



HOUSING OPTIONS

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In the past few years we have seen a lot of interest in hoop barns as a housing option for sheep. Most producers are initially skeptical of the durability of these barns. In the Pipestone area we have had a few producers construct hoop style barns for sheep.

The hoop design is a free span building that has all of the weight supported on the outside wall. In place of rafters are aluminum half circle hoops that are then covered by a durable tarp that forms the roof. Some of the first generation structures had two sheets of plastic with air pumped between for the outer covering of the shell, similar to a greenhouse roof. Some owners experience problems with the plastic such as tearing or holes developing. The newer generation barns have gone to one thicker tarp that is more durable than the plastic that was used previously.

From an initial investment standpoint these barns can be constructed for about one half of the value of a conventional pole and steel barn. The cost may vary depending on if the entire construction is hired or if the owner does some of the construction. Of course the greatest concern that most producers have is the longevity of the barn. Most of the tarps come with a prorated ten or fifteen year warranty. The producers that have constructed these barns in our area in the past two years are very satisfied with the durability of the barn. In our area in southwest Minnesota these barns have been subjected to hot and cold temperature extremes and a lot of wind without any problems.

The weight of the roof is supported on outside walls of traditional post and wood design. This keeps animals from affecting the roof supports and allows the entire building to be available for use. Manure handling is easy, as there are no supporting post in the center. The sidewalls can be solid, curtained or have doors. The barns are available in various dimensions with the more popular in this area being 30-40 feet wide and 80-100 feet long. A length of greater than 100 feet may not be as comfortable as the air becomes "dead" in the center. The endwalls are often made of plywood, doors or curtains that can be adjusted with the weather.

Producers in our area have used these barns for ewes with lambs and also for growing or finishing lambs.

We have not seen anyone use these as a lambing barn with jugs yet. Probably the greatest advantage of these barns is simply the comfort. These barns are bright and the bedding stays dry. The barns are significantly cooler in the summer than a steel roof barn. If the ends are open these barns have excellent natural airflow and are very comfortable.

If you find yourself in need of a new building or are planning expansion of your sheep enterprise take a look at hoop barns.