



Farm Rental Assessment Checklist

Leasing a farm or farmland should involve careful examination of the site conditions and all the variables that may affect the viability of your farm operation.

This checklist can be used as a guide as you examine prospective farm properties for lease or even purchase. BEFORE visiting farm properties, carefully review each consideration. Identify any particular aspects vital to your operation. NEXT, as you visit a particular property, check the boxes to confirm that you have considered each item. Note comments below to help you remember unique observations, next steps and/or questions. By carefully scrutinizing all of the items listed, you may be able to better evaluate the suitability of each property for your farm operation and identify any “deal breakers.”

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| <p><input type="checkbox"/> ACCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How will you access the property? Check to see that roads leading to the property are traversable or adequately maintained, plowed, etc.○ Does the site have adequate entry and exit for all equipment in every season and time of day during which you will be farming? See that the site has adequate access and turnaround space for large trucks delivering bulk supplies (or that a suitable alternate spot exists nearby). Each field or area on the property should have adequate entry and exit ways for regular equipment traffic.○ If individual fields have not previously seen the regular entry or exit of heavy equipment, farm vehicles, livestock or customers, consider the impact of such traffic on access ways and discuss with the landlord potential improvements to stabilize access ways, such as laying gravel. | <p><u>Comments or site visit notes</u></p> |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> AG SUPPORT SERVICE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Take note of how far hardware stores, feed suppliers, mechanics, custom hire equipment operators, or other support businesses or services are from the proposed site.○ Consider how much time you will spend traveling back and forth from each of these, or what other travel/shipping costs might be incurred. | |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> CELL PHONE RECEPTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Check to see that your phone service carrier provides cell phone reception at the site (or in a nearby location) for making and receiving calls. | |

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| <p><input type="checkbox"/> CURRENT TENANT RELATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inform yourself about any current or previous tenants. Ask the landlord if the current tenant is aware that the landlord is looking for a new tenant and see if it is possible to speak to the tenant. Conversations with previous tenants can reveal strengths, challenges or special features about a property that might otherwise be unknown. ○ Current or previous tenants might also share records that can be valuable sources of information (see “RECORDS,” below). Note any particular expectations and/or desires the landlord currently has with regard to the property (in terms of aesthetics, farming approaches, etc.) | <p><i>Comments or site visit notes</i></p> |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> EASEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be aware of restrictions placed on the property, including conservation easements, rights of way, and to what extent these restrictions could impact your farm operation or limit expansion. For example, find out the width of a right-of-way zone that the power company owns for power, also what rights these entities have for access, management, etc. (i.e. spraying herbicides under power lines) or the distance from the state highway into the property that the state owns. | |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> EQUIPMENT STORAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify and inspect locations for storing your equipment. Ask questions. Discuss terms. | |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> EQUIPMENT USAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some landowners may be willing to include some equipment in the lease for your use. If so, identify and inspect the equipment, discuss terms, including fees, maintenance schedules, time restrictions and the rights of any other users. ○ Alternatively, landowners may be interested in being hired by you to perform custom work with their equipment (i.e. plowing, hay harvest, etc.) Consider all options. | |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> HOUSING/RESIDENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify any buildings that could be used as residences, or consider any areas that could be used for building sites. ○ If an existing residence is to be included in the lease or a separate residential lease is to be crafted, both parties should be aware of the basic rights and responsibilities afforded to landlords and tenants by various South Carolina and federal laws. | |

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| <p><input type="checkbox"/> INFRASTRUCTURE USAGE, IMPROVEMENTS, & MAINTENANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Barns <input type="checkbox"/> Equipment sheds <input type="checkbox"/> Office <input type="checkbox"/> Farm stands <input type="checkbox"/> Feed storage facilities <input type="checkbox"/> Fencing <input type="checkbox"/> Food processing facilities <input type="checkbox"/> Greenhouses <input type="checkbox"/> Irrigation, well, watering system <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile livestock units <input type="checkbox"/> Product storage facilities, coolers, freezers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify and inspect any infrastructure on site that could be available to the farm operation. You and the landowner should determine which improvements will be necessary and which improvements you will have the right to make. ○ If you will be investing in improvements, a discussion as to if or how you will be compensated should be initiated. ○ Routine maintenance schedules for all infrastructure to be included in the lease should be discussed. Any anticipated major overhauls or repairs should be identified and distinguished from routine maintenance. Typically you are responsible for all routine maintenance that prevents abnormal deterioration, while the landowner is responsible for all major overhauls, replacements or repairs to structures or other infrastructure. ○ Be sure to consult with builders, irrigation specialists and other experts to get appraisals, quotes and advice on any infrastructure improvements you anticipate needing. | <p><u><i>Comments or site visit notes</i></u></p> |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> LAND ORIENTATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider the direction and/or quantity of sun available in all areas of the land that will be used. ○ Orientation with regard to wind direction or the existence of windbreaks is also important when considering which crops or livestock will thrive in a given location. ○ If you have concerns, visit the site during different times of day to more carefully evaluate sun and wind exposure. If you have adequate time, a visit during snow cover, following a rain, etc. is desirable. | |

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| <input type="checkbox"/> LIVESTOCK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any livestock that the landowner owns that is to be housed on site or managed by you should be inspected and the terms of livestock care discussed. ○ If you have questions about animal health, contact a livestock veterinarian or specialist. ○ Consider biosecurity and isolation requirements, as well as the potential for herd or flock contamination. ○ Inspect fencing, and discuss the installation and maintenance of animal fencing and water systems. | <u><i>Comments or site visit notes</i></u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MICROCLIMATES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify any wet areas, high spots exposed to excessive winds, erosion, dry areas, etc. that could affect crops or livestock. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NEIGHBOR RELATIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understand the usage, ownership and perimeters of bordering properties. ○ Ask the landlord if it is possible to have a conversation with bordering landowners or tenants and if they are aware of your intentions to farm. Consider engaging them early on, as they may have concerns about noise, pollution or aesthetics that may be more easily addressed up front. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> POWER SUPPLY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify electric service, if needed. ○ Contact the local power company to establish price rates for power or to investigate the feasibility of bringing power to other areas of the site where needed. ○ If you intend to use a generator, identify and discuss proper storage facilities for the generator and its fuel source. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PROPERTY BORDERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify all borders to confirm size of workable lands. ○ Walk borders to determine where sensitive areas exist. For example, agricultural activity would be restricted in proximity to a stream or wetland that acts as a border or intersects a border. ○ If the landowner is not familiar with exact border locations, you can access tax maps that delineate parcels at the local town office. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ROADS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check to see that roads leading to and around the property are traversable or adequately maintained, plowed, etc. for when you will need to make regular visits or transport goods. | |

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| <p>☐ RECORDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You should examine any records related to past land use. These include soil test results, pesticide application records, water quality testing results, organic certification records, building blueprints, wastewater system design plans and permits, and any other record that might reveal information pertinent to managing the land for agricultural use. ○ If the landlord has a current tenant, ask to speak to him or her in order to obtain appropriate records, if they are willing. | <p><u><i>Comments or site visit notes</i></u></p> |
| <p>☐ RESTRICTIONS/RESTRICTED AREAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify any areas of the property where you will not be permitted to operate. ○ Determine any sensitive areas that require special attention or will be restricted to certain farming practices and discuss those specific restricted practices. ○ Discuss any farming practices or infrastructure modifications that you suspect might raise concern, such as constructing a tool shed or immovable chicken coop or establishing a composting or odor-prone livestock operation in proximity to residences, and propose sites for their implementation. ○ Ask the landlord about hunting grounds or trails that exist and are used on the property. | |
| <p>☐ SOILS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify soil types (The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service publishes maps and tables with soils information online at www.websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm) and confirm them with site evaluation in each distinct area of the property. ○ Identify problem soils, such as excessively wet or sloped areas. A top priority for tenants should be having good soils. Oftentimes, if soils are degraded, it's not worth the business expense to sink a lot of money into soil improvement. This is particularly true for a short-term lease situation. ○ Have the soil fertility evaluated. You can submit soil samples to the Clemson University soil testing lab for analysis. Online at www.clemson.edu/public/regulatory/ag_svc_lab/soil_testing ○ Discuss cover cropping, soil testing and soil amending responsibilities and schedules with the landlord. | |

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| <p><input type="checkbox"/> TOPOGRAPHY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The land should be flat enough to be tilled or for equipment to be safely operated. This is not so important if grazing livestock. ○ Identify strategies for productively managing non-tillable and excessively sloped areas and discuss whose responsibility it will be to manage those areas. | <p><i><u>Comments or site visit notes</u></i></p> |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> VEGETATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify strategies for overcoming limitations related to existing tree cover, brush, grasses or weeds, including any existing invasive or vigorous weeds. ○ Identify and point out to the landowner areas where tree removal is necessary. Discuss with the landlord how this work will get done. | |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> WATER RESOURCES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All potential sources of water for farm operations should be identified, including those currently used or those that could be developed (for example, a hillside seep that could be developed into a spring, a river or stream, a well or a hookup to a public utility). ○ Information should be obtained about seasonal fluctuations in water availability and shared or alternative uses of existing or potential water resources. ○ Consult with an irrigation specialist to get a quote on installation if a new water system will need to be purchased. | |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> OTHER CONSIDERATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are many other considerations not included in this field checklist that need to be made before entering into a lease agreement, such as your landlord's expectations about insurance, access, lease term, long term ownership and land stewardship. | |

This document was adapted for use by Lowcountry Local First from the University of Vermont Extension's "Farm Rental Assessment Checklist," a project supported by UVM Extension, the Intervale Center, and the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program.