

Grazing on Private Lands

Pros and Cons

Pros:

- You form a direct relationship with your client and can be very clear on their goals
- You can maintain a small operation by only choosing small jobs – this allows you to keep overhead low and start small
- By demonstrating your skills and building relationships you can establish repeat customers and work to develop multi-year contracts to reduce your administrative hours
- It is easier to develop your regenerative grazing business with private landowners that are interested in that aspect

Cons:

- Private clients with smaller land bases require more labor on your part for planning, contract development and transportation costs
- You are responsible for understanding the amount of insurance coverage you need and for contract development
- You need to be aware of and achieve your client's goals, even if they do not coincide with yours
- Conflict negotiation!! Plan ahead and contractualize everything

Planning and Achieving Goals

To successfully build and sustain a contract grazing business on private lands you need to have strong planning and communication skills. This begins with your skills at bidding a job, click [here](#) for more information on bidding a grazing site. It is important that bid a grazing site correctly to ensure that you are able to cover all your costs and generate income. As you build your business you need to continue to build these skills to make sure you are receiving the appropriate revenue. Also, as your grazing business grows, organization and planning where your herd or flock will be become more and more important. Developing a [grazing calendar](#) is a helpful tool that enables you to keep track of your grazing jobs to ensure that you consistently show up on time to your clients. Meeting the deadlines of when you are expected to arrive and how long you will be there to graze will greatly improve your likelihood of getting repeat business.

Planning and Timeframe of Each Project

Becoming familiar with how long a grazing job will take, based on the size of the area being grazed, vegetation present, etc., will come in handy when developing your grazing calendar. Customers need to know when you will arrive and how long you will be grazing their property. You need to know this as well! As you build more work and more clients, you will have to plan ahead for up to 6-months of work. If you are delayed with one client because you have underestimated how long it will take, you are delayed for the entire 6-month period. This can put a strain on you, your livestock and your relationships with your customers. When planning how long each job will take you it is important to take the following list into consideration.

Planning and Timeframe list

- Stocking Density
 - How many animals will you be using? The number of animals will greatly impact how often you will need to move them and how quickly you will complete a job. On average 250 sheep or goats can graze about one acre a day. This average will vary depending on the vegetation type and density.
- Acreage
 - How many acres will you be grazing?
- Type and Density of Vegetation
 - The type and density of vegetation will greatly impact the amount each grazing site will take. It is important to assess the density of vegetation each year, even on sites that you have grazed in the past. Weather and rainfall patterns will affect the amount of vegetation grown each year meaning your jobs could take a longer or shorter amount of time when compared to previous years.
- Moving Livestock
 - It is important to relay to the client how often you expect to move your livestock and where and when you plan to move them. This is especially important if livestock need to cross a road for any reason. When crossing public roads, you may only have a specific time a day you are allowed to move animals. You are also typically required to have signs, flaggers and traffic control to maintain safety of your livestock, employees and the public.
- Time Frame:
 - It is important to communicate with your client a realistic estimated timeline for your grazing services. Not only will this help you plan your schedule as a contract grazer but this will also help you maintain good relationships with your clients. When using the grazing calendar template to map out your calendar, give yourself an extra day or two on large or unpredictable jobs. Be patient with yourself and your clients. It is better to overestimate how long a job will take rather than underestimate it. If you are running behind and know that you will be late to some jobs. Contact those clients immediately, apologize for the change in scheduling and ask if you can push the job back to a

Planning and Timeframe list, cont'd

- Time Frame, cont'd:
 - ...time when you know you can get there. One of the most important things you can do as a business owner and service provider is acknowledge that things are not going as scheduled and take responsibility for that. Your customers will be far more receptive and willing to be flexible if you approach changes in this way.
 - To help you plan your grazing schedule, we have provided a free template for you to use! [Grazing Calendar Template](#)

Assessing and Achieving Client Goals

For a detailed description on assessing and achieving your clients goals, click [here](#). Listed below are some of the important highlights and questions to ask your client to ensure that you will be able to meet their goals and exceed their expectations.

Questions to Consider Asking the Client

- *What do you want accomplished through targeted grazing services?*
 - It is important to understand the goals of your client to be able to meet their expectations as a paying customer. Clients may have one, or multiple goals. Goals can include, but are not limited to, grazing for firebreaks, providing a vegetation management solution, carbon sequestration and or enhancing natural resources. It is important for you as a grazer to know how to best manage and reach the goals of your clients. If there is something that you will not be able to do, it is best to be honest with your client and work together to find an alternate solution to meet their goals.
- *Location:*
 - What is the location of the property needed to be grazed?
 - If you are outside your normal locational range, you may not be able to do the clients project or you may need to increase your cost for mobilization. It is also important to assess the property to see if trucks and trailers can get into the property location or if the property is suitable for the type of fencing you have. It is best practice to conduct a site visit on lands that you have not grazed in the past to make recommendations to the client based on what you have the ability to do.
- *Acreage:*
 - What is the size of the client's property and how many acres are they interested in grazing?
 - It is important for a contract grazer to know both the size of the property and the amount of acres the client is interested in grazing. Knowing this, you may be able to provide your client with a more cost-effective solution based on your price scale.

Questions to Consider Asking the Client, cont'd

- *What is the flora of your land? (forested, meadows, etc.)*
 - It is important for contract grazers to know the flora of the 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 the property. If you are not transporting your own animals, it is important to know the length for the trailer and type of transportation your animals will be arriving in. Not knowing if the type of transportation you choose can access the property will create issues when it is time to deliver the animals.
- *Access to water*
 - Contract grazers should provide everything they need to complete the project. However, contract grazers will typically ask the client 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. You may choose to 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 you may be unable to do your project, or you may be able to haul water in for an additional service charge.
- *Predator issues*
 - Ask your client if they are aware of any predators on or near their property. To help with predator issues, contract grazers may utilize guardian dogs to keep livestock safe. However, it is important to share with your client that livestock guardian dogs are working animals that may bark throughout the night. It is also important to relay to the client to pets on a leash and maintain a safe distance at all times around guardian dogs and livestock.
- *Can a shepherd stay on the property?*
 - If you choose to hire shepherds, it is extremely important to ask the client if they are able to stay on their property in a self-contained travel trailer. It is also important to explain the role of the shepherd and what they will be doing while working on their project. You may mention that your shepherds build pens, move animals, supply water to the animals, 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 shepherd would be responsible for getting the animals back into the designated area.

After asking the questions above, make sure to follow up with your client with additional questions you may have. It is your responsibility to understand what your clients are hoping to achieve through grazing. It is also critical that you explain how the land will respond after

grazing and why. Providing this knowledge to the land owner allows you to further highlight the benefits of grazing and may ease concerns they have about how the land will look immediately following the grazing.

If you can understand and achieve the goals of your customers you are more likely to have repeat customers. This will help you fill-up and plan your annual calendar more easily. You will find that word of mouth is a fantastic marketing tool and does not cost you anything. Having repeat customers will also lead you to having to spend less time marketing, providing bids to new customers and constantly changing your grazing calendar. Remember your time is a critical piece of your income. If you manage your time well and continue to have repeat clients you are increasing your annual income and sustainability of your business.

Challenges with Grazing Private Lands

There are many challenges when it comes to grazing private land. Here are some examples of your greatest challenges.

Challenges on Private Lands

1. *Pet Dogs:*

Pet dogs can pose a variety of different risks and challenges on both private and public lands. Communication is key in reducing these challenges and risks for both you and your stock.

- **Pet dogs on Private Land:** When working with private landowners it is best to remind them to keep their dogs on leashes at all times even if their dog has a good recall. Many dogs are unfamiliar with electric fences and will accidentally get shocked. Animals may become frightful after a shock posing a risk to livestock. In addition, if guardian dogs are on the premises, it is important that pet dogs maintain a safe distance from the livestock as well. Even if you have communicated with the land owner of the importance of keeping pets on leashes it is always recommended to display signs notifying individuals that the fence is electric or if there is a guardian dog present on the property.

2. *Wildlife Predation*

- Wildlife predation is always a concern when working with livestock. It is important to assess each job site individually and determine if guardian dogs are needed on the property. If you feel guardian dogs will be needed it is important to express this need to the client. Not all clients will agree to allow a guardian dog onsite which is why it is important to hold these conversations prior to animals arriving onsite.

3. *Noise Complaints*

- All livestock will make noise. It is important that you make your client aware of the amount of noise they should expect while having livestock on the property. This includes the amount of noise guardian dogs may make (especially through the night.)

Challenges on Private Lands, cont'd

4. *Health of your herd (review livestock frame score)*
 - Health of your livestock should remain your number one priority. Please review our Animal Health and Nutrition Guide (provide link) for more information. Animals that do not have adequate health or body condition scoring should not be used for grazing purposes.
5. *Escaped Livestock*
 - It is important to communicate with your client that anytime livestock is used, there is a possibility that they may escape and eat wanted vegetation or cause damage to neighboring properties. Whether working on private or public lands, it is important to address in your contract who is liable for animals escaping and causing damage. Clients should know what to expect from you in the case that this event occurs, and what your plan of action would be.
6. *Water accessible to livestock at all times*
 - Water needs to be accessible to livestock at all times. Animals should never be out of, or low on water. If immediate access to water is not provided, it is the responsibility of the grazer to supply fresh and clean water to animals through the use of tanks and water trailers.
7. *Shepherd staying on the property*
 - Some clients do not want a shepherd staying on their property. As a contract grazer you will need to decide if this is something that you are comfortable accommodating.

Conflict Resolution

All of these possible challenges and questions should be addressed in your initial conversation with your client. Make sure you have an agreement with your customer and add it to your contract. These are critical in your ability to be reimbursed for predation or protect yourself from further liability by an escaped animal.

Conflict resolution will also be key in maintaining a healthy relationship with your client in the event an issue was to occur. The main rule of thumb when dealing with conflict resolution is to prepare, listen, apologize, refrain from getting defensive, and enforce your contract obligations. If a conflict does occur try following these steps to resolve the issue

Steps for Conflict Resolution:

STEP 1 - Be Prepared

Review your contract. **go back over sample contracts - do they cover all of these issues? Do...

Steps for Conflict Resolution, cont'd

STEP 1 - Be Prepared, cont'd

...they have resolutions?*

Are you covering all of the above listed challenges and do you have resolutions and/or responsibilities for all of them? If not, address your contract first.

Make sure you have this in your contract and make sure you verbally address each one with your client prior to having them sign the contract.

STEP 2 - Listen

You have a contractual agreement with your client and you both should have an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each party. Despite this a client may be upset over a situation in which you had properly prepared them and they had signed an agreement of understanding. No matter who is at fault it is your responsibility as the service provider and grazer to listen and acknowledge that something went wrong. This does not mean you are assuming responsibility or that you believe it to be your fault. It gives the client the opportunity to state their concerns and express their emotions. 9 times out of 10 all the client needs is to feel heard and then they are comfortable to resolve the situation amicably. Listen and be responsive.

STEP 3 - Apologize

When something goes wrong, whether it is your fault or not, apologize. If it was your error or negligence, then you are apologizing for your mistake. If you did nothing wrong you are apologizing for the bad experience your client had. This is key and will help you keep repeat customers!

STEP 4 - Do not get defensive

As you build your business, improve your skills and develop livestock that work well for you, you will also create a deep attachment to what you do. It is easy to get hurt or offended when a client complains, whether it is a legitimate complaint or not. Take a deep breath, slow down - understand that your client has as much of an emotional attachment to the land and the work being done as you do. This will help you stay in the negotiations without getting hostile or adding conflict.

STEP 5 - Enforce Contract Obligations

After staying calm, listening to your customer and being willing to apologize, you have moderated the conversation into a place where resolution can happen. Continue to keep the conversation open and connected as you point out the obligations of both parties according to the contract you both signed. Show and/or remind your customer what they agreed to in the contract if they are responsible. Also show them what you agreed to if you are responsible. If something happens that you have not yet experienced and therefore were unable to plan for in your contract, it is always best to take the loss as your first experience since you are the service provider. Take the loss, learn from it, and update your contract to make sure you have it stated clearly in the future.

Insurance Requirements and Providers

Requirements

The insurance requirements for doing private jobs can vary greatly from client to client. It is best practice to carry the following in minimum insurance:

- \$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)

Below is a short list of insurance providers that offer coverage. UCCE does not recommend one provider over the others.

Providers

Joe Magelitz

4795 Old Redwood Hwy Ste D

Santa Rosa, CA 95403

License #0B89769

707-546-2332

joe@magelitzagency.com

<http://www.farmersagent.com/jmagelitz>

Mitch White

1129 Industrial Ave

Ste 102

Petaluma, CA 94952

CA License #: 0642778

(707) 778-0377

<https://agents.farmers.com/ca/petaluma/mitch-white#>

Kris Cover

Acrisure

Mailing Address: 1950 W. Corporate Way #1

Anaheim, CA 92801

Email: kacover@Acrisure.com

Toll-Free : 800-967-6453 X1305

Direct: 707-308-2658

Fax: 707-546-2915

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