



# Cornell University Cooperative Extension Schuyler County

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## Choosing the Right Animals for Your Farm

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Raising livestock on your farm can be a very enjoyable experience that helps you to reach your ownership goals. Common examples of why we raise livestock include:

- Generate a profit
- Improve the land
- Produce food and fiber for personal use
- Family project

But raising animals is a big commitment that we should fully comprehend before the first animals come to the farm. Once a commitment has been made to raise animals, the next step is to choose the right animal to fit your property and goals. The following is a list of questions to help you choose wisely:

### **What are my goals for my property, and how will raising a particular animal help me reach those goals?**

Some animals are better for certain jobs than others. For example, if you want to keep the fields on your farm open without the expense of mowing, then larger grazing animals like cows and horses may be better suited than smaller animals which will require better fences

### **How much land will I need to raise the animals?**

In general, larger animals need larger acreages to economically feed them (pasture), and provide humane conditions.

### **What are the pros and cons of the animals I want to raise?**

Each animal has its good and bad features – understand these fully and make sure that they are compatible with your plans

### **What will the animals eat on my property?**

Feed is often the leading expense in caring for animals. The healthiest and least expensive food for most livestock is green plants. Some animals like horses, cattle and sheep prefer forages (grass and legumes). Other animals like goats can tolerate more browse (brush and coarse weeds). Most pastures are quite diverse, so multi-species grazing is one strategy to optimize pasture use and health.

### **How much time do I have to care for the animals?**

Many factors influence the amount of time needed to care for animals, including the type of animal, the time of year, and your system and set-up for management. Make sure that you will have enough time to properly care for the animal 100% of the time. Plan for emergencies (also known as “eventualities”).

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### **Am I capable of physically taking care of the animals?**

Some animals, like cattle, are practically impossible for us to handle without specialized equipment. But even small, friendly animals may require care and maintenance that requires significant physical strength. Examples are shearing, vaccinating and trimming the hooves of sheep and goats. It may not be possible to hire all of these services, so are you able to do them if not?

### **How much can I spend?**

Don't buy alpacas if your budget allows for angoras. You may be able to buy 10 small animals for the price of one large one. In any case, prepare a budget of how much you can spend per year before you buy animals, and stick to the budget. Remember to factor in all costs of caring for the animal, including fencing, shelter, vet care, and even mortality and depreciation.

### **Are there other characteristics about my property that favor or exclude certain animals?**

Small, disconnected or wet pastures may not be compatible with larger livestock. Large, open pastures without tight perimeter fence may invite predator problems with small animals.

### **Is my property already equipped for a certain animal?**

Many old farms already have barbwire fencing that will work fine for larger animals, but be unsuitable for sheep and goats. Converting or replacing infrastructure will be costly, so consider working with what you have until cash flow and time allows for changes.

### **What did I forget?**

Will the chosen animals be safe around my children and pets? Am I willing to send excess or unhealthy animals to slaughter? Are there local professionals that can provide necessary services like veterinary care, shearing, hoof care, etc? Can I afford to do this and do the benefits outweigh the costs?

### *Points worth repeating...*

1. Start with a written plan that includes goals, timeline and budget.
2. Choose animals that fit your goals, property, and interests.
3. Buy good quality animals from a reputable breeder. Spend time talking to breeders and researching the animals that you are interested in.
4. Learn from others that are doing or have done what you are considering. What would you do different, and why? Will it work?
5. Start small and don't buy compulsively
6. Are you committed?