

Barn Management Secrets

Learn from real equestrians how you can save time, space, and money in your horse-keeping endeavors

Whether you run a large facility for many horses or provide a home for one or two, we've compiled information geared toward helping improve your day-to-day barn life and operations.

Three horsewomen with a range of experience—stable manager Lindsey Holmgren; horse owner and former 4-H leader Elizabeth Clark; and former boarding facility owner Holli McMahon—share

tips and tricks with us for maximizing time, space, and money around the barn.

Game-Changing Items

A chest freezer Before you throw out that old chest freezer, consider repurposing it for the barn. Holmgren, of Salem, Oregon, has had great success using an unplugged freezer chest as an equine feed bin.

"It keeps (feed) cooler in the summertime, mice can't get in it, and it's really easy to access everything all at once," she says.

Holmgren uses plastic garbage cans to hold the feed and organizes them against the walls of the freezer. She then adds duct tape labels directly above each container with the feed type and horse's name written on them.

The chest also acts as an extra safety measure against loose horses who might venture into the feed room. If a horse unexpectedly escapes in the barn, they'll have a difficult time opening the former freezer, Holmgren says.

Just remember that if small children frequent your barn, unplugged chest freezers can be tempting places to hide and, because they're airtight, can be suffocation hazards. Consider installing a lock on the freezer handle if this could be a risk.

A bucket of baling twine Most equestrians have experienced firsthand the multiuse-power of baling twine. The colorful string truly comes in handy for a variety of tasks when it's easy to access.

Clark, who lives in Penrose, Colorado, has used twine for many tricky tasks, including:

- Constructing an emergency halter.
- Temporarily holding a fence together.
- Securing a hose while filling a water tank.

For easy storage and collection, Clark

Chore efficiency and facility design can help improve your day-to-day barn life and operations.



DUSTY PERIN

keeps a bucket next to her hay room where she can conveniently toss the twine after cutting open a new hay bale. She also recommends hanging a couple of strands in the tack room where it's easy to grab when needed.

A sturdy wheelbarrow or utility vehicle Holmgren and Clark insist: Not all wheelbarrows are created equal. Both recommend investing a little extra to purchase a sturdy two-wheeled wheelbarrow. Holmgren explains that in her experience, these types of wheelbarrows tend to be easier to maneuver with heavy loads and can reduce the number of trips you take to the manure pile.

In addition to stall cleaning benefits, Clark remarks that a sturdy wheelbarrow can lend a solid assist in hauling other materials such as shavings, hay, and even trail obstacles. "There's really not much you can't do with it," she says.

For larger operations, McMahon, of DePere, Wisconsin, can't imagine life without a small utility vehicle with an electronic dump bed. "Not only was it the chuck wagon, it was also a soil hauler, shaving hauler, poop hauler, and people hauler," she says of her barn's utility vehicle.

She used the vehicle's bed for readying feed rations, often prepping her morning feedings the night before and storing the vehicle in the feed room overnight where it was secure and ready to use in the morning.

Organization To the Rescue

Implement tack room arrangements

When it comes to keeping a tack room tidy, Clark, Holmgren, and McMahon all agree that organization is key. How you achieve that organization, however, should be based on the system that works best for you. To create a clean and tidy tack room, you might organize items by:

■ **Rider** At McMahon's boarding facility, trial and error inspired her to install 3-foot by 7-foot tack room lockers (built with sheets of plywood) for each boarder at the barn. The lockers were "large enough you could walk in them," she says. McMahon says benefits included an orderly space and a reduced risk of misplaced tack, all while the boarders had the chance to customize each locker.

■ **Horse** Clark organizes her tack room two ways. First, she dedicates an area



STEPHANIE L. CHURCH/THE HORSE

Baling twine comes in handy for a multitude of tasks when it's easy to access.

to each horse at the barn, and then she arranges her tack in the order she anticipates using each piece. For example, Horse A's tack sits in the right-hand corner of the room, with the saddle pad, saddle, girth, bridle, etc. arranged in the order a rider would reach for them when tacking up. "It's just easy to grab and go that way," she says.

■ **Task** When you step into Holmgren's tack room, ask yourself what job you need to complete, and you'll find everything in one spot because she groups items according to tasks. If you're tacking up, expect to find the saddle and saddle pad next to each other. If you need to plait your horse's mane, the rubber bands, comb, and hair shine will be on the same shelf. "If I'm going to do something, everything I'm going to need for that task is right there," she says. Holmgren says she extends this organization method to her equine first-aid supply as well, which helps her locate items—whether managing a wound, a hoof abscess, or a swollen eye—quickly during an emergency.

Create an arena schedule No matter the size of your facility, if riding instructors, trainers, staff, and boarders frequent it, they might all converge on an arena at the same time. When that happens, who gets to use it and who must wait?

McMahon addressed that problem at her stable by creating an arena schedule to eliminate turf disputes and maximize efficient use of the facility. She used a large, blank calendar that boarders could write their appointments on, but she also suggests exploring digital options such as shared online calendars that can be changed and checked on the run.

Hang up a feeding chart Are you looking for a way to keep feeding programs for multiple horses clear and organized? Holmgren suggests making a feeding chart such as the whiteboard she hung in her feed room for this purpose.

While you can organize a feeding board in many ways, Holmgren has found success laying it out as follows:

- Draw a grid made up of three columns.
- Fill in the rows in the left-hand column with your horses' names.
- Write "AM/PM Feeding instructions" above the middle column.
- Write "Special Instructions" above the far right column.

In addition to bringing organization and clarity to feeding instructions, Holmgren says a well-organized and up-to-date board ensures feedings remain consistent, no matter who is performing the chore.

Be Smart With Storage

Install stall front blanket racks If the only thing on the front of your horse's stall is his nameplate, you could be missing out. Stall fronts provide a valuable opportunity to save time running to and from other parts of the barn for frequently used items.

In addition to bearing safe hooks for hanging halters and lead ropes, McMahon says stall fronts can be great places to install racks for turnout blankets. She found hers, made of an iron-type material with rounded edges, at her local feed store. The rack's location can provide a convenient, time-saving storage solution during blanket season, she says. If you use a stall guard or gate instead of the stall's permanent door, be sure your horse cannot reach the blanket rack with his teeth; it can be a safety hazard if he gets his lower jaw stuck behind the bar. Also, some designs are collapsible when not in use to reduce protrusions in the barn aisle.

Many owners also hang a hoofpick, a flymask, and even fly spray from their horses' stall fronts, in addition to stall cards bearing the horses' age and physical descriptions, their normal vital signs, and owners' emergency contact numbers.

Use vertical space Running out of storage space? Holmgren suggests embracing vertical storage, which she describes as "using your walls for good." To keep her barn floor clear of clutter, she's installed

hooks and shelves on the walls to neatly store various barn items, such as manure forks, while keeping them easily accessible.

For items that need to be stored in containers, she recommends using heavy-duty plastic boxes that fit on your shelves. Be sure to choose containers that will protect the boxes' contents from pest and water damage, as well as dust accumulation.

Use drawer organizers For all the little things haunting the nooks and crannies of your barn, consider stowing them away in plastic drawer sets.

Clark uses small plastic drawer organizers in her barn and dedicates each one to a single horse. She recommends labeling them with a horse's name and information and storing supplements (if in the feed room) or other small items in the units.

Drawers can also be helpful when building a barn emergency kit. Holmgren took a wheeled toolbox and transformed it into her master emergency supply storage.

"It's all in one spot, easy to get to, and then you just restock when you need to," she says.

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LINDSEY HOLMGREN

Holmgren explains that the toolbox is helpful because you can store a variety of large and small items you might need for an emergency, such as gauze, triple antibiotic ointment, Vetrap, liniment, a fly mask, and more, in the different-sized drawers.

Money Savers

Mind your hay use Do you know the exact amount of hay your horse consumes or needs to consume daily? Learning

more about the hay you feed benefits your horse and can help you save money.

Holmgren says having a nutrient analysis done on her hay and measuring hay before feeding are two things that have helped her reduce her feed budget.

The forage analysis revealed exactly what nutrients Holmgren's hay was supplying and helped her determine what else she needed to feed instead of guessing. "It cut my feed (costs) down from \$3 a day (per horse) to \$0.75 a day," she explains.

Consider having your hay analyzed (you can find certified forage testing laboratories on the National Forage Testing Association website: foragetesting.org) and discussing the results with your veterinarian or nutritionist to make sure you're feeding the right amount—and variety—of hay. You might be surprised to find that a more precise approach to hay feeding could save you money.

Be loyal to suppliers Prices for barn supplies such as hay, shavings, feed, and more are always fluctuating. While no one knows if hay prices will spike next year or if shaving prices will fall, McMahon says developing stable, long-term relationships with your suppliers can go a long way in cost efficiency.

"I think developing that relationship with those suppliers (is important) so that when feed goes up, they let you know, but sometimes you don't take a hit like somebody would if they were just buying it (from them) for the first time," she says.

McMahon suggests finding suppliers you like and sticking with them. While not guaranteed, you might be able to lock in a price range for products you purchase frequently, and you will benefit from retaining the services of reliable suppliers who understand the needs of your barn.

Take-Home Message

Horses and barn chores go together like dew and rainrot, but the pathways to accomplishing those chores are almost unlimited. When you learn something new and useful, be sure to share it with us at Letters@TheHorse.com, and we will let other readers know about it. Applying a helpful tip can revolutionize a once burdensome task and add time to your day, space to your barn, and sometimes even money to your bank account. 🐾

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