



BUILDING COMMUNITY MOMENTUM

Turning worthwhile opportunities into informed leadership, credible support, and practical action.

Before You Build the Barn

What to think about before a major livestock project enters the state and local approval process.

A new livestock barn may be one of the largest investments you ever make. You may spend months working through animal numbers, feed costs, building design, manure handling, financing, market relationships, and projected returns.

But another side of the project may determine whether you ever get to build it: **Can you successfully get the project from an idea to an approved, financeable, buildable operation?** That requires more than a good building plan. It requires the right site, the right team, good information, early conversations, an understanding of the approval process, and enough trust that the first time your neighbors hear about the project is not when they receive a public notice.

1 Start with the site, not the barn

The first question should not be **'Where would the barn fit?'** It should be **'Is this a good site for this operation?'** Think beyond the building footprint. Where are the nearest homes? Who owns surrounding land? How will prevailing winds affect odor? Where will trucks enter and leave? What roads and bridges will they use? How does water move during a major rain? Where will manure be stored and applied? What setbacks, buffers, wells, waterways, drainage systems, or flood-prone areas matter? Could future residential development surround the operation? And do you have another site that could accomplish most of what you want with much less conflict? Moving a barn on paper is cheap. Discovering late that you chose the wrong location is not.

ASK YOURSELF: If I had to explain to a skeptical neighbor why this is the best reasonable location on the farm, could I?

2 Understand the entire approval process before you start it

A first-time project owner can easily assume there is **one approval**. In reality, a project may involve state environmental requirements, county zoning, drainage, driveway or road access, building requirements, utilities, manure-management requirements, financing conditions, and other reviews. Before submitting anything, map the process with people who understand it. What approvals are needed? In what order? What information does each require? Which decisions are administrative and which require public review? What standards apply? What timelines are realistic? Where could the project be delayed or stopped? **Then build backward from there.**

ASK YOURSELF: Can I draw the entire path from 'I want to build' to 'I am legally ready to begin construction'?

3 Build your team before you need them

A substantial livestock facility is not a good DIY project. Your team may need livestock production expertise, an experienced facility designer or engineer, manure-system and drainage expertise, environmental and regulatory guidance, local land-use knowledge, a lender and accountant, legal counsel when appropriate, and a contractor who understands real construction costs and sequencing. There is also a role farmers sometimes overlook: **the project strategist or translator who sees across the technical, economic, regulatory, and community pieces.** Your engineer may be excellent at engineering and your lender excellent at credit. Neither necessarily owns the whole project.

ASK YOURSELF: Who on my team is responsible for seeing the entire chessboard - not just their piece of it?



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4 Talk to people before they receive a notice

Imagine living next to a farm and discovering through the mail that a large livestock facility is being proposed nearby. Nobody talked to you. Nobody explained it. Your first response may be: **'What are they trying to sneak past us?'** An early personal conversation does not guarantee support, but it changes the relationship. Tell affected neighbors what you are considering, why, where, and that you know they will have questions. Listen before trying to persuade. Do not promise things you cannot deliver or oversell the project. And do not assume silence means support. Also understand the rules around communications with appointed decision-makers; some proceedings may limit or discourage private contacts.

ASK YOURSELF: Who will feel like I should have talked to them personally before this became public?

5 Build a project you can defend

Eventually someone may ask: **'Why should we allow you to build this?'** You need a better answer than **'Because it is my land.'** Be able to explain why the investment is necessary, why the site makes sense, how the operation and manure system will work, what traffic it creates, what you have done to reduce impacts, what regulations govern it, how it will be managed, what it means for the farm and potentially the next generation, what concerns you have heard, and what you changed because of them. The objective is not a perfect project. It is a **thoughtful, economically viable, professionally designed project you can explain with credibility.**

ASK YOURSELF: If I had ten minutes in front of the board - and no consultant or attorney could speak for me - could I explain why this is a good project?

Before You File

A good project becomes more difficult and more expensive to change as it moves forward. Preserve options early. Test the farm strategy, economics, site, rules, team, relationships, and project design before the application locks those decisions into a public process.

THE FARM	ECONOMICS	THE SITE	THE RULES	THE TEAM	NEIGHBORS	THE PROJECT	APPLICATION
Fit the 10-20 year plan?	Work under tougher assumptions?	Best reasonable location?	Know state and local process?	Right expertise around you?	Talked before public notice?	Improved by real concerns?	Ready for public review?

The cheapest time to solve a problem is before it becomes part of the application.

THE CONVERSATION MAP

BEFORE HEAVY DESIGN - Talk with the appropriate local planning/zoning staff and state regulatory resources. Understand the process and obvious site issues.

BEFORE IT BECOMES PUBLIC - Talk with immediate neighbors and important landowners. Listen before persuading.

BEFORE YOU FILE - Talk with appropriate economic-development, agricultural, and community resources who can help you understand the local environment.

BEFORE THE HEARING - Know the ordinance, standards, questions, and proper channels for giving decision-makers accurate information.

WHO SHOULD BE AROUND THE TABLE?

YOU / FARM OWNERSHIP - Vision, risk, final decisions

LENDER / FINANCIAL ADVISOR - Capital and viability

ENGINEER / FACILITY EXPERT - Design and site feasibility

ENVIRONMENTAL / REGULATORY - Permitting and compliance

VETERINARIAN / PRODUCTION TEAM - Animal and operating system

LAND-USE / LEGAL - Zoning, standards, process when needed

CONTRACTOR - Costs and sequencing

PROJECT STRATEGIST - Connect the project, people, economics, and community process

A collection of good advisors is not automatically a good project team. Someone needs to see how all the pieces affect one another.

FIVE MISTAKES THAT GET EXPENSIVE FAST

1. Designing the barn before understanding the site and rules.
2. Assuming state environmental approval means local approval - or vice versa.
3. Letting neighbors learn about the project through public notice or social media.
4. Treating every objection as ignorance instead of looking for legitimate information that could improve the project.
5. Spending so much money before public review that changing the project begins to feel impossible. Preserve optionality early; sunk costs can make reasonable changes feel like attacks.

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Building a livestock facility is ultimately a business-development project - not just a construction project. The barn has to work for the animals. The numbers have to work for the farm. The site has to work environmentally. The project has to meet state and local requirements. The financing has to work. And the people responsible for approving it have to understand what you are proposing.

AgStrat helps livestock producers think across the business, economic, regulatory, stakeholder, and community sides of a project before expensive decisions become difficult to change. If you are considering a significant livestock expansion and are not sure what you should be thinking about before moving forward, start the conversation early: virgil@agstratsolutions.com.

Site | Economics | Team | Relationships | Readiness