

Questions to Ask Small Acreage Contractors

Boulder County Extension

Items to consider prior to hiring a contractor

These are items to consider and know the answer to prior to talking to a contractor. If you have long-range expectations/goals/plans then you can convey your expectations to your contractor and achieve them.

1. What are your expectations for the acreage? Do you want to use it for forage production or exercise for animals or just leave it “natural”? Leaving it “natural” may cause fire concerns so some management may still need to take place.
2. How much money do you have to spend? How much time are you willing to spend?
3. Do you want someone to handle all irrigation, weed control, fertilizing and mowing on your acreage or do you just want them to do specific tasks? Do you have the time and equipment to handle the tasks that you don’t contract out?
4. Do you want only “organic” control or are you willing to do some chemical control? Some chemical use may be needed initially until you have certain weed species under control. The organic route may take additional time to achieve success and may include more of your time initially.
5. If you have access problems, are you willing or able to alter gate sizes, locations, access roads to allow for easier access?
6. You may want to check with your insurance to find out your liability if the contractor errs in spraying, damages a neighbor’s property or they are injured while on your property.
7. Do you have certain higher value plants or landscaping that you want protected from potential damage?

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Soil work (tillage and seeding) and spraying are dependent on soil moisture and weather (respectively), thus firm dates for these operations may not be realistic. You may need to

rely on the discretion of your contractor to determine when these operations can take place.

1. Can they handle the size of your property? What kind of access do they need (such as gate size, width of road)? Is there a minimum acreage or charge?
2. How long have they been in business and what type of background/education/experience do they have in the business?
3. Can they provide references, other acreages they manage for you to talk to or visit?
4. What type of equipment do they have?
Size, type, capability
5. Do they have applicable licenses (i.e. Colorado Pesticide Applicators license)? Is their equipment registered with the State as Special Mobile Machinery (SMM) as required by Colorado State Law?
6. How do they approach weed control? Do they immediately reach for the herbicide or do they first identify the weed then develop an overall control plan? Do they understand Integrated Pest Management Practices (IPM)? An integrated plan involves cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical means to control a pest. Cultural involves actions that will encourage the growth of the desired species such as sufficient irrigation, reducing soil compaction and good grazing management. Mechanical controls are mowing to keep weeds from going to seed, hand pulling, hoeing, and light tillage to uproot the weed. Biological is the use of a biological agent such as an insect to control the weed. There are a limited number of biological controls that are effective. Chemical is the use of a chemical (may be considered organic or synthetic in nature) to control the weed.
7. Prior to herbicide application, do they notify neighbors or do they give you sufficient notice so that you can notify neighbors?
8. Do I have to purchase the herbicide or do they?
9. What is their availability? Do they only come when you call or do they make periodic inspections to see what needs to be done? Which do you need or want them to do?
10. How much lead time/notice do they need before they can start work? How long will it take once the work is started?
11. Are they familiar with your area? Do they understand the soils in your area or other special concerns such as high water table?

12. How is their bid broken down? Does the bid include travel time and gas to and from your place and to purchase herbicide or seed?
13. Do they keep records on each acreage they work on with information such as herbicide, and fertilizer applications and mowing? Will they provide you with copies of these records?
14. What services do they provide? Mowing, seeding, spraying? Do they ever contract any of this out to others and what is their contractor's background?
15. Who is actually going to be doing the work, the contractor or their employees? (You may want to know what kind of training they provide for employees.)
16. Does the pasture have to be reseeded or with good management practices can I avoid the cost of complete renovation? What management practices should I be using to encourage good forage growth?
17. If reseeding, what kind of equipment do they have? Do they have a no till grass drill or do they broadcast seed? If they broadcast the seed, how do they ensure good grass/soil contact?
18. If reseeding, what is the seed mix they are using? Can I get a special seed mix if I request it or can I purchase my own mix? Why are they recommending this particular mix? How much seed will they put down per acre? I want to graze X number of Y type of animal, what kind of seed mix should I use and what special considerations should I/you take? The type of forage that each type of animal prefers or does best on is different. [to my knowledge we don't make this distinction in the Extension office. We have a mix for dryland and a mix for irrigated with suggestions of adding a legume if desired]
19. Is this going to require continuing maintenance and what is the time frame for doing it?
20. How long before my animals can go back on this pasture? [Do we trust the contractor to accurately answer this question? Maybe details on this would be a good addition to a reseeding factsheet?]
21. What kind liability insurance do they carry and what does it cover?
22. Do they require a deposit and if so, how much? Is it refundable?
23. What can I, the property owner do to make this successful? What do they expect from me? What information/education can they give me so that I can better manage my property (assuming you want to be involved)?

