



Acquiring Agricultural Leases: Challenges & Strategies for Success

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Introduction



- Fifth generation cattle rancher in the Bay Area – Koopmann Livestock / Walking C Livestock
- Public Land Rangelands Manager/Ecologist – Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.
- Professional Rangeland Consultant – Koopmann Rangeland Consulting



Overview



- Challenges to acquiring grazing leases – Brief overview
- Grazing Leases: A Rancher’s Perspective
 - What to look for when applying for a grazing lease
 - What works for you? What won’t?
- Grazing Leases – Public Agency Perspective
 - What are they looking for in a tenant?
- Overcoming the challenges
 - Strategies to increase your success in acquiring grazing a grazing lease
 - Tips for building a resume/experience

Challenges

LAND for LEASE

- Finding suitable land to lease – high demand.
 - Drought
 - Cattle prices
 - Rangeland conversion
- Experience
 - Livestock husbandry and marketing
 - Infrastructure*
- Financial Sustainability
 - Large capital investment
 - Cost of livestock
 - Infrastructure*
- Politics



- **Compatibility**
 - Grazing Season
 - Class of Livestock
 - Location
- **Lease Terms**
 - Length of Lease
 - Pricing
 - Financial Sustainability
 - Special Requirements / Restrictions
- **Capacity**
 - Size of property
 - Financial Solvency
 - Stocking
 - Infrastructure / Maintenance

Grazing Leases: A Ranchers Perspective



What to think about when considering applying for a grazing lease

▪ Experience

- Grazing with recreation
- Grazing under a resource management plan
- Vegetation management (invasives/natives)
- Natural Resource Management
- Infrastructure, Roads, Structures
- Public Outreach and Education

▪ Operational Capacity

- Do you have the staffing or capacity to manage the property
 - Pasture rotations
 - Emergency response
 - Infrastructure maintenance and repairs
- Location

▪ Financial Solvency

- Do you have financial capacity to cover:
 - Rent Fees
 - Infrastructure improvements
 - Livestock purchase & husbandry

Grazing Leases: Lessor Perspective



What is a lessor looking for in a grazing tenant?



Selection Process



- Public Land Grazing Lease
 - Publically advertised
 - Grazing Request for Proposals (RFP) released
 - Site visit of property
 - Interested parties submit written Grazing Proposal
 - Interview(s) of applicants
 - Most qualified, experienced grazing applicant selected based on combined score of grazing proposal and interview(s)
- Private Land Grazing Lease
 - No protocol for selection – At landowner/managers discretion

Strategies to Increase Your Odds



1. Finding Land to Lease

- Contact local agencies – Get on the list
- Make your interest in grazing lands known
- Consult local RCD/NRCS/Farm Bureau/Farm Link

2. Patient but Persistent

- Lease opportunities don't occur all the time
- Continue to check in with agencies & make your interest known
- Look for alternatives (i.e. private leases)

Strategies to Increase Your Odds



3. Research – All agencies are different

- When an opportunity comes – Research the lease/agency/RFP!
 - Is it compatible with your operation?
 - Do you meet the minimum qualifications?
- Why is the property up for lease?
 - Newly grazed property?
 - ‘Problem tenant’ removed?
 - Grazing tenant gave up lease for some reason?
 - Lease term expired?
- Don’t Waste your Time! But Practice can be good



* Code of the west: Don’t cut cinches!

Strategies to Increase Your Odds



3. Research (part 2)

- The Site Tour – Attend!

- Make your presence and interest known

- Thoroughly inspect the property (terrain, forage, water, infrastructure)

- Ask questions...

- What is the agency's priority objectives?



Strategies to Increase Your Odds



4. Preparing a Grazing Lease Proposal

- Start Early
 - Get all necessary information together (reference letters, financial statement, etc.)
- Be thorough
 - Carefully read the RFP and include ALL required information
- Highlight your strengths
 - Particularly if they coincide with agency's objectives for the property
 - Don't lie or exaggerate – You will get caught
 - Thoroughly demonstrate your experience and capacity
 - Narrative
 - Pictures
- Submit a professional proposal
 - But, fancy doesn't necessarily mean the best
- Get it in on time!

Strategies to Increase Your Odds



5. The Interview

- Prepare
 - Know what is in your proposal!
 - Know what the property management objectives are
- Be early – If you're on time, you're late
- Be confident - Be knowledgeable - Be Honest
- Bring business partners/family
 - Don't bring consultants to answer questions for you...

* Practice helps. The more times you go through the process, the better you'll get.

Strategies to Increase Your Odds



6. Getting the Lease...

- If you do not get the lease, learn from your experience
- If you do get awarded the lease, PERFORM
 - Work hard and keep your word
 - Build a strong, healthy partnership with the agency
 - Grazing public land is not a charity case*
 - This lease will add to your 'value' as a tenant for future lease opportunities



Building Experience



The best way to increase your odds: Build Experience & Operational Capacity

- a. Go to work for someone to gain experience/knowledge
- b. Get your foot in the door – Look for small, local private land leases
- c. Partner with more experienced operator when applying
- d. Improve infrastructure – Learn by doing
- e. Attend workshops



Building Experience



Infrastructure Improvements & Capital– Options for Assistance

- Grants
 - USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
 - EQIP
- Loans
 - Ag lenders
 - Farm Link
- Partnering with Lessor (Rent Credit)





Upcoming Grazing Lease Opportunity:

Mindego Hill portion of the Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve.

-1,047 acres

-San Mateo County, CA

-Year round – cow/calf pair

-5 year lease w/ option for 5 year extension

-RFP to be released early May

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‘Don’t get discouraged. Acquiring a grazing lease can be a long, uphill trail but you’re not traveling it alone. Take advantage of available resources, better yourself as a grazing operator, stay positive and stay persistent.’

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