

## **Targeted Grazing Client/Contractor Need To Know Guide Step 1: What I have and What I want**

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There is limited information out there about the questions and facts to keep in mind while evaluating potential clients/contractors, doing an onsite evaluation and designing/implementing a targeted grazing program. Knowing the right information to have in advance and what questions to ask is essential to productive communication between both parties and a smoothly run program. This goes for the third class of folks involved in targeted grazing as well: the private landowner who runs their own animals for the task. The only difference is that they will need to have the information of both the contractor and the client, while asking themselves the important questions.

### Step 1: What I have and What I want?

It doesn't matter what side of the tool you're approaching from, the client or the applicator, these are the first two questions that you should be asking yourselves. Not only before the project begins, but before an onsite evaluation ever happens. What do I have? And What do I want? These two questions lead the client, contractor and private grazer to the three most important aspects of any vegetation management project; their obstacles, assets and goals.

#### For the Client

##### Assets and Obstacles

You need to have some vague idea of what you have to work with on site in terms of the implementation of the grazing, the present vegetation composition, soils, slopes, water, boundaries, neighbors and access points. I'm not talking about a research grade analysis complete with density, pounds per acre and soils data for every square inch of land. I'm simply saying that being aware of these characteristics on a basic level will not only help you in asking the potential contractor the right questions during the site evaluation, but to even decide whether or not targeted grazing is the right method for your site. If so, what species may be most appropriate? These are the two first steps in the process of finding a contractor. If there is a high proportion of poisonous plants, then it may not be worth the risk. If the topography involves steep, rocky hillsides then goats would be a preferred choice over cattle. Moving on, do goats suit the type of vegetation that you're trying to manage, whether that be vegetation you're trying to get rid of or keep.

During the evaluation, knowing something about the characteristics of the site will help you address questions like:

- Is there water available?
- Will the water be hauled in to the animals?

- Is there a high risk of domestic dog attack from neighboring areas?
- Who are the neighbors?
- Are there any known predator threats?
- Are there any poisonous plants in or near the site?
- Are there areas on the site or nearby that would be absolutely off limits to the animals?
- Are there any state or federal regulations, statutes or otherwise that might affect the grazing management (i.e. – endangered species or city livestock ordinance)?
- Would the contractor be able to easily access the site with the animals and equipment that they need to do the job?
- Where will they potentially load the animals in/out?
- Will the animals need to be walked into the site?

These are questions that could be, and should be, discussed with the contractor during the evaluation. All of them will have an effect on how the animals must be managed to ensure the safety and efficiency of the project. And they are all connected to the physical characteristics of the site itself.

## Goals

The second part to the equation is what you want, your goals. When I say goals, I don't mean, 'I want to get rid of X, Y or Z.' The control of the target species is a step in the process of reaching your goals. If simply getting rid of weeds were my goal in my targeted grazing program, then I wouldn't use livestock at all. I'd simply blow up the place. It may sound extreme, but it would certainly take care of the weed problem temporarily. All I'm saying is that the process of vegetation management is not the same for a parking lot versus an irrigated pasture versus a wildlife habitat versus a fire break. Defining these goals helps you to:

1. Decide on the target vegetation
2. Decide on the desired vegetation
3. What the most cost-effective methods would be for management
4. If targeted grazing is appropriate
5. What species of livestock is most suited for that site and
6. How intensely the animals will need to be managed to meet those goals as efficiently as possible.

## For the Contractor

## For a potential Job

When evaluating a potential job site, it's important to work through the questions outlined above up front with the client. Knowing their goals for the site is absolute for efficient implementation of targeted grazing. As far as the individual site characteristics, it's just as much your job to ask them questions about water, neighbors, predators, prohibited areas and present vegetation. Don't expect them to automatically supply you

with all of this information and never assume that those things will work themselves out during the duration of the project. Sometimes they will, but most often they don't. The smoothest running projects are those where each party has a good understanding of one another's wants, needs and haves before the project even begins. Asking questions does not make you ignorant of your profession. Quite the opposite, it makes you a responsible grazer. The management of your animals may drastically change depending upon their answers.

For example, if you're working with a large acreage area, but you only have 300 head of animals, you may need to devise a network of priority sites that would receive the most benefit from the grazing treatment. Or perhaps that job is not suited for your business and should go to a bigger company. This will help avoid wasted time and heartache for everyone involved.

Make sure to know what you have to work with and don't make promises on which you can't deliver. If things change during the project (which I guarantee they will), that's ok. This is where the most important part of your job comes into play. Communication. There is no more essential tool between client and contractor than that of good quality communication. If there are changes, talk to each other and discuss possible alternatives. This will help you both be happier about the success of the project. Besides, the client should know the property about as well as anyone can and may have some suggestions that didn't occur to you on how to solve any problems.

For your business

Obstacles and Assets

Now I want to move on to the business side of the contractors' haves and wants. If you have or are thinking of acquiring animals for use in targeted grazing, then it's just as important to understand your own haves and wants in terms of your business. This will help you in designing and implementing a business plan that will work for you. Running livestock involves too much work for you to end up with a company that doesn't fit your needs. Unlike machines, livestock are unpredictable, they never shut off, their health/welfare must come first, and if managed improperly, livestock can do a lot more harm than good. So it's important to develop a business that works for you or it may lead to frustration and eventually improper management decisions.

First, begin by determining what you have. Experience with your intended livestock species, plants, noxious weeds or perhaps you just happen to have some random temporary electric fence laying around the house. Any landowner, agency, city government, local or state government contacts you may know. These people are going to be your potential client base. These assets help you to know your starting point. Knowing where you're starting from will help you determine where you 1) want to be 2) where to start and 3) how much work and money has to go into getting where you want to be. Livestock and equipment are not exactly cheap, labor can be difficult to come by and the hours are definitely odd. So knowing what you're starting with definitely helps.

## Goals

Right off the bat, let me dispel one quick myth that I run across quite often. If you're interested in starting up a contracting business to get rich, you are making the wrong career choice. It is possible to make a living off of this process as a sole income, but it is a lot of work. Especially if you decide that you want to run something as management intensive as the goat.

With that out of the way, ask yourself this. What do you want? Are you in this full-time or is this a way to help your fellow mankind while making a few extra dollars on the side?

Your goals are the framework that you will use to determine the scope of your business. How many animals to devote to targeted grazing (if you own your own production business)? How many animals to buy? How far and wide you're willing to travel to graze? How much labor you will need? How much equipment you'll need? What kind of equipment you'll need?

If your goals are to do some local grazing on small acreages as a side income, then you may only need a small number of animals, a dozen or so rolls of electronet, two dogs, a horse trailer, a pick up truck, a small liability insurance policy and a good guard dog. If you've decided that you want to go regional with the business, traveling state to state, then you will need a lot more animals, a group of dedicated (and trustworthy) employees with their own dogs, a number of guard animals, supplies for temporary corrals (cause they're not always available when you need them) camper trailers for employee lodging, horse trailers to haul equipment, a network of livestock haulers to transport your animals, a much larger liability insurance policy, worker's comp, benefits and a lot more fencing equipment. Plus, you'll need a network of veterinarians to perform all interstate health checks. This also means that you will need a decent education (self taught or otherwise) in the various types of vegetation that might be encountered (desired and undesired), the ecotypes of the various areas in your region and the regulations associated with interstate livestock transport. A general timeline of how to work up to that level of a company will have to be developed because believe me, you won't want to start off at that level. Even if you have that kind of cash laying about, which most of us don't, it takes a little while to work out the kinks in fencing technique, employee training, animal training, animal exposure and transport.

After determining the scope of your business, you will then be able to move on to some more of the on the ground details of your business that your goals will help you settle. By this, I mean certain conditions and considerations that can be set between you and the client early on, most likely in the onsite evaluation. Whether you make them absolute or unique to the job site are up to you. An excellent example is water. Do you want to have to haul your own water to your animals? Another is site access. Are you willing to take on jobs in more remote areas where you may need to herd the animals into the site? Going to the opposite side of the spectrum, are you willing to take urban jobs where

someone will need to be with the animals 24/7 to ensure their safety from two and four legged predators? The goals that you set for your contracting business will help you decide the requirements for the jobs you are willing to take on. Crawling through dense Russian olive stands to build fence pens every two days just may not be something that you are willing to do. The same might be true for hauling water. These are good things to know when doing onsite evaluations, so they can be brought up with the client before the project ever begins. It saves everyone a lot of time, makes you look more professional and allows for vastly improved planning of the intended project.

Life is change and so should your goals

I think this statement is especially true when dealing with natural resource and vegetation management. Nature is in constant flux, never the same from one year to the next. A Colorado rancher once told me, 'if you do the same thing this year that you did last year, you're doing it wrong.' Because this year isn't last year.

Your goals will change, as will your management of the animals. This goes for all three of the groups targeted in this article; the private grazer, the contractor and the client. As you begin to see the progress of the project, adjustments in management will be made to hopefully make the whole process run smoother. But it's essential to have that initial starting point and plan. This will be the foundation on which those adjustments will be made.

And with that, I will leave you with one final disclaimer. I hope that this article doesn't scare anyone into not pursuing targeted grazing, either as a job or a treatment method. It is an effective tool that can be run to the satisfaction of both client and contractor. With this article, I'm simply trying to emphasize the important of knowledge and understanding between both parties. Without the communication, goals, assets and obstacles of those involved, it's the difference between walking up a small hill and pushing a boulder up a mountain. It can certainly be done, but the first option is certainly much easier and there's no risk of getting run over by a boulder.

### **Targeted Grazing Online Resources**

University of Idaho's Prescription (Targeted) Grazing Website

The University of Idaho, in cooperation with the American Sheep Industry, has put together a handbook on the use of livestock for vegetation management. This is the website for that handbook. It's got an incredible amount of valuable information about the techniques and science underlying the use of this tool. This includes good information about the behavioral aspects of the tool.

<http://www.cnr.uidaho.edu/rx-grazing/index.htm>

Maryland Small Ruminant's Weeds Website

This page also has a wealth of information on not only Targeted Grazing, but on the livestock themselves. They also include a good amount of information concerning vegetation problems in the eastern United States as well as the arid west.

<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/weed.html>

The Nevada Department of Agriculture's noxious weed site

[http://agri.state.nv.us/PLANT\\_NoWeeds\\_index.htm](http://agri.state.nv.us/PLANT_NoWeeds_index.htm)

The Center for Invasive Plant Management's website

<http://www.weedcenter.org/>