

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.

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 will 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 management, 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” management methods or are you willing to do some chemical management? Some chemical use may be needed initially until you have certain weed species managed. Organic methods 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 equipment access?
6. You may want to check with your insurance to find out your liability if the contractor errs in spraying and 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 conditions, 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 management? Do they immediately reach for the herbicide or do they first identify the weed then develop an overall management plan? Do they understand Integrated Pest Management Practices (IPM)? An integrated plan involves cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical means to manage 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 methods 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 manage the weed. There are a limited number of biological agents that are effective. Chemical is the use of a chemical (may be considered organic or synthetic in nature) to manage the weed.
7. Prior to herbicide application, does the contractor notify neighbors or do they give you sufficient notice so that you can notify neighbors? Do they have prior experience with weeds and on properties similar to yours? How often have they worked in your area? How long have they been doing this specific type of application, i.e. weeds, trees, near or in water?
8. Colorado Department of Agriculture can provide you with the inspection and complaint history of any pesticide applicator. They call also provide you with a list of licensed pesticide applicators. Contact them at 303-869-9063.

9. Do I have to purchase the herbicide or does the contractor? If the contractor is using a restricted use herbicide, unless you have a private applicators license, the contractor will need to purchase the restricted use herbicide.
10. 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?
11. How much lead time/notice do they need before they can start work? How long will it take once the work is started?
12. Are they familiar with your area? Do they understand the soils in your area or other special concerns such as high water table?
13. How is their bid broken down? Does the bid include travel time and gas to and from you place and to purchase herbicide or seed?
14. 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 these records or copies?
15. What services do they provide? Mowing, seeding, spraying? Do they ever contract any of this out to others and what is their subcontractor's background?
16. 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.)
17. 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?
18. 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 seed/soil contact?
19. 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?
20. Is this going to require continuing maintenance and what is the time frame for doing it?

21. How long before my animals can go back on this pasture? Grass must be well established and rooted prior to grazing animals. Absolute minimum of one growing season is recommended but longer is better.
22. What kind liability insurance do they carry and what does it cover?
23. Do they require a deposit and if so, how much? Is it refundable?
24. 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)?