

# The Last Word

By Ted Brown

When the snow disappears and the bare ground shows through, pretty much everyone who lives on a rural property gets itchy.

Now this itchiness has nothing to do with having gone all winter without a bath, like in pioneer days, but more an itchiness to take on a project.

You see, to occupy our time, we 'ruralites' (is that a word?) have been forced to putter about all winter, working on indoor projects, inside the barn or driving shed.

Or even, God forbid, a project in the house.

I spent much of the winter working in the main barn, creating pens, interconnecting gates, feed passages, box stalls and gravity fed grain bins— all to become more convenient and efficient.

And on top of that, they look nice.

When one lives in the country, and has loads of space and buildings to look at, one tends to start dreaming, perusing the property all winter with an eye to 'do this or that' in the spring, when the snow is all gone.

And naturally, once spring breaks open like a brand new bud, we need to expend some of that pent-up energy on a project we've been secretly planning all winter while the white stuff on the ground prevented us from firing the starting pistol, so to speak.

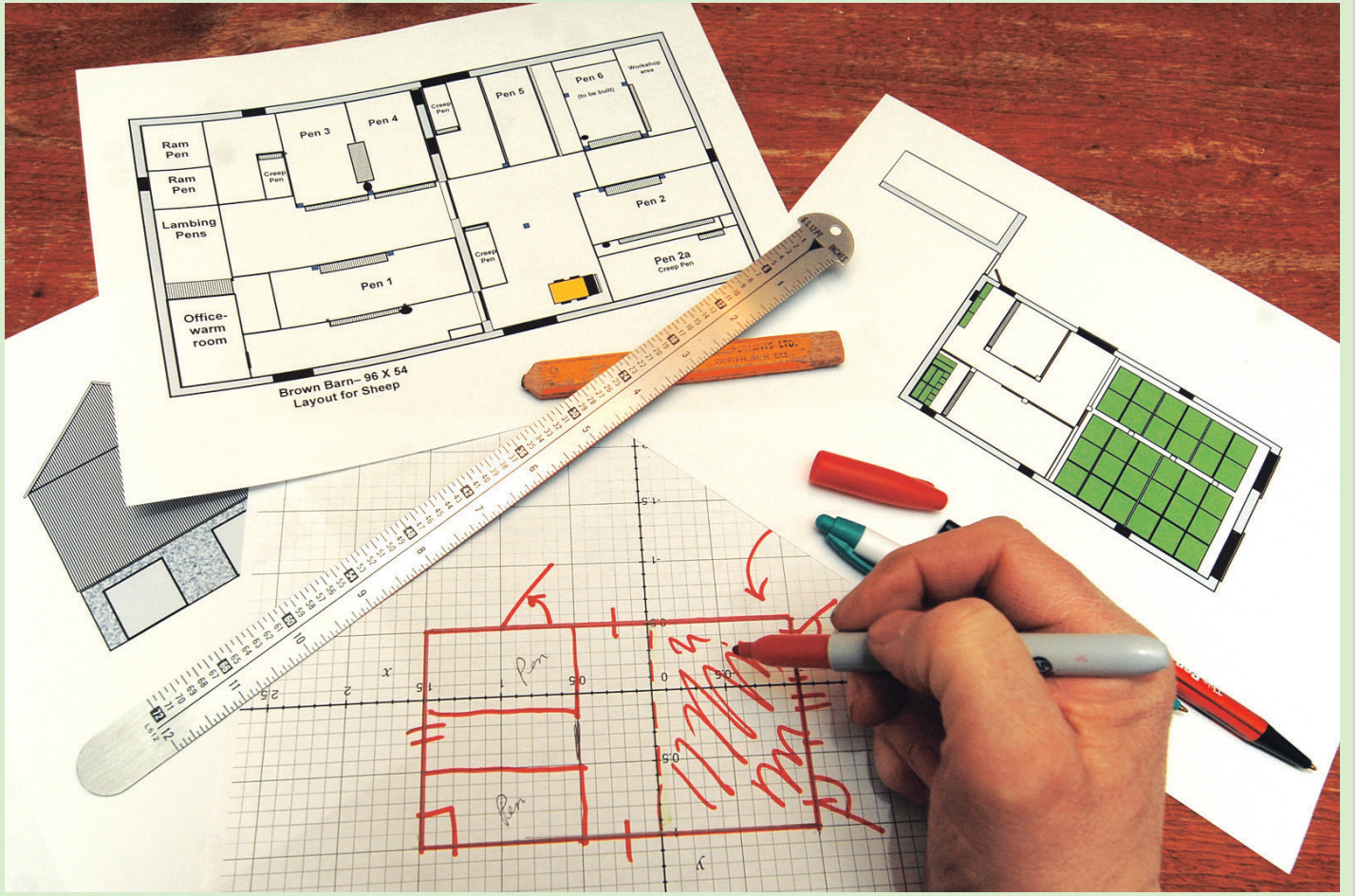
I've only got a dozen or so things I dreaming of doing... but common sense says one might actually come to fruition.

My wild and outlandish projects revolve around plans like taking the small barn we call the hay house, and pouring a concrete floor in it from one end to the other— but when one does the math, and calculates the cost, it's a safe bet that project won't get off the ground, at least not this year.

But it would be *sooooo* nice, a smooth concrete floor where I could store stuff and wheel it around on the smooth floor- not get stuck in the dirt floor like now.

Equally 'pie-in-the-sky' would be taking the same barn and building horse stalls in it, to be able to board a few horses. I even have the plan drawn up-six horse stalls, a tack room, a feed room, a place to hang out...

But when I think about how busy I am at present, common sense tells me the last thing I need is a bunch of



horses to be responsible for— so we'll shelve that project as well.

My ongoing dream to convert the old stone ice house into a guest house is as close to a reality as having the Tooth Fairy and Easter Bunny over for scones and tea on the same Sunday afternoon.

But it would be *sooooo* cool, the little old stone building with quaint little windows, maybe a small fireplace to ward off the cool night's chill and give the building a coziness second to none.

Nope, ain't gonna happen this year. Still waiting on that Lotto 649 thing.

A pond in place of the marshy area? A 'coverall' to store big round bales of hay in?

Well, they're all feasible projects, but the old pocketbook just can't quite support them.

But I do have one plan that will see the light of day.

Our flock of sheep, known as Brown Woolies, are housed inside the barn in their numerous pens, enjoying having me waiting on them hand and hoof.

They haven't been able to go outside, since there aren't any fences

outside that would contain them, and the local coyote population is also a bit too prolific for my liking.

Consequently, they've been housed inside, where it's much safer for them.

And they really seem to like that present arrangement, as they enjoy the cool shaded interior of the barn on the hottest summer days, and food and water that is never far away.

But I'm figuring it's time to kick 'em outside for the summer, to give them fresh air and sunshine, as well as a metal hay feeder in which I can place a big round bale of hay once a week, instead of handling numerous small square bales twice a day. The original feedlot we had for cattle is the perfect place to turn them loose.

But with the coyote situation— and we live close enough to both a marshy area and a bush— I'm going to need to rebuild that enclosure so it is coyote-proof.

Back when we had cattle, coyotes weren't a problem. No coyote in its right mind would consider taking on a Holstein cow that weighed 1,600 lbs. That just wouldn't be prudent.

But when it's a sheep, about one-tenth the weight of a cow, a couple

of coyotes utilizing a bit of teamwork can easily make short work of an adult ewe— even less of a challenge when it's a young lamb.

So I gotta think like a coyote when I rebuild the feed lot to contain the sheep.

Research tells me the openings in the fence must be small— 4 by 6 inches or smaller— a chain link fence is even better. A minimum of five feet in height is a given, six feet is better, and the bottom wires must be anchored tight to the ground, so an enterprising coyote can't dig under the fence.

Running electric fence wires on the top and bottom of the wire fence is also a deterrent when a coyote touches one of them with their nose.

And bringing the sheep into the barn every night is also a good way to keep 'em safe.

So as the snow of winter disappears, and the damp, dank smell of the new earth fills the air, I know I'll soon be able to realize my dream project for this year, and have the sheep out and about, at least during the day.

Sadly, that concrete floor in the hayhouse, or converting the old ice house into a guest house, are dream projects that will not see the light of day— at least not this year.



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