



WHAT DO I DO WITH MY LAND?



A DECISION MAKING GUIDE FOR NEW MEAT PRODUCERS



This guide is designed to help new farmers who are interested in getting involved in meat production. The goal is to provide information regarding land size, costs, equipment requirements, and other factors that can influence a farmer's choice in livestock species and operation type.

For further resources and guidance contact your local Extension Agent.

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How much land do you have?



0.3 - 0.5 Acres
Per Sheep/Goat



2-3 Acres
Per Cow

Your acreage of grazable pasture land may limit you to a certain type of livestock.

Ruminants, like cows, sheep, and goats, get almost all of their nutrients from pasture and forage.

Pigs and poultry will need supplemental feed and can be housed on less ideal grazing land.

Poultry and pork are both suited for small acreage settings. Stocking rate will vary depending on stage of production and style of management, among other factors. These numbers serve as a good starting point.

Depending on stage of production, pigs can be stocked at a rate of 6-20 pigs/acre



Poultry require approximately 5 sq ft of foraging space per bird

What are your goals for your land?

- \$ Profit
- Enjoyment/Hobby

Deciding on goals for your land can help you plan. You might need to write a business plan. Even outlining expectations for a hobby farm can be beneficial for a new farmer.

Is there any fencing or infrastructure already in place?

- Goats and sheep need fencing with tighter spacing than cattle. Working facilities differ between species and may be better suited for one type of operation.
- Having a water source is critical to raising livestock.
- Old barns or sheds can be modified into chicken coops or houses.

For more information and guidance, contact your local Extension Agent



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What is your desired level of involvement?

Ruminants



Land rental is an option for those who do not want to own livestock, but wish to retain ownership of the land. Stocker operations keep younger animals on their farm to put weight on them before reselling. Breeding operations keep animals on their farm all year round and have additional cost and labor expenses. Marketing options can vary in time and energy commitment as well. Retail meat sales can be more labor intensive than live animal sales for example.

Poultry



Involvement with raising pastured poultry will not vary much with the exception of housing style and processing.

Pork



Raising pastured pork will vary based on operation type. Farrow-to-Finish will have animals on the farm year round and will be higher in labor and expenses.



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Cattle

Cows have a longer production cycle and will be on your farm a lot longer before seeing any returns. For cow-calf operations, it takes about 1.5 years from breeding to selling the weaned calves. They are larger animals that need lots of space as well as more hay and feed supplies.

Marketing

There are several marketing options for selling cattle. Some options are more profitable than others and some require more effort and time.

- Livestock Sales
- Graded and/or BQA Sales (Price Premium)
- Private Treaty/On Farm Sales- Breeding Animals or Live Animals for Processing
- Selling Meat Cuts- Retail or Wholesale

Other Considerations

- The breed you select will depend on what your goals and marketing strategies are.
- Pasture management will be a major time and cost consideration.
- Beef is a well established market with a more consistent demand.

Challenges

- Cattle have a much higher initial investment between purchasing animals, equipment, and land.
- Cattle have a longer production cycle, which means it takes longer to see your returns. It also makes it difficult to adjust production goals and involves higher levels of market risk.

Equipment

There are lots of options and considerations to make when purchasing cattle equipment. Here are some basic items needed to get started.

- Cattle working system- a head gate at minimum
- Trailer for animals
- Fencing
- Feeding supplies- hay ring, feed trough or bunk, waterer, etc...
- Tractor with implements to move round hay bales, spray fields, etc...



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Small Ruminants

Sheep and goats have a shorter production cycle. For breeding operations, it takes about 9 months from breeding to selling the young. They are smaller animals that need less space as well as less hay and feed supplies.

Marketing

There are several marketing options for selling sheep and goats. Since they are more of a niche market it might take more time and effort to create a market for your products.

- General Livestock Sales
- Graded Sales (Price Premium)
- Private Treaty/On Farm Sales- Breeding Animals and Live Animals for Processing
- Selling Meat Cuts- Retail or Wholesale

Other Considerations

- Sheep and goats are smaller and typically easier to handle than larger livestock species .
- The breed you will select will depend on your goals and marketing strategies. Breeds are commonly divided into meat or dairy types for goats and hair or wool for sheep.
- Pasture management will be a major time and cost consideration.
- USDA requires scrapie tags on animals before selling or moving them.

Challenges

- Small ruminants are strongly affected by internal parasites. A comprehensive parasite management plan will be a necessity.
- Goats can be escape artists and will need a suitable fence to keep them contained.
- Small ruminants will need appropriate protection from predators.

Equipment

There are lots of options and considerations to make when purchasing equipment. Here are some basic items needed to get started.

- Pen system to confine animals to work them
 - Trailer for animals
 - Fencing
 - Feeding supplies
 - Shelter from inclement weather
- Optional:
- Tractor with implements to move round hay bales, spray fields, etc...
 - Head gate/chute system



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Pastured Pigs

Marketing

There are several marketing options for selling pork. Live animal sales are less common than selling meat.

- Livestock Sales
- Private Treaty/On Farm Sales- Piglets or Breeding Animals
- Selling Meat Cuts- Retail or Wholesale

Other Considerations

- If transporting live animals on state roads, they must have tags provided or approved by the NCDA.
- There are different breeds that have varying carcass characteristics and suitability for pasture. Research what will fit best with your production system.

*Timeline is typical for faster growing pig breeds. Some heritage breeds will have a longer production time



Piglet
2-4 Pounds



Feeder Pig
40-60 Pounds
2 months



Finished Market Pig
250-280 Pounds
6 months

Challenges

- Pigs are very destructive to pastureland. Their natural inclination to root will destroy grass pastures. A rotational schedule will be necessary to keep pastures in good shape.
- Pigs are very intelligent, which can create challenges with handling them and keeping them contained.
- Pigs do not handle the heat well and will need some way to help cool off in the summer.

Equipment

There are lots of options and considerations to make when purchasing equipment. Here are some basic items needed to get started.

- Strong perimeter fencing
- Temporary interior fencing
- Feeding and watering supplies
- Shelter/Shade
- Trailer for transporting market animals



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Poultry

Pastured poultry have a lower initial investment. Depending on the breed, chickens can be ready for processing in as little as 6-11 weeks. Turkeys take closer to 5 months. This allows for quicker adjustment to consumer demand.

Marketing

Marketing options are more limited for poultry. There are little to no live animal sale options.

- Direct to Consumer
- Restaurants and Farmers' Markets

Other Considerations

- Poultry are easily and quickly scaled to meet producers needs.
- Chicks and poults require a brooder in the early weeks of life before being moved out to pasture.
- Poultry can be processed on farm for retail if you possess the proper exemptions.
- Daily care is needed for poultry flocks.



Challenges

- Finding a processor can be difficult and processing equipment is very expensive. Additionally, processing on farm is labor intensive.
- Farmers must be comfortable with dispatching and processing their animals themselves.
- Poultry are prone to predation issues.
- To prevent disease transmission, proper biosecurity practices are very important.

Equipment

There are lots of options and considerations to make when purchasing equipment. Here are some basic items needed to get started.

- Brooder with heating system
- Coop- either stationary or portable
- Feeding and watering supplies
- Fencing
- Processing equipment- rent or purchase



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Further Resources

NC Choices: <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/food-system-initiatives/nc-choices/>
Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS):

<https://cefs.ncsu.edu/>

Amazing Grazing: <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/extension-and-outreach/amazing-grazing/>

N.C. Cooperative Extension Local Foods Portal:

<https://localfood.ces.ncsu.edu/>

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