

# agronomy news

## Livestock Options Open for Small Acreages

Criteria for choosing among available species include experience, lure of the exotic, pleasure of companionship, profit.

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Small acreage farms or ranchettes are not for everyone, but they do provide a healthy way of life in the country, away from the problems of urban congestion. Thousands of households throughout Colorado cherish the unique lifestyle of small acreage ownership, and the numbers are increasing each year. For a variety of reasons, these property owners are looking for animal enterprises to include in their property management plan.

As of 1992, over 340,000 acres in Colorado were managed by over 18,000 different landowners owning tracts of land ranging in size from one to 49 acres. Projected population increases show Colorado as the fifth fastest growing state in the U.S., with an 11% increase by the year 2000 and a 38% increase



by 2025. This will mean more than 20,000 potential new small acreage landowners in the next five years.

Some of these new property owners are looking for ways to make their property prosper, while others want the satisfaction of starting an agricultural enterprise. The majority of this new clientele will not have a traditional agricultural background. Their experience in managing natural resources (i.e.,

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soils, air, water, plants, animal, human resources or proper use of pesticides, etc.) is very limited. Others will have some production agricultural experiences, but not under Colorado conditions. The Department of Animal Sciences at Colorado State University receives numerous requests from these new property owners to help them find an enterprise that matches their area of expertise and/or resources.

Possible enterprises are as diverse as the species of animals found in Colorado. The most

popular small livestock acreage enterprise is based on horse ownership (80%), including boarding, breeding, riding lessons, and training operations. Horse enterprises are only as successful as the people who run the operations. So, the operators will have to stay up-to-date on riding, training and business skills. Cooperative Extension can help these operators with facility and land resource management; such as pasture management, weed control, ground water quality, insect and manure control.

Many property owners need information about pasture management. Animals cannot continuously graze pasture on limited acreage. On a small acreage, a pasture is an exercise area, not a feed source. Small acreage owners need to supply all the animal nutrient needs through hay and other supplemental feeding sources. Horses owners need facilities where they can corral animals for most of the day, and turn them out into the pasture for just a few hours per day. Reduced grazing time assures vegetation cover to the pasture areas, eliminates overgrazing, and therefore reduces the chance of weeds taking over the pasture. This approach is a real turnaround from our traditional way of managing pastures and grazing

animals. Of course, the animals will also require daily handling and training, corral cleaning and manure disposal, along with fly control. These management tasks become more intensive for the small acreage owner, when compared to horse operations on larger tracts of land.

Some animal enterprises in Colorado are traditional, and some are more exotic. While some property owners look to horses, sheep, hogs and cattle, others are exploring more exotic livestock choices, like cameloids,



elk, miniature horses and donkeys, bison, ratiters like ostrich and emu, and pheasants. For the small

acreage manager, the traditional animals may be as exotic as the llamas and emus, simply because they have no background or experience in animal husbandry.

Llamas and alpacas are the favored cameloids in Colorado. The llama is a 280 to 350 lb. animal domesticated for its packing ability. Alpaca are raised for their cashmere-like fiber. There are two different types of alpacas, both of which are represented in the United States, the Suri and the Huacayas. The alpaca are smaller in size than

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llamas, average 100 to 180 lbs. in weight. Both llama and alpaca are very social animals.

Elk raising on private property is

becoming very popular in Colorado. However, to start elk ranching in Colorado, one

needs to contact the Division of Wildlife and the Department of Agriculture. In Colorado, a special license is

mandatory for raising elk. Special handling facilities and fencing is needed. Details on regulations on elk can be found in House Bill 94-1096.

Bison breeding operations can fit nicely into most cattle operations. However, bison should be kept in five-foot tall fences. Corrals should be 7 ft. tall, with solid walls. Specialized squeeze chutes, designed for bison, should be used. The bison industry includes several segments: breeding stock, meat, and by-products. Nearly every part of the bison is marketable.

Ratiters, or running birds, such as the ostrich and emu are also an option for the small acreage owner. The ostrich stands seven to nine feet tall and weighs 300 to 350 pounds. Ostrich meat is promoted as a low-cholesterol red meat, and is gaining popularity as a restaurant

entree. Ostrich leather is a popular product for boots and upholstery, and the feathers can be cropped once a year for additional products.

Emus are the second largest flightless bird. At maturity, emus are 5 to 6 ft tall and weigh 125 to 160 lbs. Emu

products include leather, meat and oils.

A variety of goat breeds are grazed on forage lands

less suited for other livestock. Goats are raised for fiber, milk and meat, depending on the breed. Colored angora and cashmere goats are known for their luxurious fibers. However goat raising requires a dog proof fence (like sheep raising). A dog or coyote can be the goat's worst danger, so dog-proof fencing is required.

Pheasant raising covers approximately 175 species of birds. Most species of pheasants raised in the U.S. can tolerate cold winters, but some species do require housing in a warm building during the winter season. Long, caged runs are required to successfully manage these birds.

There are two main types of small acreage livestock enterprises, those designed for breeding and profit, and those set up for hobby/companionship. One person referred to their

property as a "4-H farm." They are raising livestock for the kids, "so they can experience a country way of life." Whether for profit or hobby, this new clientele enjoy what they are doing, and are willing to research and learn as much as possible about their new-found interest. **Swinker**



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# Unlocking your land's potential

**Soil surveys and soil tests are keys for landowners to use as they fulfill dreams for future uses of their land.**

New landowners often have big dreams for the future. Those dreams can come true if a landowner understands the limitations and the potential of the different soils on his/her property. With this knowledge base, the plans for the land can be matched up with the land's potential in a manner similar to putting a jigsaw puzzle together.

There are two keys for assessing a soil's potential: soil survey and soil testing. A soil survey is available from the local Natural Resources Conservation Service office for most Colorado counties. Soil surveys provide information about landscape characteristics that don't change much within a human lifespan. Soil sampling and testing provide information about soil properties that can change within short periods of time. These two tools provide landowners with opportunities to learn about their land and make wise decisions for its future.

Using the maps in the soil survey a landowner can determine what soil types are present on his/her tract, and what their distribution is on the land. A description of each soil is given down to about five feet deep. Therefore, a landowner can learn not just about the surface properties of the land, but also about the soil depth and erodibility.

If landowners are considering soil amendments to improve soil physical properties, they can learn what soil textures are present and make amendment decisions accordingly. The potential of a soil for shrinking and swelling is also evaluated in the soil survey, and this is critically important to know when choosing a homesite.

The permeability and water holding capacities of soils have important implications for irrigation practices, and these characteristics are also described in the soil survey. In addition, average soil temperature and precipitation are also provided in the soil survey; this can be useful information for people moving into an area from out-of-state. Lastly, the soil survey includes very useful tables which outline soil suitability for homesites, septic tanks, farm ponds, irrigation and drainage, recreational uses, and wildlife habitat. Mapping these areas out on your new land can be a useful planning tool.

Soil properties like fertility, organic matter content, pH, and salinity can change rapidly depending on how soil is managed. Therefore, soil sampling and laboratory testing can be useful to learn about the specific characteristics of your land.

Each portion of your land that either has a different history of use or where you propose a different use in the future should be sampled separately.

Soil testing labs can provide a landowner with an accurate assessment of the fertility of a soil and make a specific fertilizer prescription to improve the productivity of your land. Soil testing is also useful for diagnosing problems related to high pH or high salts. Soil testing allows you to monitor short-term changes in fertility, salinity, or organic matter contents.

The tools of soil survey and soil testing work hand-in-hand to give you an idea of the potential of your land and its limitations. With these tools, you can plan your dream, and make it come true! Instead of fighting the land's limitations, aim for its potential. **Davis**

