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Some Recommended Tobacco Barn Construction Features

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SOME RECOMMENDED TOBACCO BARN CONSTRUCTION FEATURES

By

George A. Duncan

Extension Agricultural Engineer

Following are several recommendations concerning tobacco barn construction or remodeling. These recommendations are included in newly revised blueprints available through the Agricultural Engineering Plan Service (see separate plans list).

1. LOCATION - Locate on high ground, ridge or hill area, with open terrain for good wind currents and air movement, and accessible to fields and farmstead.

2. ORIENTATION - Orientate with the long side perpendicular to prevailing fall winds, usually toward the southwest (ridge northwest to southeast).

3. UTILITIES - Electricity is generally needed for stripping room lights, motors, or other special equipment and tasks. A water supply is optional. Some fuel type will be needed for heat if a stripping room exists.

4. WIDTH - The most common widths are 32- to 40-foot with 2 or 3 driveways. Wider barns or sheds on a side begin to limit ventilation through the tobacco and affect curing results.
5. **LENGTH** - The length is generally in multiples of 12- or 14-feet with the maximum length determined by tobacco capacity needed or levelness of terrain. Use of smaller barns may be an advantage for fire safety and convenience to field or other farm uses.

6. **HEIGHT** - Barn heights are trending toward only 3-4 tiers to reduce the labor required and be more compatible with modern construction methods and newly developed housing aids.

7. **FOUNDATION** - Concrete piers, solid concrete walls, or concrete blocks are used to support sawed posts. All posts should have steel anchor straps with bolts rather than nailed or pin-type connections for adequate post anchorage. Full cross- and longitudinal-bracing are mandatory for resistance to wind forces and structural strength. An increasing number of pole-type barns are being built which have fewer internal braces that interfere with tobacco housing and workers and offer more versatile uses in the future.

8. **FRAMING** - Rough sawn native oak, poplar, and/or pine wood is widely used. Sound quality lumber is needed for tier rails, tier rail supports, plates, and other load-bearing structural members. Specific sizes are shown on blueprints. Do not substitute "dressed" (S4S) lumber without increasing the size or quantity of members used.

9. **ROOF** - The rafter-type roof structure is most common. The clear-span trussed-roof type structure is sometimes used for more open interior space and versatile barn structure.

10. **SIDING** - Wooden boards are most common and often painted with a suitable barn paint or black creosote-tar mixture that is more economical and supposedly provides better wood protection and longer life. Metal siding can be used depending on the barn design and ventilation requirements.
11. **VENTILATION DOORS** - Approximately 1/3 of the sidewall should be openable with vent doors for good natural ventilation. Vent door types include the traditional hinged panels, alternate lightweight track panels, or the more economical top-pivoted panels.

12. **DRIVEWAY DOORS** - Full-width driveway doors allow easy access and convenience in the barn. Either hinged or track doors can be used. A minimum height of 10 ft. is recommended. Up to 12 ft. may be desired for tall equipment needs.

13. **TIER RAILS** - Three-inch by four-inch (3" x 4") sound quality wooden members should be used only for lightly loaded 12 ft. tier rails, use 4" x 4" or equal for heavily loaded 12 ft. and all 14 ft. lengths. Four by four (4" x 4") not safe for 16 ft. and longer designs unless center supported.

**Vertical Spacing** - Five-foot vertical tier-rail spacing is recommended for two-tier barn designs with only one worker in the barn, 4'-6" for three-tier designs with 2 workers in the barn or four-tier design with 3 workers in the barn; and 4'-0" for four-tier designs with 2 workers in the barn.

**Note:** Obviously the stick spacing must be farther apart with the 4'-0" design than 4'-6" or 5'-0" due to the overlap of tobacco in order to achieve equivalent curing results under normal environmental conditions.

**Horizontal Spacing** - Forty-eight inch (48") center-to-center spacing is traditional but a narrower 40" to 44" spacing is suggested for easier standing by the worker and handling of tobacco.

**Tier Rail Supports** - Some minimum sizes of supporting beams for tier-rails when using sound quality full-dimension native oak, or Southern yellow pine are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Span (length)</th>
<th>Using 12' Tier-Rails</th>
<th>Using 14' Tier-Rails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Ft.</td>
<td>2&quot; x 8&quot;</td>
<td>2&quot; x 8&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2&quot; x 10&quot;</td>
<td>2&quot; x 10&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2&quot; x 12'</td>
<td>2&quot; x 12'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caution - DO NOT SUBSTITUTE WEAKER SPECIES SUCH AS POPLAR, OTHER PINES, ETC.,
OR DRESSED (S4S) LUMBER WITHOUT INCREASING QUANTITY OR SIZES OF
MEMBERS OR USING SUPPLEMENTAL BRACING.

14. **SUPPLEMENTAL HEAT** - Coke and LP Gas have been widely used as supplemental heat to
aid curing in humid weather or for big tobacco but the increased cost
and scarcity have reduced the uses to almost zero. For further inform­
ation on gas or coke stoves and curing recommendations, see publication
AGR-14, "Harvesting and Curing Burley Tobacco", by I. Massie, and
J. Smiley, College of Agriculture, Department of Agronomy, University
of Kentucky, Lexington, KY. April, 1979.

15. **FANS** - High-volume ventilation fans can be used in tobacco barns to aid air cir­
culation and improve curing at an economical cost. See separate article
"Using Fans in Conventional Burley Barns", AEU-7, Agricultural
Engineering Department, University of Kentucky, Lexington, 40546-0075.

16. **LABOR SAVING** - Tall barns are not as practical or desirable as in the past. Labor
studies have shown that tall barns require more laborers, utilize
labor less efficiently, and require more time and energy to house
tobacco than do lower barns. Changes in the relative costs of roofing
and structural framing have made lower buildings nearly as economical
per unit of volume and tobacco capacity as tall buildings. Thus, lower
height barns and newer designs featuring 3-4 tiers or mechanical housing
aids are recommended for labor efficiency.