

More than 150 colorful barn quilts across four counties make up the Central Minnesota Barn Quilt Trail.



## Barn Quilt Trail Celebrates Rural Artists

“Barn quilts” are large painted wooden squares featuring quilt-block designs, hung on barns, houses or other buildings to add decoration, celebrate heritage and tell stories. Most barn quilts measure 2, 4 or 8 ft. sq. They’re a common sight in many states and

are celebrated by local communities.

Barn Quilts of Central MN is unique for encompassing four Minnesota counties: Wadena, Todd, Morrison and Cass. Since the group’s first quilt was hung in 2016, enthusiasm and participation have

skyrocketed. The four counties now boast more than 150 quilts, with many more in the planning stages.

One factor that’s helped the Central Minnesota group flourish is cooperation among many individuals, foundations, businesses and clubs. The group received assistance with design, construction, painting and mounting from local high school art teachers and students, FFA students, and the local electric cooperative.

“One group of students has made 50 of them as part of their classwork,” says Lisa Kajer, a founding member of the group.

The group’s website features the group’s history, a trail map, photos of many quilts on the trail, and the story behind each quilt. The quilts have been organized into five distinct trails based on their locations.

“It’s important not to have too much distance between them,” Kajer says.

On the Staples Area Trail, for example, she says a visitor can view 35 quilts in 30 min. by keeping moving.

A wonderful benefit of a barn-quilt trail, Kajer says, is that most people appreciate

that a community offers free public art that can be viewed individually or as a group, and that the backstory for each quilt is provided. On the Staples Area Trail, Kajer has even added information about other nearby points of interest and natural assets, such as rivers and local parks, that can be viewed near the various quilts.

“Some people have called the barn quilts ‘eye candy’ because they’re so fun to look at,” Kajer says. “It’s happy, peaceful and a wonderful way to create a memory or tribute for someone.”

The tradition of decorating barns with quilt-like patterns dates back nearly 300 years, when immigrants settled in Pennsylvania and surrounding areas. They began decorating their barns with folk art designs that reflected their heritage, beliefs or family traditions.

The modern barn quilt movement in the U.S. began in Ohio in 2001, when Donna Groves honored her mother, a quilter, by painting a quilt block on their tobacco barn.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Barn Quilts of Central MN ([barnquiltscmn@gmail.com](mailto:barnquiltscmn@gmail.com); [www.barnquiltsmn.org](http://www.barnquiltsmn.org)).

## Farm Event Features Fresh-Air Exercise

Lena, Wis., dairy farmer Carolyn Alsteen and personal trainer Beth Schmit have teamed up to host Fitness on the Farm, an annual agriculture-inspired workout celebration. Alsteen, the fifth generation of her family to work on the farm, plans to eventually transition into ownership of the 550-cow operation.

“Beth Schmit, my childhood friend and personal trainer, was trying to help me find ways to get workouts in,” says Alsteen. “It’s not easy to make it to the gym on busy farm days. I started doing squats with pails of grain as I was feeding calves, doing elevated push-ups on the milk taxi while watering calves, and during tractor season, trying to get some quick movement in if there was a lull.”

This farm-focused intentional movement planted the seeds for Fitness on the Farm. The annual fitness event aims to promote dairy while teaching people to incorporate the tasks and equipment around them into their daily lives to achieve their fitness goals.

“I’ve always enjoyed bringing community to our farm, and Beth loves hosting classes and being a source for community outreach,” says Alsteen. “It felt natural to

bring two things we both have a passion for together.”

The pair started small.

“Our first year was mainly friends and people we knew, but we’ve continued to grow every year,” says Alsteen. “Last year, our third year, we had our best attendance so far.”

“It’s challenging, as so many things occur in the summer,” Schmit adds. “But last year we grew in attendance by over half. The feedback was great.”

They note that first-time visitors may be hesitant but quickly praise the event, promising to bring friends back next year.

“We have things pretty well figured out now, so setting up doesn’t take too long,” says Alsteen. “June is Dairy Month, so we choose to do it either the last weekend in May or the first weekend in June to kick things off,” says Alsteen. “Those attending register at 7:30, with the race starting in waves at 8. Usually everyone is finished by 9:30. The biggest thing is hoping we don’t overlap with chopping first crops or aren’t still heavy into planting.”

The fitness challenges are designed to accommodate a range of abilities, with participants from 5 to 72 years old.

“You can make it however difficult or easy

you want,” says Alsteen. “We offer ways to challenge yourself if you’d like.”

In many ways, the event aims to mimic the daily movements that come with a job in agriculture—lots of interruptions and changes in direction.

“It’s definitely more intense than a regular farm day,” says Alsteen. “I mean, we aren’t always running laps out to the stone pile. Still, the activities we have planned show how tough and labor-intensive farming can be—carrying pails of grain, picking rocks, moving gates, throwing tires, sprinting when the cows get out!”

Summer 2026 will be the pair’s fourth year hosting, and they’re excited to surpass last year’s participation.

“If you’re looking to run something similar, just do it,” says Alsteen. “It doesn’t have to be all perfectly planned. Start small and start with friends; that’s what I’ve done for all the events I’ve hosted on the farm. People genuinely want these kinds of experiences. They love them.”

“We have some fun ideas in store for this year’s event, held on May 30th,” says Schmit. “We encourage all to watch our Facebook page. If another farm wants to run something similar, they can connect with us, too. We’ll



Fitness challenges are designed to accommodate a range of abilities, with participants from 5 to 72 years old.

help them navigate how the event could work for them.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Fitness on the Farm, Carolyn Alsteen ([Alsteenfarmsllc@gmail.com](mailto:Alsteenfarmsllc@gmail.com)); Facebook: Alsteen Farms, LLC; Instagram: carolyn.alsteen) or Beth Schmit (Facebook: Homegrown Fitness, LLC; Instagram: [homegrown\\_fitness\\_llc](https://www.instagram.com/homegrown_fitness_llc)).

“Fewer than 3,000 Spanish Mustangs remain,” Huffman says. “Without focused efforts to retain a broad spectrum of the foundation bloodlines, the breed could become extinct.”



## Legendary Tough Spanish Mustangs

Spanish Mustangs, one of America’s oldest horse breeds, are facing a brighter future thanks to conservation efforts by the National Spanish Mustang Registry.

“Our horses are special to us,” says Registry President Stephen Huffman. “Like most horse lovers, we feel ours are some of the very best.”

The breed’s reputation is the stuff of legend.

“Noted for its near-mythical stamina and

toughness, the Spanish Mustang can survive and multiply in conditions when many would perish,” Huffman says. “This breed helped shape USA history. They were brought to the New World by the Spanish Conquistadors and spread throughout missions and settlements, becoming more numerous from breeding programs and trade imports.”

He notes that Spanish Mustangs were prized by Indian tribes and often obtained through trade and raids, eventually becoming

an essential part of Native culture.

“The wealth of the tribes was often measured by horses. These mustangs were used as war ponies, for travel, and for buffalo hunting.”

The Spanish Mustang is a smooth-muscle horse with a short back, rounded hips, and a low-set tail. The girth is deep, with laid-back shoulders and well-defined withers. They stand approximately 13.2 to 15 hands and weigh between 650 and 1,100 lbs.

“Their build varies from lighter types to heavier types without extremes,” Huffman says. “They carry an appearance of natural collection and balance.”

Better yet, the hardy breed can tolerate forage that would be unsuitable for domesticated horses, including poison ivy, greenbrier vines and acorns.

Even so, Spanish Mustangs were on the brink of extinction in the early twentieth century. Their fate shifted in the mid-1950s, when a group formed to preserve the last survivors, eventually establishing the Spanish Mustang Registry in 1957, the first and original registry for the horses.

“Robert E. Brislaw and his son, Emmett Brislaw, collected individual animals

considered the best examples of the breed,” says Huffman. “They chose stock carefully, only keeping the most ideal types available. Today’s horses still retain the qualities that allowed the Spaniards to conquer a new world.”

Still, the breed remains at risk.

“Fewer than 3,000 Spanish Mustangs remain,” Huffman says. “Without focused efforts to retain a broad spectrum of the foundation bloodlines, the breed could become extinct. It’s critical to save this visual example of our history of the founding of America.”

Huffman and other registry members are working hard to do exactly that.

“We strive to preserve the horses of the Conquistadors, the Indian war ponies, the buffalo runners, and the cow ponies of early America. This means continuing to educate the general public and maintaining genetic diversity across the surviving Spanish Mustangs for the owners and breeders of these amazing animals.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Stephen Huffman, Spanish Mustang Registry President ([cbhuff@yahoo.com](mailto:cbhuff@yahoo.com); [www.spanishmustang.org](http://www.spanishmustang.org)).