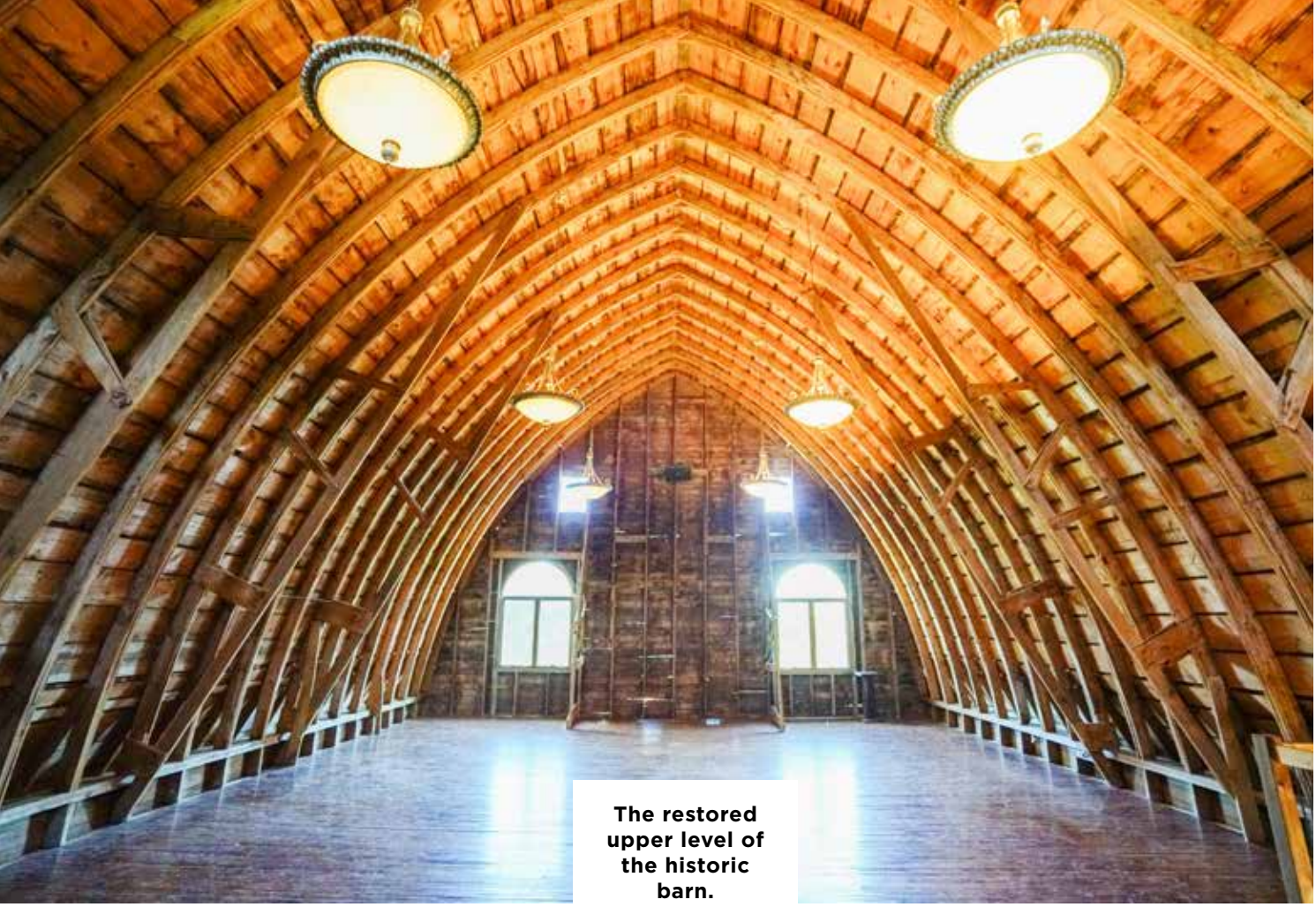
By BreAnne Benson

Good Roots Farm and Gardens is an event center and community hotspot just a mile and a half north of Brookings, South Dakota. Bill and Julie Ross, who have been married for 46 years, moved back to South Dakota to take care of Julie's parents when their health was declining. After their passing, the couple spent time figuring out their next move and what they wanted to do with the farm. They knew it was in a great location just outside of Brookings and the 96-year-old barn that stood on the property had already caught the attention of people who saw its potential. The Rosses spent the next few years planning, learning, and organizing for what would become a popular hub for people to come together in their community.

They heard about pizza farms that were scattered up and down the Mississippi River and knew it would be a perfect way to make use of their organic vegetables. Additionally, they saw a need for a place that friends, families, couples, and strangers alike, could gather and build a heightened sense of togetherness. The couple based their goals for this new venture around three main values they shared.

"We started with the end in mind: caring for the Earth, building community, and encouraging all people to come together and enjoy each other," said Julie Ross.

Their season of restoration was a busy one. The barn, which is now used for weddings every weekend in the summer and events during the week, was once exactly what one would expect a near century-old barn to look like. After years of animals and harsh weather, it took Bill three days of power-washing just to get it clean. From there,



The restored upper level of the historic barn.

Lit with soft yellow light, the main floor serves as a great place for people to gather.

BACK TO *Good Roots*

Guests await the bridal party for a ceremony in the north grove.

A restored trailer is now used as decoration to welcome guests.

they poured cement for the main level floor and repurposed an old school floor for the loft. They added a patio for indoor and outdoor eating as well. They used as many of the original farm buildings as they could to keep the venue authentic. This included turning an old outhouse into a bar which is loved by many. The building her dad used to work on tractors in is now a preparation suite for brides, and they turned a garage into an art room that includes pottery wheels.

There are seven different locations on the farm at which couples have gotten married, and they host events for all different occasions, such as corporate gatherings, university events, birthday parties, family reunions, and more.

The property also features a high tunnel greenhouse, pastureland, a few goats and sheep, apple and cherry orchards, and five acres of Aronia (chokecherry) – a berry with the greatest antioxidant levels in existence. They also offer wagon rides, fire pits, great locations and props for pictures all upon contract. The farm is surrounded on the east and north by a 100-acre conservation reserve, which serves as a pheasant and pollinator habitat with native grasses and thousands of wildflowers, all owned by extended family.

Among all the events hosted at the farm, they take special pride in their wood-fired pizza nights. Every Sunday evening starting in June and going until mid-October, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. people from all over gather to enjoy pizza picnic style with their family and friends. They use local ingredients for their pizzas, handmade and hand-tossed dough, sauces made in-house, and toppings from their own gardens. They even offer dessert pizzas with the apples, cherries, and Aronia all grown on the farm. These nights are pet-friendly (as long as they are

BACK TO *Good Roots*

The Good Roots farm is full of colorful flowers in the middle of summer.

Their original nutraceutical dessert pizza made with Aronia grown on the farm.

on a leash) and they encourage guests to bring yard games and to take in all the farm has to offer while they wait for their pizza.

Good Roots Farm and Gardens has 12 employees on staff for their pizza nights and 28 people who live on the farm with them. They include SDSU students, a couple whose job is to oversee the gardens, and currently some scientists who are using their farm as their place of study.

"We have four fire pits and they are all getting used regularly," said Julie. They often have gatherings for everyone who lives on the property and it has become a small community of its own."

Although the couple has already achieved their goal of bringing people together, they are continually looking for ways to expand. They have an exciting addition to the venue planned for next summer. While they frequently have local musicians out to play, they are working on the construction of a stage to host outdoor concerts in 2024. In addition, they plan to open a small store on site and may renovate an old granary.

The farm is open from May through the end of November. The other six months of the year, Bill and Julie spend their time traveling around the world to see their four sons and two grandkids. An updated calendar can be found online at goodrootsfarmandgardens.com with upcoming events, as well as additional information about booking weddings, events, pizza orders, and more.

Homesteading HACKS

Hutchinson's farm yields increase every year, even in the temperate climate of Wyoming.

By Kaycee Monnens Cortner | ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEGHAN GATES AND TIFFANY HUTCHINSON.

The modern era's version of "homesteading" looks quite different from those who settled centuries ago, but is not without its own challenges and relevance. In a world of same-day Amazon shipping and Wal-Mart superstores, some families are choosing to live differently. It is not as easy to live a step outside the fast-paced world, but the satisfaction and self-reliance is irreplaceable.

Gates did not grow up on a ranch, but is giving her two daughters the best childhood possible, growing their own food and spending each day with their parents.

A milk cow is just one way that Gates provides food for her family without ever leaving the ranch.

"If your heart is in the place of being more self-sufficient, doing things on your own more, living a simpler lifestyle, and relearning the skills generations are forgetting now – that's what defines a homesteader," says Colorado native, Meghan Gates.

Gates now resides in Oklahoma with her husband, Cody, on their commercial cattle operation. The couple are also raising two young daughters whilst Gates seeks out innovative, natural ways to feed and care for her family. For her, the heart of homesteading lies in the kitchen. Gates makes her own bread, cans produce from her garden, ferments vegetables, and makes her own tea and kombucha.

The Oklahoma prairie, which can be hot and windy in the summertime, provides its own obstacles to her vegetable production. Anything that is lacking from her own garden, she can supplement with a trip to the local farmer's market. While foraging does not yield much in her environment, Gates has a medicinal herbs section in her garden. Luckily, being cattle ranchers, beef is a staple in their household. Other forms of meat include the meat chickens that she raises, along with the deer meat from her husband's hunting. Gates also has laying hens and a steady supply of eggs, as well as a milk cow for her family's dairy needs.

Gates did not grow up in the ranching or homesteading lifestyle, getting only glimpses of it when she left the suburbs to visit her grandparents' small cattle operation. "My fondest childhood memories are from the ranch," she said. Now, she can pass on the passion for a simple life to her two daughters. "I honestly can't imagine a better childhood than what my girls are experiencing right now," she said.

For anyone looking to get started homesteading, Gates offers the advice to start small. Making a sour-

Caring for her animals is a passion for Gates.

Homesteading can take on many faces, including cast iron and Dutch oven cooking from scratch.

Tiffany Hutchinson's no-till garden is her pride and joy.

dough starter and bread, fermenting sauerkraut, baking things from scratch while being less reliant on mixes or pre-packaged goods, making one's own granola bars, and learning to mend clothes are all simple ways to begin. "Even if you don't enjoy sewing, mending clothes usually doesn't take very long, takes little skill, and saves you money," she said.

For those who do not own land, small, indoor "gardens" are still possible, along with the use of public gardening spaces. For those who do own a small amount of land, there are infinite possibilities for planting a garden.

The first type of animal Gates suggests starting with is a batch of laying hens. "Laying hens are so easy. They're pretty low cost and the reward is quick. Eggs are so good for you. It grows your confidence as far as jumping into raising other animals, as well," she said.

Diversifying her income, Gates has created an online shop for t-shirts and their homeraised beef. She also offers online courses to help others learn to homestead. She is currently creating her second cookbook.

"I really think that it's less about the things you have or the skills you have and more about the mindset. Homesteading really encompasses so many different skills. I think that you can spend your entire life learning new things, getting deeper, and more purist if you want to."

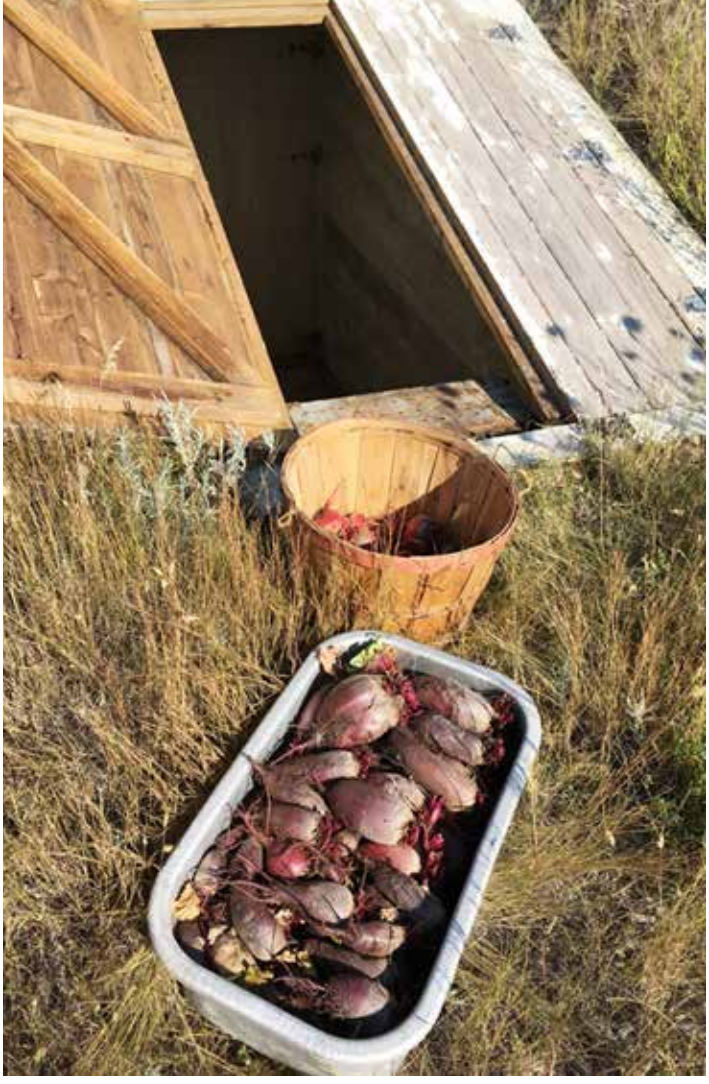
Courses, cookbook, and beef offered by Meghan Gates can be found at www.goodhandle.net.

A few states away, Tiffany Hutchinson homesteads near the base of the Absaroka Mountains. Her husband works for the Hoodoo Ranch in Cody, Wyoming, and the couple raise their four sons in the western lifestyle.

Hutchinson, like Gates, did not grow up on a ranch. Now that she and her husband live a half-hour from town and can foster independence through homesteading, it is a key motivator for her. "My biggest thing is, I like to be self-reliant. I just want to be able to take care of my family without relying on everybody else," she said.

A no-till garden is Hutchinson's pride and joy. The method yields the most amount of food with the least amount of work. "It's nearly effortless," she said.

Her garden used to be a field. It was mowed, the sagebrush was removed, and the foundation was set.



High yields and low maintenance are the reasons Hutchinson uses a no-till garden. Though it takes time to establish, the "fruits" of a no-till garden are abundant.

Root cellaring is a "lost art" according to Hutchinson, but she has mastered it. Hutchinson's root cellar, which was cleaned out and reclaimed nearly 10 years ago, was a lifesaver during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Hutchinsons are passionate about raising their four boys in western traditions. Traditions, both in homesteading and cowboying, are important to Hutchinson, whose husband works for the Hoodoo.

The process for establishing a no-till garden is as follows: lay down four layers of newspaper, followed by six inches of compost or aged manure, then six inches of wood chips. "The first year or two your stuff is slightly stunted, but after that, my yields of my stuff have gotten bigger and bigger every year," said Hutchinson.

She claims that the number of weeds picked yearly would not even fill a five-gallon bucket. The garden can thrive with little weeding and even days without watering. With her busy lifestyle, working as a part-time landscaper, helping with ranch work and brandings, and mothering her four boys, it is the ideal method of gardening.

Even in the high elevation near the mountain, Hutchinson's garden is successful. For whatever reason, the no-till method does not even require the rotation of crops, as her section of corn – known to need yearly rotation – continues to yield more each year.

To complement her yearly vegetable harvest, Hutchinson has also mastered the art of using her root cellar for food storage. When they moved into their house in 2014, the cellar had not been used since the 1930's. after cleaning it out, she now has the use of a traditional, 12x32' space to preserve a food supply. "It's a lost art," she said.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, she was well-equipped to provide for her family without running to town with the exception of having a massive toilet paper supply, she joked.

The Hutchinsons, besides consuming their regular supply of beef, have also raised and butchered hogs, Cornish hens, and broad breasted turkeys.

Hutchinson also possesses the skills of a master seamstress. She used to make her husband's band collared shirts, which the other cowboys would try to trade him out of at brandings. She also made fleece sweaters in the buckaroo style. Sewing is not her favorite part of homesteading, but she is grateful to have the knowledge. Never one to have a "town job," Hutchinson helps where she can on the ranch alongside her boys and husband, landscapes, and sells candid western photography through her business, Wyoming Life Photography.

Like Gates, Hutchinson hopes to instill the values of their western and traditional lifestyle in their boys. "I see so many people in today's world that are so dependent on other people and the government. I hate that. I want to teach my kids to be the way me and my husband Craig are: You work hard, you take care of yourself so you can take care of your friends and neighbors around you."

the Fence Post

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Hot water bath canning is a popular method of preservation but should be reserved for high acid foods such as fruits, jams, jellies and pickles.

While we call it canning in the United States, the process actually uses glass jars with easily removable lids.

The dehydration method is popular with products such as tomatoes. At the store, sun dried tomatoes can be very expensive.

Dried green beans have become increasingly popular as a shelf stable snack.

Home Food Preservation Post-COVID

By Callie Hanson

Of the many changes that came about from the COVID-19 pandemic, a shift in interest towards home preservation and canning is one of the more positive changes.

Sheila Gains, Arapahoe County Master Instructor of Family and Consumer Sciences notes interest in canning and food preservation has been on the rise since as early as the Y2K event in the early 2000s.

"People wanted to have stockpiles of food in case something happened. While nothing major happened during Y2K, we have various weather events and issues like COVID where supply chains are severely disrupted," Gains explains. "With COVID, people had a lot of time on their hands and a lot of people suddenly wanted to start canning."

Gains notes this caused some issues with canning supplies themselves as these manufacturers were also under COVID restrictions as well and there were limited quantities of canning supplies available, which further drove the demand.

Dr. Marisa Bunning of CSU Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition notes there is a growing interest in knowing about food especially in both urban and rural areas.

"Since COVID, I have noticed a growth of specialty grocery stores with larger produce departments and a growing interest in cooking and preservation," Dr. Bunning says. "There has also been an uptick in the number of farmers' markets, which is actually tracked by USDA. These numbers have leveled off some now but this means people have the option to buy these fresh fruits and vegetables from local producers."

Dr. Bunning also notes the COVID-19 pandemic drove the demand for canning supplies into a shortage as more people either got into gardening or expanded their existing gardens as they had more time on their hands.

"A lot of people have kept to behavior and activities they picked up during the pandemic including this interest in gardening, canning, and preservation. I also believe the recent hike in food prices has also driven this interest of growing food at home as people try to stretch their money."

Gains explains there are four major types of food preservation: dehydration, canning, freezing and fermentation.

"Freezing is the easiest method and tends to taste the most similar to the fresh product," she explains. "You simply blanch the vegetable, place it in a freezer grade bag to avoid picking up odors or freezer burn, and store until you need it."

Gains notes dehydrating takes more time and the equipment to do so can be costly. Dried foods tend to taste the least like fresh foods but are shelf stable.

As products such as kimchi and sauerkraut become more popular, the fermentation method has grown in popularity as well. CSU has even offered multiple classes on this process.

Canning can be subdivided into two types, pressure canning and boiling water bath canning.

"Hot water bath canning is for high acid foods such as fruits, jams, jellies and pickles," Gains explains. "If you will do vegetables, meats, or soups they have to be preserved in a pressure canner to avoid botulism."

Green cabbage and carrots is a popular combination to can.

Home canned salsas and tomato sauces are an easy way to preserve an abundant tomato crop. CSU EXTENSION PHOTOS

Preserve Smart is an application started by CSU Extension to assist users in finding tested and safe preservation recipes and methods.

With the interest in canning and food preservation continuing to grow due to various factors, extension professionals note the importance of food safety cannot be understated. Ignoring food safety protocols with canning can lead to deadly cases of botulism.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, home canning of vegetables is the number one cause for outbreaks of botulism across the U.S..

"Botulism is a rare but serious illness caused by a toxin that attacks the body's nerves. It can cause difficulty breathing, muscle paralysis, and even death. The toxin is made by Clostridium botulinum bacteria. Improperly canned, preserved, or fermented foods can provide the right conditions for the bacteria to make the toxin."

Gains notes that using tested recipes for canning is essential to avoid the risk of botulism.

"There are a lot of great resources available for people to find safe and tested canning recipes. There is no excuse to ignore food safety with all of the resources available at your fingertips. Your grandmother's recipe was not tested and it is not sure to be safe. It is critical that the pH and viscosity of canned goods is correct and the heat penetrates clear to the center."

CSU has spent the last several years developing an application designed to ensure safe food preservation practices for users known as Preserve Smart. This application allows users to plug in their elevation, as well as the type of food they are wanting to preserve and the method they are using to generate safety tested recipes for that item.

Dr. Bunning notes the idea for this application came about when an employee at CSU was at a farmers' market and found a deal on large quantities of apricots but did not have a quick way to reference how many she would need for certain preservation methods.

"This application is still a work in progress. It started with just fruits and vegetables but we have since added recipes for other food types," Bunning says. "We decided to include some basic information such as the science behind why your elevation matters as well as a glossary of terms."

For those just getting started in gardening and food preservation, Dr. Bunning notes reaching out to regional or local extension offices can provide a wealth of information for specific areas and their needs.

"For Colorado and surrounding areas, even with our limited growing season we have a lot of vegetables and fruits that do well here," she says. "Zucchini is very easy to grow and a good vegetable to start pickling. Tomatoes are also very popular as they are easily grown and can be very useful both canned and frozen."

"Your local extension agencies are great places to ask questions and get to know your local agents. I naturally discuss canning a lot because it is very popular but I like to remind people that freezing is a great option. For example, strawberries are great to make jams and can, but you may not want or need eight jars of it. You can freeze the amount you need as sliced strawberries or freezer jam."


Salsa Verde
HOT SO SAUCE

Cottage Food Laws & Commercial Kitchens

By Callie Hanson

When South Dakota Specialty Producers Association (SDSPA) began visiting communities and determining their needs in the realm of specialty production, the association found that a lack of commercial kitchen space was a large hurdle for small business owners and growers.

SDSPA is a non-profit geared towards specialty producers in the state, particularly those producing non-commodity products such as specialty crops, niche meats and grains, agritourism, and organic products. USDA defines specialty crop producers as those producing fruits and vegetables, cut flowers, honey, landscape plants, etc. Members of the association include growers, processors, chefs, marketers, consumers, resource providers and others interested in producing, marketing and consuming specialty crops and local products.

Laura Kahler was contracted by the SDSPA through a USDA block grant and has been tasked with conducting a series of meetings across the state and the conversation of commercial kitchen space has come up time and time again.

"We get these meetings together to discuss what is going well, what needs improvement, and what are some resources necessary to be more successful," Kahler explains. "When we start thinking about commercial kitchen spaces, this can be very expensive for a small business. For some producers, the ability to rent the space they need when they need it is a lot more feasible."

From a legal standpoint, having a space that is already up to par with commercial kitchen standards of the state saves producers the headache and expense of having to build their own space in line with strict food safety laws. Users of the space would simply have to carry their individual food licenses.

Many states have specific laws governing how individuals can sell homemade food goods. South Dakota in particular saw a handful of amendments in 2023 to existing cottage food laws.

According to Curtis Braun, SDSU Extension Food Safety Field Specialist, House Bill 1322 expanded opportunities for producers to sell certain products with "minimal regulator requirements."

"The bill expands the types of home-produced, home-canned and food products allowed to be sold directly from a household," Braun said in a release through SDSU. "Before certain foods are processed or sold out of a house, each individual involved in production is required to complete a South Dakota Department of Health-certified online training once every five years."

The key component of products falling under cottage food regulations is the locations in which the food is allowed to be sold. Products marketed under cottage food laws must be sold at the processor's primary residence, farmer's market, roadside stand, or another temporary sale venue. In order to sell at a retail location, products must be prepared in a licensed commercial kitchen.

Commercial kitchen setups do not have to be brand new, but can instead be a product of underutilized spaces in communities.

COURTESY PHOTO

SDSPA HOSTS MEETINGS ACROSS THE STATE TO GAUGE THE NEEDS OF ITS MEMBERSHIP IN THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES.

A hot topic among regional meetings of the South Dakota Speciality Producers Association is the need for commercial kitchen spaces.

South Dakota Speciality Producers Association serves those producing non-commodity products such as specialty crops, niche meats and grains, agritourism, and organic products.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Instead of reinventing the wheel and building entirely new commercial kitchen spaces, Kahler is encouraging communities to look into underutilized spaces that already exist in small communities such as churches, event halls, and retirement communities.

Braun notes that this option is desirable to producers due to the lower cost. While the process is similar to that of building a totally new kitchen, producers would not have to submit a kitchen layout. Instead, they would apply for the license and submit the food service plan review questionnaire, along with a routine licensing inspection.

In a recent Zoom informational meeting, Kahler invited Merae Meek, who serves as the hospitality associate for Grace Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. The church has found much success in renting their kitchen space, serving as both a means of income for the church and a valuable resource for their community.

"When COVID hit, we had a full commercial kitchen with three full-time chefs on staff to serve the needs of our church," Meek explains. "When we started doing research, we decided renting kitchen space would be the best way to go. We spent a long time ironing out the logistics and this has been a really great thing for our community."

Meek explained in the informational meeting that they have created a manual of everything renters would need to know and a price list. A monthly fee of $100 covers chemical cleaning and trash removals and allows for the church to charge less for the space.

The per hour rental price varies from $17 to $40 per hour, depending on the space they are renting.

"Our whole kitchen is a shared space so we have different packages that people can choose. We are big enough to accommodate 10 people at once. We can do anything from large catering jobs, to a baker who may just need a single table for space."

In addition to counter space, the church rents out its cooler and freezer space by the shelf as well as dry storage space.

"When you think about it, how many communities in this region have underutilized spaces that could get approved for use as a commercial kitchen?" Kahler points out. "As much as these types of spaces could benefit larger cities, I think this is a great opportunity to keep money and development within smaller communities and really benefit all those involved."

The center ridgepole on the new sod house was originally the ridgepole for the sod home of Theodore Frischkorn and his sister, Mary (Frischkorn) Haumont.

By Ruth Wiechmann

Custer County, Nebraska, has been called the 'Sod House Capitol' of the world. While most newly built homes sport vinyl siding and sheetrock, walls are currently going up on the area's newest soddy.

Rick Maas is the visitor center coordinator at the Sandhills Journey National Scenic Byway Visitor Center at Broken Bow, Nebraska. The sod house being built there is Rick and Mike Evans' brainchild, but they've had a lot of help over the last several years as the project has gone from "good idea" to actuality.

Kevin Cooksley's family has deep roots here. Custer County was established in 1877. Cooksley's great-grandmother and her brother homesteaded 16 miles northeast of Broken Bow in 1878, five years before Broken Bow was founded in 1883 and eight years before the railroad came in 1886.

Mary Frischkorn was a pioneer school teacher. She and her brother Theodore, "Thee," left their roots in Beaver County, Pennsylvania to come to the Nebraska Sandhills. Thee was a builder by trade, and Kevin shared a photo of the siblings sitting in front of their sod house.

"Thee built barns," Kevin said. "He built the house that my family currently lives in, possibly around 1895. It's a big two-story house with a concrete wall basement. The man who remodeled it for us in 2014 said that it was the best built house he had ever worked on."

Mary died 21 years before Kevin was born, but his mother, Mary Bell Haumont Cooksley, had some memories of her father's mother.

"Mom remembered her as a very stern person; she was not one of those people who are all warm and fuzzy," Cooksley said. "Mary was a woman with a lot of starch. Very proper. By that time mom lived on the ranch and her grandparents lived in town. In the 1920s you didn't go

Building History

Sod Walls and Appreciation for Pioneers Grow

Evans and Maas initially hoped to use a grasshopper plow and team of horses to cut the sod for the house, but discovered a local friend had custom built the perfect sod cutter to mount on his skid steer. Mechanization made the process easier, but it still proved to be back-breaking labor to lift the 80+ pound sod bricks into place.

Siblings Theodore and Mary Frischkorn sit in front of their sod house. Mary's great-grandson Kevin Cooksley still has the chairs they are sitting on in the photo. The ridgepole visible has been kept by Mary's descendants for over 140 years and will crown a newly built soddy at the Sandhills Journey National Scenic Byway Visitor Center, Broken Bow, Nebraska.

Mike Evans' great-grandparents pose in front of their sod home, near Ipswich, South Dakota. "He was a travelling Methodist preacher," Evans said. "I don't know how on earth he talked her into homesteading, but they both look happy in the photo."

to town all that much when you were 16 miles out. Mom was only nine years old when her grandmother died so she didn't have a lot of memories."

Mary's brother Thee never married, but romance came Mary's way through a neighboring homesteader.

"My great grandfather-to-be, Jules Haumont, emigrated from Belgium with his brother Edmund in 1879," Kevin said. "He took up a claim five or six miles northwest of Mary and Thee's homestead. The closest post office was about three or four miles to the southeast of both claims. The way my grandmother told the story, Jules would ride his horse down there to post a letter or pick up mail, and one day he stopped here and asked if he could water his horse. Mary noticed that he had a bandage on his hand, and asked if she could change the bandage for him."

Mary and Jules married about three years later. Cooksley speculated that it must have been an interesting courtship, as Mary spoke German and Jules spoke French! Their only son, Frank Haumont, was born in the sod house on Jules' homestead in 1894; they also had three daughters. Frank attended Nebraska Wesleyan University 1913-1917, where he met Hetty Bell. Frank enlisted to serve his country in World War I after he graduated, and after the war returned home to the ranch. Frank and Hetty were married in 1919. They started a herd of purebred shorthorn cattle and raised their family on the ranch. Their daughter, Mary Bell, would become Kevin's mother.

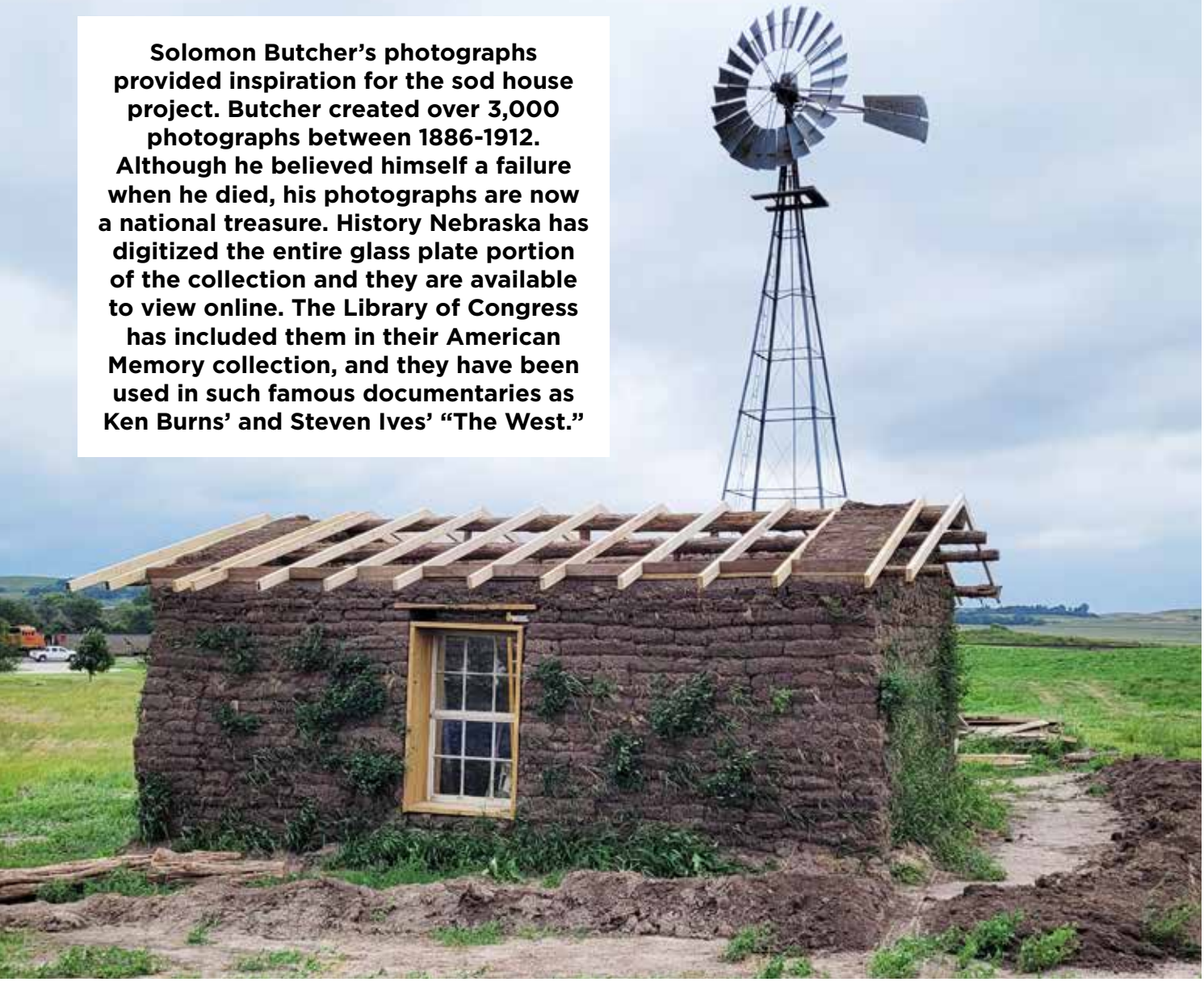
The sod house project was supported entirely by private donations and volunteer labor. As more people heard about the idea, more people showed up to help. Thirty-five to forty people have shown up for each work day to help with building the house.

The Custer Economic Development Corporation owns the property where the sod house is being constructed. The Red Barn Visitor Center is located on the east side of Broken Bow, and the sod house is located on the same land. Rick Maas takes care of it, and he and Mike Evans are both on various committees with the organization.

"The Red Barn is Rick's baby," Evans said. "I love history and so does he. Seven or eight years ago, we were both on a CEDC committee, and one day while we were in a meeting, I said to him, 'We're famous for Solomon Butcher's photos of Custer County's sod houses; we need to build a sod house.'"

Kevin Cooksley says that he has gained a deeper gratitude for his ancestors' sheer determination to carve a life and a home out of the sod. "Projects like this help us remember how much they sacrificed and give us a new perspective on what they did."

Solomon Butcher's photographs provided inspiration for the sod house project. Butcher created over 3,000 photographs between 1886-1912. Although he believed himself a failure when he died, his photographs are now a national treasure. History Nebraska has digitized the entire glass plate portion of the collection and they are available to view online. The Library of Congress has included them in their American Memory collection, and they have been used in such famous documentaries as Ken Burns' and Steven Ives' "The West."



Born in what would become West Virginia in 1856, Solomon Butcher came to Nebraska in 1880. He discovered that the life of a homesteader was not for him, and also developed a profound respect for the hardy and tenacious people of the plains. He set out to document the settlement era, creating over 3000 photographs between 1886-1912. Butcher died in 1927, and is buried at Gates, Nebraska, about 25 miles from Broken Bow. He felt that his life was a complete failure, but his photography has kept the history of the American West alive.

Now Evans and Maas are, quite literally, rebuilding a piece of that history.

Three out of Mike Evans' four sets of great-grandparents lived in sod homes. While the soddies were standard construction practice during homestead days, building them is a lost art.

"Sod houses are what Custer County is known for," Evans said. "But there's not a lot of information on how to build them. It's been no picnic. Nobody around knew how to do

A closeup shot of the ridgepole donated by Kevin and Shannon Cooksley.

it. We had to research what we could and figure out what we couldn't find answers for."

The sod houses of Custer County were built of necessity. Trees were scarce and sod was plentiful. Thee and Mary's ridgepole was sourced from 40 miles away, near Victoria Springs, where tall pines grew.

Maas and Evans feel the significance of the historic ridgepole.

"It will be our crowning jewel," Maas said.

Thee and Mary's sod house was torn down over 100 years ago, but the ridgepole had been saved all those years. Kevin and Shannon Cooksley were part of the sod house committee, and thought that it would be appropriate to donate the ridgepole for this project.

"It's been quite an awakening for us as we help build this sod house," Cooksley said. "Laying up sod walls is backbreaking work. Imagine how hard it would be when they didn't have mechanization. It has been an educational process for all of us. Standing inside those walls is like being in a fortress."

The sod house is 16 feet by 20 feet on the exterior, with interior dimensions of 12 feet by 16 feet. Two-foot-thick walls lend to good insulation quality in both summer and winter. As the walls go up, it is evident that the pioneers living in their soddies would stay cool in the summers and warm in the winters. There would be no wind howling through the cracks. Cooksley said that helping with the project is truly bringing history to life for them.

As Evans and Maas got serious about their idea, they originally hoped to use a team of horses and a grasshopper plow as their pioneer ancestors did.

Building History

Volunteers used shovels to cut the sod bricks to length, and boards to carry them to the walls and set them in place.

Sod Walls, written by Roger Welsch and published in 1968, proved a valuable resource for Mike Evans and Rick Maas as they researched how to build a sod house. They have had questions that they couldn't find answers to. "Some things must have been integral knowledge," Evans said.

Volunteers found handling the sod bricks to be back-breaking work, and marveled at the stamina and fortitude of their ancestors.

"I'm into antiques and I had a grasshopper plow already," Evans said. "I put new handles on it but I wasn't sure who was man enough to handle it. I knew it would take someone who was more of a cowboy than I am to handle a team and break sod with the plow."

Evans happened to be visiting with a friend who told him he'd invented a sod cutter that mounted on his skid steer. Typical sod cutters go just below the roots. Evans explained that for making sod bricks, the sod needs to be cut 2 inches below the roots to get into the mud. His friend's invention did exactly that.

Several years of drought in a row put the project on hold. The ground was so hard that they could not get the sod cutter into the ground.

"We were pretty much set up," Evans said. "We decided that whenever we got some rain, we would build the house. In the meantime, we read a lot, and Rick Maas and I went a looked at sod houses that had fallen down, checking out the thickness of the bricks and how they tied together in the corners, and observing what we could."

Rick Maas worked in the lumberyard business for years, so he had plenty of experience planning building projects.

"When building a sod house, not much of that applies," Maas laughed. "It's different. Nobody's done it before. Roger Welsch's book, Sod Walls, published in 1968, gave us interesting descriptions of the process. We also looked at sod houses still partially standing in our area."

Without a 'how to' manual, Evans says they have learned a lot by trial and error. When five inches of rain fell in 10 days, following the driest April on record since 1885, it was time to start building. Maas said that over 40 volunteers showed up, with 30 to 35 people present each day.

"After the sod was cut into 1-foot-wide strips, we used an edger spade to cut the strips to length to make 2-foot-long individual bricks. The strips were put onto boards, which were set on a pallet so they could be lifted by a skid steer with forks and put onto a pickup to be hauled to the house site. We lifted the boards onto the wall to put the bricks in place. It got progressively harder as the wall grew higher."

Maas and Evans had noticed that the sod bricks in the walls of the old sod houses were laid with the grass side down, although this was not explained in any of their research.

"We think we discovered the reason," Evans said. "With the dirt side up you can chisel it off with a corn knife or other tool to make it level. Even though our bricks were pretty uniform we still had to do that. It must have been integral knowledge so people felt no need to explain the reason for it."

The team chose to cut their sod on the west side of the visitor center property, where it is a mixture of brome

Building History

Roof beams and rafters are up on the sod house. Sheathing boards will be added next and then the roof will be finished with a waterproof membrane and sod.

grass and bluegrass. The area had been cut for hay just a few days before they started cutting the sod. The volunteer crew laid up 22 layers of sod bricks in two days.

"We noticed that the walls had a Jell-O effect; the bricks weighed nearly 85 pounds apiece and were full of water," Evans said. "It hit us after a while that back in the day, a pioneer would probably get up in the morning, hitch up his team, lay over the sod. Then he had to cut it into bricks, then carry it to the home site. It was probably a man working with his wife and kids, or maybe with a neighbor or brother-in-law, not a crew like we had. He might get a layer done in a day, maybe two or three layers at most. Then it would have time to settle and dry out before more layers were added."

They quickly realized that they had better slow down and do some reinforcing while it dried down and stabilized. After giving it some time, they are pleased that the walls are settling straight down and staying square. Once they feel it has settled completely, they will add more layers on the walls, complete the gable ends, and build the roof structure.

Evans and Maas appreciate the continued support from the community for the sod house project.

"People would hear about it and come up to us wanting to help," Evans said. "They would tell us that their grandparents or great-grandparents lived in a soddy. We have had incredible support and enthusiasm from people who showed up to help or gave us donations. The ridgepole donated by the Cooksley family will be our crowning jewel when we put the roof up."

Evans said that they will hold a celebratory open house this fall after the sod house is completed.

Maas is pleased that the sod house has already attracted visitors even though it is still under construction.

"We have gotten so much attention just from people driving by," he said. "Lots of people have stopped; our

visitor count is increasing. We happen to be a passport stop in the Nebraska tourism program. We are on the Sandhills Journey National Scenic Byway. Highway 2 runs right through the Sandhills, from Grand Island to Alliance; the sod house will be a significant draw to the byway, Broken Bow, and other towns along the way."

Maas has gained a greater appreciation for the strength of the pioneers through the sod house project.

"People back in that day had to be tough," Maas said. "They were doing this without machinery or technology, and neighbors were so far apart that they probably didn't have forty people showing up to help."

Kevin Cooksley says that he has gained a deeper gratitude for his ancestors' sheer determination to carve a life and a home out of the sod.

"Projects like this help us remember how much they sacrificed and give us a new perspective on what they did," he said.

STRATEGIES FOR BETTER *Soil*

Bar Cross Ranch meadow grass is thriving and healthy.

Dusty Emond's sheep at sunset. COURTESY PHOTO

By Heather Smith Thomas

Managing land for soil health has ecological and economic benefits. According to Jeff Goodwin, PhD (Director, Center for Grazing Lands and Ranch Management within the Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management in Texas A&M's College of Agriculture), for optimum soil health, six principles apply:

1. Context; consider environmental, financial and social context for decision-making
2. Armor the soil: keep it covered to minimize bare ground
3. Minimize soil disturbance by utilizing reduced/no-till practices on cropland and adaptive grazing strategies on pastures.
4. Increase plant diversity with warm and cool season grasses and forbs.
5. Keep living roots in the ground all year
6. Integrate livestock grazing.

These principles can be followed whether a person has one acre, 10 acres or thousands of acres. Here are examples of farms and ranches that have been working at this goal and seeing improvements.

Dusty Emond is a 4th generation rancher in north central Montana. The operation runs cow-calf pairs, heifers, stockers, sheep and goats. The goal is to utilize regenerative practices.

"I went to the Ranching for Profit school in 2006 and started going to seminars on regenerative agriculture," Emond said. "The more you learn, the more you realize you don't know! We went to all of Nicole Masters' seminars and it amazed me how little I knew about soil—in terms of microbes, fungi ratios, etc. I was barely aware that we had microbes and fungi, let alone ratios! It was an eye-opener and made me believe there is a lot of potential to improve this ground. We've been slowly working our way to becoming more regenerative, trying to pay attention to soil health and trying to improve our grazing management and rotations."

Dusty Emond's sheep and cattle are often pastured together.

Dusty Emond's solar-powered pumps are utilized to fill water tanks for the cows, with water from fenced-off ponds.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Bar Cross Ranch – moving cattle to new pasture. **COURTESY PHOTOS**

"The pastures that have been getting some rest are showing more diversity. We now have a lot of green needle grass, which for our environment is an indicator that the soils are improving. I don't remember seeing much green needle grass when I was a kid; we mainly had blue gramma grass and shorter species that can withstand higher intensity season-long grazing. So, we are getting some more desirable species."

The Bar Cross Ranch near Cora, Wyoming (southeast of Jackson Hole) has been practicing holistic management. Katie Scarbrough, Ranch Manager, saidthis operation for many years was typical to the area, putting up hay in summer while cattle were on the range, and grazing hayfield aftermath in the fall, and fed hay in the winter.

Jeff Goebel, a Certified Educator with Holistic Management International has done some work with Katie on the ranch. Jeff brought in Gregg Simonds a few years ago, for his input.

"Gregg used to manage the Deseret Ranch in Utah and he can often help answer questions," Scarbrough said.

Some of the things that work well in other parts of the country with more rainfall and better soils do not work in the arid West on geologically younger, thinner soils in rugged terrain.

Bar Cross Ranch pasture rotation improves soil health and grass production.

Barney Creek – Pete putting up hot wire to divide a pasture.
COURTESY PHOTOS

"This is why we brought in Gregg, to ask what he thinks," Scarbrough said.

With traditional season-long grazing, land becomes degraded. One way to reverse that trend is with rotational grazing. Using adaptive grazing practices and regenerative principles, with more water sources and temporary fencing, soil improves again. An important benefit from grazing in desert country is increased microbial stimulation from the grazing animals and the fertility they supply via manure and urine. This helps stimulate soil biology and growth of new grasses from the latent seed bank. Soil water infiltration rates increase significantly. The simple use of regenerative principles and practices are more efficacious and far more productive in restoring a degraded landscape than any chemical or mechanical means or planting seeds.

Barney Creek Livestock is a family operation near Livingston Montana, devoted to regenerative agriculture. Pete and Meagan Lannan have been practicing holistic management for 10 years and feel it's the only way they were able to stay in agriculture.

This ranch has been in the family since 1900.

"When my dad took over the ranch, it was the era of modernization," Lannan said. "My dad built up the cattle herd and always had a job on the side as well."

When Lannan came back to the ranch and looked at cost of equipment, he had to find another way to keep the ranch going.

"I started reading about Allan Savory, and books by Joel Salatin. I watched videos and found some of Gabe Brown's information. I read Jim Gerrish's book Kick the Hay Habit and books about grazing," he said.

Lannan learned that cattle are a great tool to build the soil.

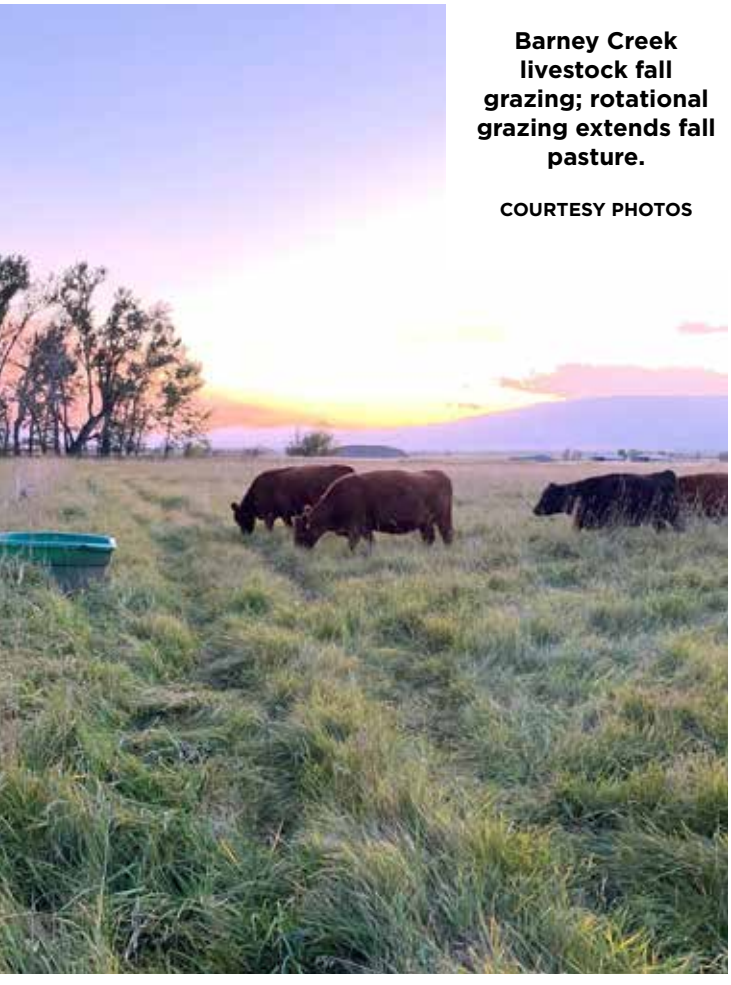
"My interest in holistic management and rotational grazing began because I didn't want to have to prop the ranch up with an outside job; I wanted the ranch to be profitable on its own," Lannan said.

With rotational high-density grazing he and Meagan have seen visible progress in the productivity of pastures, and now they are also leasing a few other places.

Electric fence divides a Barney Creek pasture.

Barney Creek livestock fall grazing; rotational grazing extends fall pasture.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Carmichael bulls on pasture.
COURTESY PHOTO

"One place was really degenerated; the new owner wondered if there was any hope for it, and we said yes," Lannan said. "We've seen degraded land improve, here and in Africa. Nature will recover it, with proper management."

Some of the old ways 100 years ago were very healthy for the land, then modern technology, commercial fertilizer and big machinery came along and people thought they needed to grow more productive crops and get more performance from livestock.

"It was counterproductive. Now we try to get back to more diversity and a healthier land base," Lannan said.

Bart and Shannon Carmichael focus on holistic management and regenerative agriculture in South Dakota. Ranching has been a lifelong passion for Bart, who started leasing his grandparents' place near Faith, South Dakota when he was a junior in high school.

"It was just 4 big pastures Grandpa used as seasonal pastures. After Shannon and I got married, the first thing we did was start building fences, dividing those big pastures so we could do more moves and rotation."

In 2012 they had a serious drought and decided to allot areas for the whole herd, using 40-acre pieces fenced off with temporary electric fence.

"It really helped stretch our pastures," Carmichael said.

Rotational grazing extended their grazing season; there are not many days that they have to feed hay in winter.

"When we're moving through pastures during winter, we almost always have green grass (green understory in the tall grass) everywhere we go," Carmichael said.

They started dividing pastures into even smaller pieces, which gave everything else more recov-

Carmichael cows on pasture.
COURTESY PHOTO

Tom Heyneman checking rotated pastures. COURTESY PHOTOS

Photo taken in 2015 vs. 1985.

ery time. All the forage species have a chance to mature and go to seed. This has made a huge difference in forage quantity and quality and allowed some of the missing native plants to come back in.

Tom Heyneman has been using intensive grazing to improve grass production on his Bench Ranch near Fishtail, Montana. His parents bought the ranch in the 1950s and had sheep, dairy cows, and registered Red Angus.

"In the early 1980s they learned about Allan Savory and went to one of his seminars. By the mid-1980s they were utilizing holistic management principles. Wayne Burleson, a certified holistic management educator, began helping them do a lot of cross-fencing," said Heyneman.

Pastures on the Bench Ranch have been monitored a long time, and photos taken early on by Burleson provide a comparison with what the pastures look like today, showing progress in grass production. There is an obvious contrast.

Twenty-three years ago, they fed big round bales on some dry ground during winter, so cows would stomp out the sagebrush—which had become dense on that high, dry area. The cows got into all the round bales, trampled hay into the soil and deposited lots of manure and urine—creating a sheet of compost.

Today you can still see where the cows created natural compost; the grass is three times higher than in surrounding areas.

"Next to this spot that didn't have cattle impact there's almost no grass, and a lot of sagebrush," Heyneman said.

Burleson took photos of that area the first few years, and they show that this area went from sagebrush and short grass to almost all grass. Livestock can be a good tool for improving the soil. This is Nature's way to build soil.

Sustainable Landscaping
WITH NATIVE PLANTS

A native landscape featuring showy fleabane, switch grass, chocolate flower, penstemon, and prairie sage.

COURTESY PHOTO

By Callie Hanson

Sustainability has become a hot button term in recent years as the general public becomes more aware of their daily effects on the environment. When we think of landscaping in a sustainable way, it comes down to choosing, installing and maintaining plants in a way that has the lightest footprint and most benefit for both people and wildlife.

Deryn Davidson is the Colorado State University (CSU) Extension Sustainable Landscapes Specialist. Davidson notes landscaping in a sustainable way is more about a holistic approach instead of focusing on a single aspect such as water conservation or supporting pollinators, both of which are important pieces of the puzzle.

"Generally speaking, there is more awareness about the impact we have on the environment," Davidson says. "But if you asked 10 different people what is driving the shift towards sustainability, you may get 10 different answers."

"Some people may have heard that pollinators are in trouble and want to do their part to help. Others may have noticed their water bill rising and want to make an effort to use less water in their yards."

Davidson notes sustainable landscaping looks at not only plant choices, but soil types and water use as well. In addition to native plants, adapted, non-invasive plants can also be good choices in these landscapes.

Native plants are defined as those that were present prior to Europeans colonizing North America. Adapted plants are those that do well in the ecosystem but were introduced from another area. Adapted plants have been tried and proven to be non-invasive, which is critical.

"Not only do these landscapes require fewer inputs, they create a sense of place and celebrate our local ecosystems. Creating these types of landscapes provides habitat and a reconnection to our wild spaces."

Colorado State University Natural Resource Extension Specialist Nathaniel Goeckner notes the western states including Colorado and its neighbors are dominated by dryer ecosystems and short grass prairies.

Chocolate flower, which is known for its sweet chocolate smell, with a native bee.

Boulder raspberry is a good choice for dry, shady areas. COURTESY PHOTOS

Prairie clover with native bee.

Rocky Mountain penstemon with honey bee.

"The short grass prairie in Colorado is one of the most changed ecosystems in the state," Goeckner says. "It is estimated nearly 50% of this ecosystem has been transformed to another use. By planting native plants, we can help stem that change and bolster good habitat for other native species."

Another perk of utilizing native plants in a home landscape is these species already have specific relationships with native pollinators, birds, and other wildlife.

"By promoting native plants in your gardens in landscapes, you are essentially creating a continuation of existing ecosystems of the area," Goeckner said.

As water conservation becomes a hotter topic of conversation every year, the added benefit of drought tolerance with native plants cannot be understated.

"When homeowners choose plants native to their area, they are choosing plants who have had thousands of years of adaptations to survive in the ecosystems in which they are native or adapted to."'In our research garden, we have plants on drip irrigation but most of our natives do not need much supplemental water. Once these plants get established they are good to go. For someone who is maybe just getting into gardening, these can tolerate a lot more neglect because they are meant for this environment."

For those looking to have wildlife come visit their property, utilizing native plants can attract wildlife as it can provide both food and shelter.

"There are a lot of native currants such as the golden and wax currant plants that do well and are popular with wildlife," Goeckner said.

When choosing which native plants are best suited for you, the site in which they will be planted is an important consideration. A quick chat with a local extension agent can help narrow down some options that will work in a specific area and conditions.

"Just like introduced and ornamental plants, native plants will have specific light and water needs and should be planted accordingly. For example, someone with a south facing slope or other sunny area, some plants may not do as well there, but natives found in sunny spots will thrive in that type of site."

Some popular foothills and prairie plants include winecups (Callirhoe involucrata), prairie spiderworts (Tradescantia occidentalis), and blanket flowers (Gaillardia aristata).

"Native grasses such as blue gramma, big and little bluestem, and buffalo grass do really well and once they get established."

When it comes to drought tolerance, Colorado and surrounding areas are home to numerous plants with adaptations such as wax or hairy coatings on their leaves, These types of adaptations allow plants to tolerate drought and hold onto moisture better than plants who lack these attributes.

Front yard landscapes planted with native prairie plants can be both eye appealing and easily maintained.

CSU has a lot of fact sheets that lay out the elevations, water and sunlight needs of the countless native plants in the area.

For those looking to plant trees, the area is home to a number of native pines, the most popular being ponderosa pines, which do well from New Mexico into Montana. Some popular deciduous trees include cottonwoods and a variety of elder trees. In general cottonwoods and aspens tend to be faster growing but short-lived with weaker wood than their coniferous counterparts.

"If you have an area with some low lying wet spots or near water, peach leaf willows (Salix amygdaloides) do really well or a Rocky Mountain Birch (Betula fontinalis)."

"But the most important thing is to reach out for information on what you are planting and the site conditions they require."

"The only caveat with pine and coniferous trees is if you live in a wildfire prone area, make sure you double check the correct spacing and keep them at least 30 feet from your home as a wildfire safety precaution."

Regardless of what plants they choose, Goeckner encourages everyone getting into native plants to start small and build from there.

"You can start small and increase in size, it can be overwhelming to start with a large project like converting your entire lawn" he says. "Start small and then get in contact with your local extension agent so they can help you work through any hiccups that may occur along the way."

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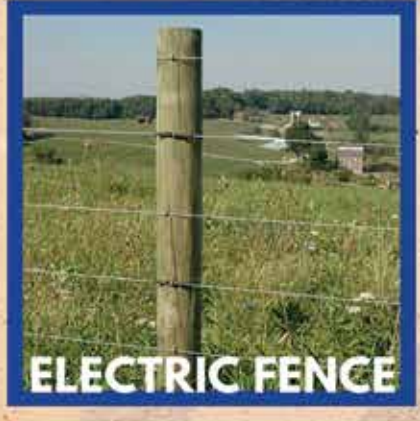

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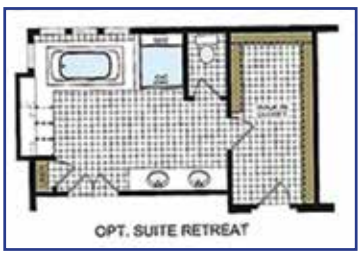

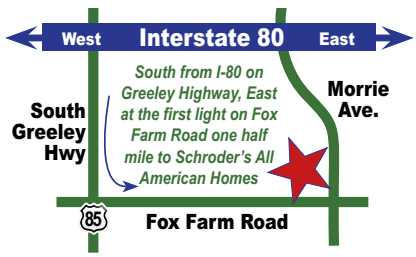

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