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## **Fun Facts** about **Farms and Ranches**





This booklet is designed to help you see the miles of Kansas scenic byways with new eyes.

We have included photos and brief descriptions of common sights. It is a booklet that young and old will enjoy whether you are a visitor to the state or a life-long Kansan.

In this booklet you'll find fun details about things you see on these byway miles -- cattle, crops, wooden barns, silos, and more. These are things we see so often...*that we almost don't see them!*

Two other booklets also are available. One describes wildlife and birds; the other, grasses, trees, and wildflowers. Each booklet has a map of the scenic byways of Kansas and trivia questions for kids to answer.

We hope that this little booklet will put smiles on your faces as you drive around our Sunflower State.



### What about those cows?

A herd is not always just cows! *Does this look like a herd of cows?*

It's really a herd of bovine that may be steers, heifers, cows, calves, or bulls. A cow is technically a female bovine. The differences won't always be apparent as you drive down the road, but below are some terms for your information. In the future, instead of saying you see cows, you might say, "Oh, look. There's the bull pen!"

A **steer** is a male bovine that has been castrated.

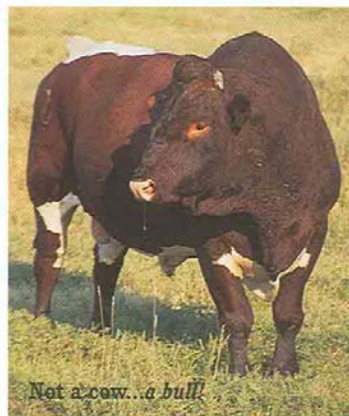
A **bull** is an intact male bovine.

A **heifer** is a young female bovine before having her first calf.

### When do cows have babies?

Bulls normally are kept in separate pastures from the cows. Depending on when the rancher wants the calves to be born (spring or fall), the bull is "turned out" with the cows at the appropriate time.

A pregnancy is about nine months. Depending on when the bull was turned out, spring calves may start to "drop" as early as January.



When the due date comes around, the rancher moves his herd to a smaller pasture so he can keep an eye on the cows and assist when necessary.

By the way, on the average, **one bull in a herd can sire 30 offspring per season!**



### Do cows know which calf is theirs?

The mom cow is very protective of her calf. Early on she may keep her calf at a distance from the herd. In about a week the calves start to interact with each other, and on sunny days may race around in groups and buck and kick.

As the calves get older, they become less dependent on their moms. As the summer approaches they nurse a couple times a day, but grazing fills an increasing part of their diets. The calf is weaned from its mom in the fall. They bawl for each other for about three days and then get over it. *By this time, the cow is pregnant again and ready to start the cycle all over.*

### What do cows do in the summer?

Cows and calves are moved to a summer pasture by May, depending on the quality and quantity of grass. The usual allotment is one cow-calf pair per six to eight acres for grazing in the Flint Hills. The number of acres usually increases the farther west you go because of less rainfall.



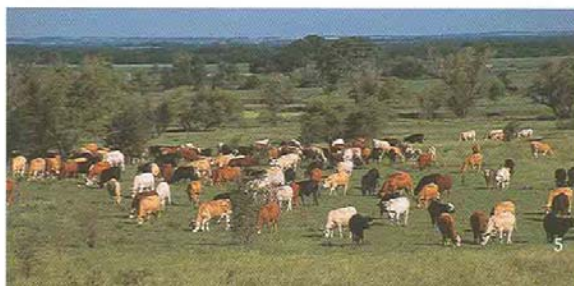
The cows spend the summer eating (about 20 to 25 pounds of dry matter each day) and sleeping. *They usually chew their cuds six to eight hours a day, sleep four hours, and spend the rest of the time grazing!* The job of the calves is to gain weight until they weigh between 450 to 650 pounds!

Cows have four stomachs and digest grass and other roughage with great efficiency. Because they don't take time to chew their food very well, the balls of grass they digested too rapidly come back up. When they're not grazing, they chew this grass again (called their "cud") with great intensity and return it to the stomach for further digestion.

If you're wondering, cattle don't sleep standing up. They lie down when they sleep!

### Why are the black cattle mixed in with the brown ones?

A rancher may have built his/her herd by buying whatever breed was available at the right price at the sale barn.



The multi-colored herds are sometimes referred to as "rainbow" herds.

Sometimes farmers put different breeds of bulls and cows together so the offspring will inherit the superior genetic qualities of the two breeds. *Those offspring are called crossbreeds.*

## What kind are they?

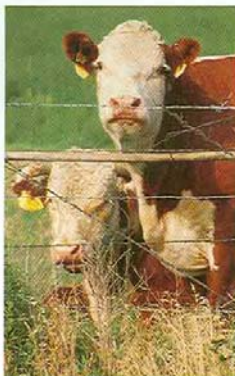
Generally...

Brown cattle with white faces are **Herefords**.

Black cattle are **Angus**.



Black cattle with white faces are **Hereford/Angus crosses** commonly referred to as **Black Baldies**.



White cattle are **Charolais**.



Cattle with black and white markings all over are **Holsteins**, good milking or dairy cattle. They are **Belted Galloways** if they look like Oreos!



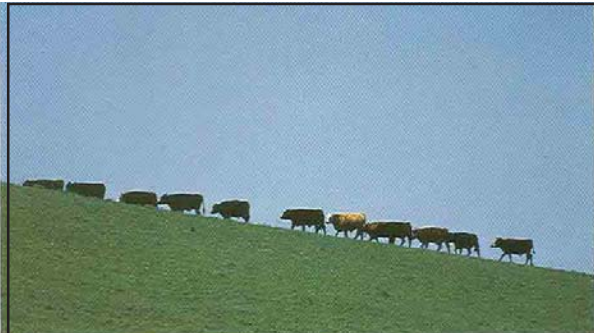
Cattle with extremely long horns are, you guessed it, **Texas Longhorns**.

## Do cattle have friends?

Cattle are herd animals and thus are very social. They maintain order through subtle gestures, though sometimes they will fight to establish dominance.

If you study a herd long enough, you'll notice that they hang out with the same cattle; they have grazing buddies. You'll also see the same cow leading the others. They have a definite pecking order. *Cows even babysit for each other.*

You can sometimes see a group of young calves together under the watchful eye of one of the mothers while the others are off grazing.



Most of the time cattle stand about 30 feet apart while they graze. Sometimes you'll see them bunched closely together. Usually they're close together when flies are "bugging" them.

*Tail swatting is more effective when cattle are bunched together!*

## What happens to those calves that look so peaceful grazing?

After calves are weaned they are known as **stocker cattle**.

They are grazed until they weigh 700 to 800

pounds and then are sent to feedlots to eat grain and gain more weight before slaughter. This is called *backgrounding*.



## What are those tall circular structures?

The cement and sometime tile cylindrical silos are practically a thing of the past on farms and ranches.

Once used to hold silage (coarse livestock feed composed of the leaves, stalks, and grain of forages such as corn and sorghum), they now are too small and difficult to fill and are not adapted to the large



amounts produced in modern forage harvesting. However, if you see big blue silos you've probably located a dairy farm. These silos are more advanced than the old cement ones and act like sealed thermos bottles.



## Wooden barns

The last wooden barns were built in the 1950s. Most wooden barns were built when horses were still used for farming.

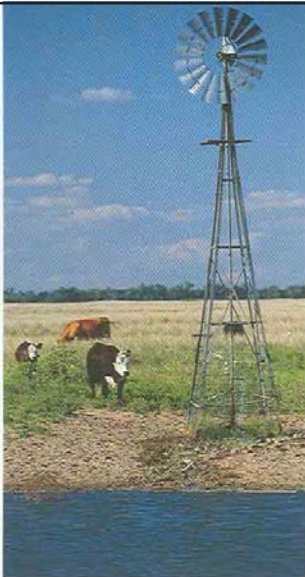
Now, in many of these older barns, the ceilings are not high enough and doors not tall enough for modern tractors. Sadly, few of the older barns are renovated to meet modern usage needs because it is much less costly to build new steel barns.

## Are those windmills working?

If you see a windmill with the head spinning and driving the pump rod with water spilling into a stock tank, then you've found a working windmill!

Now days man-made ponds are a primary source of water for livestock, but there are quite a few windmills still working, especially in the Flint Hills.

If it came to a vote, cattle would choose good spring water!



### What is there to notice about fences?

*Oh, many things!* Is the fence made of post rock, hedge, processed wood, or steel?

If it's wood and steel, *how many steel posts are set before you see a wooden post?* It's usually in a pattern, and the wood posts are there to strengthen and stabilize the fence.



**A post rock fence post weighs between 250 and 400 pounds!** Post rock fence posts are usually found in the Smoky Hill region. You can see them on the Post Rock Scenic Byway. On some scenic byways you'll see remains of neatly stacked stone walls that pioneers once made and used for fences before timber and wood materials were readily available.



### More about fences...

Do you see cattle walking around in a stubble field that doesn't appear to be fenced? How does the farmer keep them from straying out of the field? *Look closely and you'll see a one-strand electric fence.* It's easier to look for the skinny rods that stake the fence into the ground.

Look at a permanent fence. How many strands of wire does it have? Five strands is the most common for cattle. Is it smooth wire or barbed? *There's lots to notice!* If it's a particularly tall fence with at least seven strands, you've probably come across a buffalo pasture!



### What is the story of those big round hay bales?

Why do they store them outside? Won't they get wet?

Large round bales (food for cattle in the winter) began to replace the small square bales (we call them square but really they are rectangular!) in the 1970s.

**The small bales weigh between 35 and 85 pounds. The large round bales weigh between 500 and 2,000 pounds!**



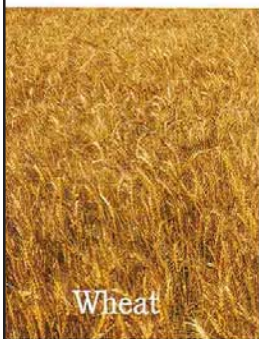
The large round bales eliminate the physical labor associated with handling the smaller bales. Because the bales are round, they shed water and can be stacked outside. Those piles might look sort of rotten, but inside the top layer it's all fine for eating!

Technology has made all sorts of options available, and, once in awhile, you'll see smaller round bales and larger square bales. Factors that enter into the decision about what kind of bales to produce include what kind of equipment is at the local dealership, cost of equipment, use of bales, storage, transporting, and man power.

Small bales are often used to curb erosion at road construction sites!

## What crop am I looking at?

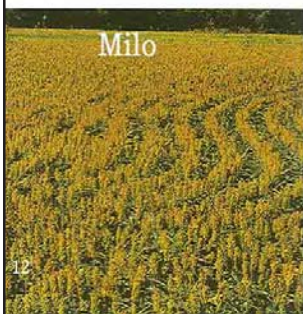
In Kansas, you'll most likely see wheat, corn, milo, or soybeans. Sunflower crops are becoming more common, too. In southern Kansas you may see some cotton fields.



Wheat



Corn



Milo



Soybeans

If you aren't familiar with crops, you'll wonder why we let them get so "dead" before we harvest. That is when the crop is ripe — *when it looks the worst!*

Some people have wondered where our golden wheat is because you won't see it all year long. When the wheat is young the fields look like lush green lawns. As it matures, in late May and early June, it begins to change from green to gold.

When the wheat is ripe enough to harvest, it is a golden-brown. Also, when the wheat is ready to be harvested, the wheat head looks like an upside down "J" because it bends down at the time it is dry and completely mature. Before it matures, the head is in a straight up position.

Most Kansas wheat is winter wheat, meaning it is planted in the fall, goes dormant during the winter, and is ready to harvest in June and July, depending on what part of the state you're in.

So now you're an expert and can report to passengers in your car, "*Looks like that wheat is ready for harvesting.*"

## Wheat harvest

Just when it is ripe, wheat is harvested with a combine, dumped into a grain truck, and taken to the local grain elevator. It is stored in the grain elevator until the farmer chooses to sell it.



## What does a combine do?

A combine is a machine that harvests various crops. The *header* is the movable part you see at the front of the combine. It usually needs to be changed for different crops. It includes a cutter that cuts the standing grain and then pulls it into the combine.

The grain is threshed out of the seed head and is delivered to a storage bin in the combine. The left over parts of the grain stalk, the straw and chaff, are chopped and blown out the back of the combine and into the field.

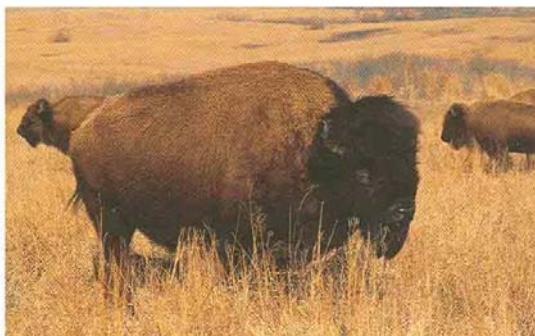
## Tractors cost *that* much?

The base-line price for a top-of-the-line tractor today (in 2002) is approximately \$146,000.

*In 1970*, the best tractors of the day cost around \$10,400.

## What's burning?

Ranchers sometimes burn their pastures in the springtime. This gets rid of the old dry grass left from the previous year and jump starts the new grass growth.



## What a nice surprise to see bison in a pasture!

Bison, commonly referred to as buffalo, are becoming more popular as livestock. Mature bison and mature domestic cattle weigh about the same.

Bison are very strong and very fast. They often do not respect a fence like cattle do and will just run through a normal pasture fence. A bison fence must be taller and built with additional wires. *Bison are good leapers!*

Bison tend to face the wind whereas cattle tend to have their backs to the wind. Bison will walk into a storm and often walk out of it into improved weather conditions. Cattle walk with the wind and thus stay in the storm with disastrous results.

*So are buffalo smarter than cattle?* They are a wild animal and have learned to survive on the open prairie.

Buffalo and cattle shed their winter coats in the spring. At this time they look rather shaggy as patches of hair begin to come off as they rub against trees, fence posts, and roll in the dirt.



# Did you see it?

Place a check beside the items that you find and note the date and location.

1. Rainbow herd DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

2. Herd of Angus DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

3. Stack of round bales DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

4. A bull in a pasture by himself DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

5. Upright cement silo DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

6. Abandoned cement silo...*with a tree growing in it!* DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

7. Post rock fence post DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

8. Five strand fence DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

9. Boot on a fence post DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

10. Herd of Angus/Hereford crossbreeds DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_



A game for the kids!

# Did you see it?

11. Herd of Charolais cattle DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

12. Spring cow herd DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

13. Mom cow babysitting calves DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

14. Buffalo herd DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

15. A working windmill DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

16. Wheat harvest scene DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

17. Field of soybeans DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

18. Sunflower field (*crop*) DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

19. Field of milo DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

20. Field of corn DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

# SCENIC BYWAYS Etiquette

**K**ansas scenic byways are to be enjoyed by everyone.

Please help us preserve this beautiful land by not picking the flowers and native grasses, and by not straying onto private land.

Of course, please do not litter.

This magnificent scenic land is home to many Kansas residents who welcome you to their communities, shops, and restaurants. Please respect their privacy by not photographing cowboys or their families. Stay out of the way of cattle drives. Do not climb fences or gates. And please, help keep everyone safe by obeying posted speed limits.

This booklet is one of a series produced for your enjoyment by the Kansas Scenic Byways Program. Authors of the booklets are: Marci Penner and Debbie Divine. Photographs are by Mil Penner and Marci Penner. Other contributors to the project were Harland Schuster, Bobbie Pray, Jim Gray, Jane Koger, and Earl Wright. Thanks to the Kansas Scenic Byway Committee for their encouragement and assistance in completing these booklets.

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*Enjoy Kansas Scenic Byways!*

