

Building Functional Grazing Leases

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Livestock grazing can be an effective and economical tool for owners and managers of larger landscapes to reduce fire fuel loads. As a landowner and property manager you have to take into account a vast number of considerations when developing a grazing lease. Every grazing lease will differ when considering a property's unique set of challenges. When creating a new leasing agreement, the landowner and the grazing operator should openly communicate terms and conditions and build a trusting relationship.

Paying, Paid or Free

Livestock grazing is a business with costs and risks associated. When you are discussing terms and conditions, you should take a holistic approach considering livestock grazing needs, infrastructure costs, time, fencing, water reliability, forage quality, etc. There should be conversations regarding designation of responsibilities to create a manageable agreement and successful, long-term lease experience.

When developing a new grazing lease on property, taking a multi-year approach can provide the grazing tenant the confidence to invest time and resources in the property if they know they will be back for a few years. This is especially true when considering capital improvements and time invested in the property to initiate

grazing. Furthermore, if the property has sat idle for a number of years and grazing infrastructure maintenance has been deferred, there will be necessary costs incurred to re-establish livestock grazing.

Goals and Objectives

As a landowner, you should have a list of goals and objectives that expand beyond your interest in the use of livestock grazing as a management tool. Some things you may want to consider include the time when you want livestock on the property, invasive species management, wildlife habitat management, water quality, or docile livestock compatible with recreation.

A livestock grazing lease to reduce fire fuel loads will reduce vegetation, but will not make your ranch "fire proof." When developing a managed grazing program, you should consider the "Residual Dry Matter" - the amount of forage left at the end of the grazing season, to support plant physiology, provide soil stability, and reduce the potential for erosion and other negative impacts that can result from intensive grazing. For more details, visit ucanr.edu/grazing_for_fire_prevention.

Lease Terms and Conditions

Lastly, by outlining terms and conditions in a lease agreement, there should be no surprises. Common terms to include in a lease agreement include:



- Season of use (e.g. Nov.-June)
- Class of livestock (e.g. sheep, cows with calves, etc.)
- Stocking rate (e.g. 1 cow per 20 acres - site specific)
- Exterior fencing
- Livestock drinking water – access to wells, or note reliable streams, ponds, etc.
- Insurance
- Response time for sick animals or animals out on the road
- Rancher/lessee to provide the landowner/lessor with an operating plan. Any management changes must be based upon an extraordinary change of conditions such as severe drought or wildfire.

A lease is a two-way street; both lessor and lessee must strive to understand how the land resources may be managed to meet their combined goals. These key tools will aid in successful lease opportunities for the next generation.

As a landowner, you can find more resources on leases, basic essentials of annual beef cattle operations in California and business expenses by visiting http://ucanr.edu/grazing_for_fire_prevention.



Photos provided by Carissa Rivers.