

Private Landowners FAQs

Why hire a contract grazer?

Contract grazers specialize in grazing both public and private lands to meet the specific goals of each client. In addition, professional contract grazers provide all the necessary supplies, equipment and livestock needed to complete each project. Hiring a contract grazer takes the workload away from the homeowner while helping benefit and strengthen the local agriculture community, preserve and enhance natural resources and help reduce fire fuel loads.

Preserving and enhancing natural resources

Livestock grazing enhances habitats and native biological diversity. Looking out across Sonoma County grasslands, most of the plants that we see are non-natives that were brought here from Europe and Asia. Livestock grazing is essential for maintaining habitat of many native plants and animals in modern day California. Most of the non-native plants that now dominate California's grasslands are annuals that grow profusely, producing large amounts of plant matter^[1] that can smother native plants and ruin habitat for native animals, unless kept in check by livestock grazing. As well as helping to manage the excessive plant matter produced by non-native plants, grazing also plays a very important role in keeping grasslands open and preventing their conversion to shrub lands. Examples of how livestock grazing benefits a few several native plants and animals, including those that are threatened and endangered, are abundant in Sonoma and Marin Counties can be found at [Grazing on Public Lands](#).

Fire Fuel Reduction

Livestock grazing reduces fire fuels more effectively than most mechanical methods. Grassland not grazed creates high levels of fine fire fuels which can pose fire hazards. In addition, the invasion of ungrazed lands by shrubs also creates long-term fire fuel issues. As stated by scientists Russell and McBride (2003), increased shrub cover from removal of grazing has caused "a general increase in fire hazard within the open spaces of the San Francisco Bay Area" and "In the context of the landscape matrix as a whole this increased hazard indicates a greater possibility of fire being spread into adjacent forested areas and residential communities." Livestock grazing is the most cost-efficient and practical fuel management method for ranchlands and open spaces in Sonoma and Marin Counties. Learn more at [Benefits of Grazing & Wildfire Risk](#).

Support Local Agriculture

Continued grazing helps keep alive a way of life that's been here for over 100 years, provides local meat that consumers feel confident in buying, reduces the carbon footprint of meat production by minimizing transportation, and helps keep the local economy strong. Learn more at [Go Local Sonoma County](#).

What is the process of hiring a contract grazer?

Fire Fuel Reduction

1. Brainstorming your goals and having the proper information ready to discuss.

Questions to Consider

- **What do you want accomplished through targeted grazing services?**
 - Before contacting a contract grazer, think about the goals you have for your property. Is it to provide firebreaks, manage vegetation, etc.? Knowing your goals, the contract grazer will be better able to evaluate your needs and offer recommendations personalized to you.
- **Location:**
 - What is the location of the property needed to be grazed?
 - A complete address is helpful for contract grazers. If you are outside their normal locational range, they may not be able to do your project or they may need to increase their cost for mobilization.
- **Acreage:**
 - What is the size of your property and how many acres are you interested in grazing?
 - It is important for the contract grazer to know both the size of your property and the amount of acres you are interested in grazing. Knowing this, contract grazers may be able to provide you with a more cost effective solution based on their price scale. Oftentimes adding additional acreage can lower the cost per acre of your project.
- **What is the flora of your land? (forested, meadows, etc)**
 - It is important for contract grazers to know the flora of your land to be able to make recommendations. These recommendations may include species of animal (sheep, goats, cattle) and stocking density.
- **Access to property**
 - In order to graze properties efficiently, trucks and trailers will be delivering animals to your property. If you are unsure if your...

Questions to Consider, cont'd

- **Access to property, cont'd**
 - ... property can accommodate large vehicles and trailers; it is recommended that you ask your contract grazer to do a site visit prior to signing a contract and starting your project.
- **Access to water**
 - Contract grazers should provide everything they need to complete your project. However, contract grazers will typically ask you if there is access to water on the property that they may utilize. Contract grazers will use this water source to supply water to their animals throughout the duration of the project. They may supply water through a garden hose, or by filling up water trailers and leaving them closer to the animals to supply constant access to water. If no access to water can be provided a contract grazer may be unable to do your project, or they may be able to haul water in for an additional service charge.
- **Predator issues**
 - If you are aware of any predator issues, it is important that you share that information with your contract grazers. To help with predator issues, contract grazers may utilize guardian dogs to keep their livestock safe. However, it is important to note that livestock guardian dogs are working animals that may bark throughout the night. It is also important to always keep your pets on a leash around a guardian dog and to make sure your pets keep a safe distance from the animals being utilized for grazing services.
- **Can a shepard stay on the property?**
 - Many contract grazers employ shepherds that stay on the property in a self contained travel trailer. These shepherds build pens, move animals, supply water to the animals and help maintain the health of the livestock by evaluating them for illness and injury daily. In addition, if the animals were to escape their pen for any reason, the shepard would be responsible for getting the animals back into the designated area. It is important to be aware that many contract grazers require a shepherd to stay with their animals as part of their contract. If you do not wish to have a shepard on your property this may limit your options for contract grazers.

Questions to Consider, cont'd

- **What time of year do you wish to have grazing services completed? cont'd.**
 - The time of year you wish to have these services completed will dictate when you should reach out to contract grazers. You may contact a contract grazer anytime for their services. However, if you wish to graze your property between the months of May and October it is recommended that you get in contact and start scheduling with a grazer as early as January that year. If you wait until you want your services conducted, it is unlikely that a contract grazer will be able to accommodate your wishes promptly during these busy months. While it is unlikely that reputable contract grazers will be able to fit you into their schedule if you call during the height of the busy season, you should still reach out and see if they can accommodate your project or have any references that might be able to. If a contract grazer can no longer schedule you in your desired month, you may also be able to ask if you can be scheduled “on call” if there is a cancellation in their schedule.
- **What will happen if livestock escape their designated area while they are on my property?**
 - It is imperative to remember that there is always the possibility of animals escaping from their designated area. If animals escape, they may eat wanted vegetation around your property or neighboring properties. This is why it is important to always hire a contract grazer with the proper insurance and liability coverage to pay for or replace damaged vegetation or items. This is also a great question to ask contract grazers to learn more about how they will manage escaped livestock if the event occurs.

2. Review UC Extensions Match.Graze to find contract grazers.
 - a. <https://matchgraze.com/>
3. Reach out to grazers you believe will be a good fit for your property and discuss your goals with them.

4. If possible, invite contract grazers out to assess your land prior to animals arriving and signing a contract. Here you will be able to develop a relationship with your contractor and they will be able to evaluate your land and make a plan personalized for your property.
5. Sign a contract and book your grazing time. Many grazers will not write you into their schedule without a signed contract. Some grazers may also ask for a deposit prior to animals arriving.
6. As your scheduled time approaches, your contract grazer should contact you with the day and time of their arrival.
7. Animals will arrive and complete the job

What should I look for when hiring a professional grazer?

- Insurance
 - As a homeowner you should look for a contract grazer who is properly insured in the event an accident was to occur.
 - Proper insurance should include at minimum the following.
 - \$1,000,000 in Commercial Liability
 - \$1,000,000 in Automobile Liability (If driving/ transporting their own animals)
 - \$1,000,000 in Workers Compensation and Employers Liability (If employing individuals)
- Animal Health
 - Contract grazers should have a plan to care for any sick or injured animals.
- Knowledge About Individual Landscapes
 - Contract grazers should be able to evaluate your land and make recommendations to meet your goals with targeted grazing. These recommendations include the species being utilized (sheep, goats, cattle.) Contract grazers should also be able to walk you through their plan of how to accomplish these goals with stocking density (the number of animals) and length of time in each area.
- Comfortability
 - You as a homeowner should be comfortable and confident with the contract grazer you choose. If issues or concerns arise you should feel comfortable discussing them with your contract grazer prior to and/ or during your services.

What should I expect from the grazing process? (Fencing, Time Management and Costs)

Fencing

Targeted grazers typically use an electric netted fence operated by a solar powered charger to contain their animals. Not only does this method keep animals grazing in specific areas, but it ensures a more even graze of the land and helps make sure each job is completed to its original specifications. This electric fence also helps keep predators and individuals out of each area. It is important not to touch the fence for any reason and to keep other individuals and pets away from the fence as well.

Time Management

The length of time it will take to clear vegetation on each job is different. On average it takes about 250 goats and/or sheep to clear one acre of land a day. However, this estimated time will vary depending on the time of

year, type of vegetation and density of vegetation. For a more accurate and detailed estimated length of time, it is recommended that homeowners contact a contract grazer to conduct a site visit.

Cost

The cost of a grazing project will vary by the amount of acres being grazed on the property. Typically, the more acreage being grazed, the lower the cost is per acre for the homeowner. Some contractors will agree to let neighbors' partner together on a contract to increase the total acreage and lower the cost. It is always important for homeowners to be informed on whether their contract grazer invoices through "all-inclusive pricing" or if their grazer invoices by "itemized pricing".

- All Inclusive Pricing:
 - All inclusive pricing will include things such as mobilization/ transportation, livestock, equipment necessary to complete the job and personnel to manage the project. Grazers that have all inclusive pricing will charge their clients one set fee for the project. This set fee is usually based on a per acre price.
- Itemized Pricing:
 - Grazers that choose to itemize their pricing may have several different ways to invoice their clients. The most typical extra service fee that occurs with itemized pricing is a transportation/ fee on top of the quoted per acre price.
- Additional Information:
 - Each contract grazer may quote clients differently. The most common pricing system is to charge per acre. However some grazers may also charge per animal or per day. Usually these different ways of pricing all end up to cost the same total amount for the homeowner.

Sample contract: What will a simple contract include/ what should I look for?

In a standard contract you should see the following areas

- Scope of Services
- Terms of Agreement
- Payment/ Compensation
- Insurance

Many contract grazers may also have additional components added to their contract. It is important to read and understand the contract that you agree and sign. Look to our section on contracts for more information.

Funding/grant opportunities for homeowners

Check with your local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) or Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) for funding opportunities for landowners.