

# New Life for Old Buildings: A Smart Move?

[Kevin Jani](#), Minnesota Extension Engineer

Many dairy farmers have buildings that they could remodel or recycle to make more useful. Buildings can be remodeled to expand animal capacity and herd size, increase labor efficiency, or improve animal management and care. But is it a smart move?

Maybe, or maybe not. Good planning and a critical eye are needed to make sure the remodeling and recycling produces a cost-effective, labor-efficient, and functional building.

The remodeled building must fit the dairy's management plan. Too often, people don't do enough planning before plunging into a remodeling project. They end up with a space that is hard to use or doesn't provide the environment animals need to do well. In these cases, the time and money spent on the project were wasted.

Remodeling and recycling require just as much planning as new construction, if not more. Before remodeling a building, consider its structural soundness, roof condition, and location. Location is important because it affects traffic patterns, natural ventilation, manure management, and other activities. Don't spend money and time on buildings in low or wet areas. Consider how the remodeled building fits into future plans, too.

In the planning stage, think about cow flow to and from the building, manure handling, ventilation in hot and cold weather, labor efficiency, feeding, watering, equipment access, and animal comfort (i.e., stall or pen size). All of these factors affect a building's usefulness. An unsolvable problem with one of these factors might make remodeling a bad option. Be careful when accepting compromises for a remodeling project, especially if you plan to use the remodeled building for more than a few years.

Consider costs. A new building might be a better option if remodeling costs would be two-thirds or more of the cost of a new building. Be wary if remodeling cost estimates are 50 percent or more of the cost of a new building.

There are many examples of remodeling and recycling that have produced useful, efficient, and cost-effective spaces:

- Many structurally sound stall barns have been converted to parlors and holding areas.
- Many pole barns, machine sheds, and hay sheds have been converted into freestall barns for cows or heifers. This works very well when the building is properly located and has sidewalls 10-to 14-feet high.

- Some producers have converted old two-story stall barns into naturally ventilated barns for young stock by adding inlets and either installing chimneys or removing the haymow floor boards and adding ridge openings.
- Some people have used old corncribs with center alleys as bedded shade and windbreaks for young stock in open lots.

One of the more difficult recycling projects is to convert an old hog barn or chicken house into a calf barn. Such buildings are hard to ventilate properly. Poor ventilation compromises animal health. Also, both manure handling and feeding are usually done by hand, making the building labor intensive.

In summary, buildings can be successfully remodeled and recycled into useful spaces after careful planning and evaluation of options. Remodeling can breathe new life into an underutilized building. The key to successful building remodeling and recycling is planning to ensure that the remodeled building will be efficient and provide a useful space.

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