
**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
BOULDER COUNTY**

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C O U N T Y R U R A L
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R E S O U R C E
G U I D E**

Introduction and Considerations



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**

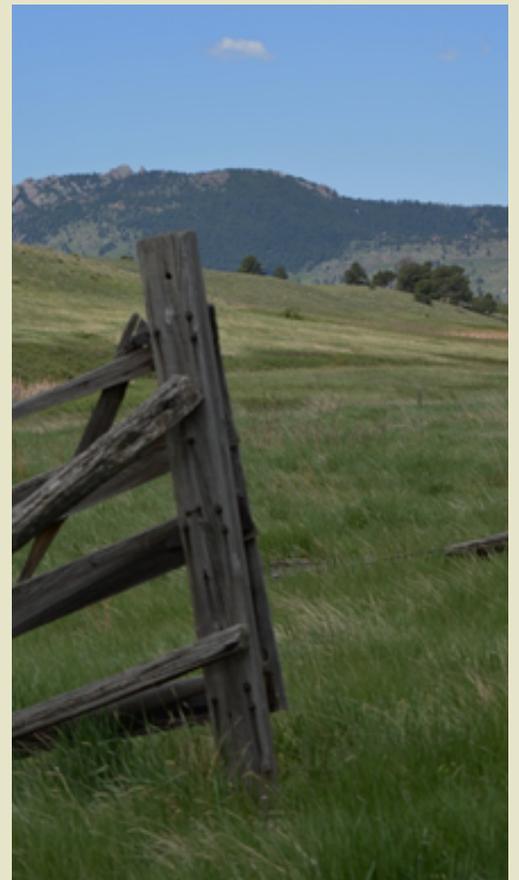
INTRODUCTION

Since the discovery of gold in the Gold Hill area west of Boulder in 1859, people have been coming to Boulder County to seek their fortune. While a few made it rich from gold, many stayed to till or graze the land, for the climate (tuberculosis sanitariums) and now the educational, recreational and employment opportunities. Boulder County was one of the first 13 counties platted in 1861 in what was at that time, the Colorado Territory. Over the last one hundred and sixty plus years, the county has gone from a mining and agricultural economy to a technology and education economy.

While many Boulder County residents live in a municipality, others seek what they see as the simpler, more down to earth lifestyle that a rural acreage offers. While a rural lifestyle does offer certain advantages, there are other factors that can be considered disadvantages. This booklet is not meant to be all encompassing but hopes to present a balanced picture of rural living. We want those who think they want to own a rural property to know what they are getting themselves into prior to purchasing a property and then being overwhelmed and discouraged. This guide provides as many resources as possible so that rural property purchasers and owners can be as informed as possible prior to and after purchase.

New rural residents often do not understand a rural or agrarian lifestyle and can soon be at odds with neighbors over issues that are normal agricultural or rural practices. Understanding these practices prior to purchasing a property can help new residents adjust to their new lifestyle. In the past, rural living traditions consisted of neighbors helping neighbors and working together to benefit all. New rural residents are often surprised by the length of time it takes for services such as road plowing, emergency response and utilities restoration to occur. Municipalities often offer many more amenities than can be offered by a county government.

Getting involved in your rural area groups or associations (i.e. local fire department, homeowner's association) can help you get to know your neighbors and learn more about the rural culture. Rural living can be very satisfying and enjoyable when new residents have reasonable expectations. There are multiple organizations that can help property owners adjust and manage their property. Please see the Local Resources list at the end of this document.



CODE OF THE WEST

In 1934, western novel writer, Zane Grey, wrote “The Code of the West” in which he attempted to capture the unwritten values that the rugged individuals who were settling the West practiced. These values such as integrity, honesty, stewardship and self-reliance still exist in the rural west today. Here are a few of the values.

- Never pass anyone on the trail without saying “Howdy”.
- Do not practice ingratitude.
- A cowboy always helps someone in need, even a stranger or an enemy.
- Be there for a friend when he needs you.
- Consideration for others is central to the code.
- Respect the land and the environment by not smoking in hazardous fire areas, disfiguring rocks, trees or other natural areas.
- Honesty is absolute – your word is your bond; a handshake is more binding than a contract.
- Live by the Golden Rule.



PLANNING AND WHAT DO I WANT FROM MY PROPERTY?

Many people who visit the Boulder County Colorado State University Extension (CSU Extension) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices have purchased an acreage or are looking to purchase an acreage with ideas and plans about what they want to do on the property. Frequently these ideas and plans are not realistic goals for the property due to available resources (i.e. irrigation water, soil, vegetation, etc.). This disconnect can stem from relocating from another state and not fully understanding our soils, climate and vegetation or perhaps they lack knowledge about rural life or requirements for livestock.

County Land Use Codes often allow landowners to do things on their property (i.e. have more livestock on the property than the land and vegetation can support) that are not realistic for a specific property long term. Landowners must be willing and able to supplement what the land cannot provide or alter their plans. For example, having more livestock than the land can support requires the landowner to supply the additional forage required for their livestock or to sell some of or all the livestock. The Land Use Code may prevent you from doing things that you want to do (i.e. holding public events in your barn). Investigating what the codes will or won't allow you to do may alter your plans.

The first step should be to sit down with the entire family and write down everyone's thoughts and ideas, then distill those ideas down to the main desires both short and long term. If you have not yet purchased the property, this list can be used during a property search with your real estate agent. If you have already purchased a property, you can discuss your list with the local CSU Extension or NRCS office to figure out your lands' actual potential. Both agencies are great resources for you. They can help you understand how the limitations created by the amount of precipitation, the property's elevation and soils guide the goals for your property. If you have not purchased your property, take time to review and utilize the "Purchasing Rural Property in Colorado" booklet <https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/natres/xcm235.pdf>. Having a long-term plan helps you utilize your time and resources wisely so that you enjoy and get the most out of your property.

One of the first basic questions to ask is: Are you looking for a property just to get away from the city and have no plans to have livestock or to raise a crop or do you want to try to provide at least some portion of the family's food needs from the property? Even if you don't want to raise anything, you still need to maintain the vegetation. You cannot ignore the property and vegetation and expect it to stay the same. Prairies, forest lands and rangelands are not static systems. They are constantly changing due to natural disturbances such as grazing, fire and climate conditions. Providing some disturbance (mowing periodically to mimic grazing) may be needed to keep your plants healthy.

PLANNING AND WHAT DO I WANT FROM MY PROPERTY?

Once a property is identified for possible purchase, the prospective landowner should perform their due diligence to identify any potential issues that will cause problems and cost additional money down the road. Refer to the “Purchasing Rural Property in Colorado” booklet for a checklist to use. Colorado State University Extension and NRCS can help you evaluate a property prior to or after purchase.

Be sure to be realistic in your estimate of time, resources and money that it takes to manage your property and livestock. Simple tasks that you think will only take 15 minutes quite often turn into a half day project that costs twice as much. If you have children, they do grow up and often find activities other than taking care of the weeds and livestock. Be prepared to take over more duties as the children grow. As you get older, you may not want to or be able to do as much yourself and will need to make sure that you have funds to contract out the property management or sell livestock.



GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

Most of these considerations will be covered in more detail in later sections of this document.

Access (Land Use, Transportation)

Consider and examine the most common access route to your property for width, base material, steepness, overhead obstructions, etc. The fact that you can drive your vehicle to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency services vehicles (i.e. fire engines) can achieve that same level of access under all conditions. If you plan to build on your property, check with your contractor that their construction equipment can access your site. Large construction equipment needs wider roads, curves and turn around areas.

Legal problems can arise when a property is landlocked. The most common access method might be through another landowner's property. Ensure that you have legal access to your property. If you must cross another's property to access your property, then you must have a documented legal access easement. Article 7-700(B)(3)(a) of Boulder County Land Use Code states: "The building lot must have the legal right to cross other private lands or a permit to cross public lands for vehicular access."

If you are planning to build a new residence, you must be aware that the county will not issue a building permit unless the building lot has a lawfully established right of vehicular ingress and egress. An access permit must be obtained whenever any new drive onto a Boulder County maintained road is constructed. Specific construction requirements are listed on the access permit. Contact Boulder County Community Planning and Permitting Department for more information. You may need to have your road designed by a qualified engineer.

Your property may have easements across it for water or utilities for other properties. Easements may be required for you to construct roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. There may be easements that are not on record. Contact the Boulder County Clerk and Recorder to obtain information on historical deeds and easements affecting your property. Make sure that you have all the information on easements on your property, what those easements allow and that all easements are included in legal documents.

Construction in a rural area may cost more and take longer than within a municipality. It takes longer to access the property so deliveries and inspections take longer.

Emergency response times will likely be longer and cannot be guaranteed. Ensure that your address is clearly visible. Metal signs on metal posts with at least 4" tall reflective numbers are preferred (often white letters on green background). If you have a locked gate, how will emergency responders get through the gate? Cutting locks takes time and slows response.

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Be sure that you know who maintains the roads that lead to your property, are they public or private. Also be aware that not all public roads are maintained by Boulder County. Please refer to the official Boulder County road map at

<https://www.bouldercounty.org/transportation/maps/roadmap/> for details about county-maintained roads. Will you incur any expenses in maintaining local roads (i.e. homeowner's association fees)? Post natural disaster, you may need to replace access roads, bridges or culverts. You may have to do your own road maintenance and plowing or be willing to contract with someone. In extreme weather, roads may become impassable for multiple days requiring the use of a four-wheel drive vehicle with chains to travel. Boulder County roads are maintained according to a priority system. See the Boulder County Road Map for details.

School buses travel only on maintained county roads that have been designated as school bus routes by the school district. You may need to drive your children to the nearest county road, so they can catch a school bus.

Mail, parcel and newspaper delivery may not be available in all areas, check with your local postmaster, package delivery service and newspaper for availability. If you have a locked gate on your access road, how will your local delivery service leave your parcels?

Unpaved roads are muddy and may generate dust. Boulder County does not treat all unsurfaced roads with dust palliatives. They only treat those roads with traffic over a certain level. Contact the Public Works Department for additional information.

<https://www.bouldercounty.org/transportation/maps/roadmap/>

Utilities (Water, Septic, Etc.)

Tap fees for access to treated domestic water and running the line to your house may be very expensive, difficult or impossible to obtain. If you don't have access to a domestic water system, you need to find an alternative water source such as a well or cistern. Drilling a well can be expensive depending on the location and the drilling depth. Water quality may require treatment which is an added expense. You are also required to have a permit for the well that defines what the well water can be used for, i.e. domestic only within the house, livestock watering, etc. Well water quality and quantity vary greatly. Periodic well water testing is recommended (once a year at a minimum). Landowners must be careful of activities around wells to prevent contamination (hazardous materials, manure) and damage to the wellhead.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

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Electric, gas or propane service may or may not be available in your area. Bringing the power or gas line to your property may require the crossing of another property (easement required). Make sure that you have legal access to do this prior to building. Do you have special electrical needs such as 2 and 3 phase that are not normally available? You may need to have a propane tank.

Since power outages occur more frequently in rural areas, you may want to consider purchasing a generator to keep basic electrical services operational (i.e. well, freezer/refrigerator) in an outage. Educate yourself and practice connecting and operating the generator and have extra fuel. Limit access to refrigerators/freezers during the outage. Have an alternate method to heat the home (i.e. wood stove or fireplace) and to heat food (i.e. grill, camping stove) and extra fuel.

If a sewer line is not accessible, then you will need a septic system or other approved treatment system. Boulder County Public Health Septic Smart program can assist you with this. The soils and other features such as depth to ground water determine the system required.

Telephone communications may be difficult. Some areas may not have private lines, or you may be limited to one line limiting the ability to have a fax or a business line. Cell and internet service may be limited in various areas, especially the mountains. Check with your local service providers for access.

Having a home compost container and system is a good way to “recycle” kitchen and yard wastes into a rich and useful soil amendment. Please remember that meat, cheese, oily and pet wastes should not be composted. Compost piles can be a wildlife attractant that you do not want (in the foothills and mountains piles may attract bears). Contact the Boulder County Resource Conservation facility for more information on composting.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

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It is illegal to create your own trash dump. Trash removal services in rural areas are generally more expensive and are typically provided by private haulers. There are usually no local government sponsored “curbside” trash pick-ups and recyclables; these are limited to those rural areas where housing density make such services practical. Because of problems associated with long driveways, snow, high winds and animals, many rural residents prefer to “self-haul” their trash and recyclables directly to a landfill or to an intermediate transfer station. For residents in areas frequented by bears, you should use bear proof waste containers. Some rural communities hold spring cleanup projects with free trash dumpsters to encourage residents to spruce up their neighborhoods. Check with your neighbors or homeowner’s association for information about such events.

Many products used in the home garden, garage and hobby shop contain hazardous chemicals and need to be used and stored safely. Once you decide to discard these products, they become household hazardous wastes requiring proper disposal. Contact Boulder County Solid Waste Division for disposal methods for these wastes.

The Property (Land Use)

Not all properties are buildable. Some properties are either too steep, located in a flood plain, or too small for building. Most counties require 35 acres to build in a rural area. There may be a few smaller lots (less than 35 acres) located within rural subdivisions that allow construction on less acreage. Also confirm that the lot size does not limit future construction/remodeling. As part of the property purchase, you may have received a plat (a legal description of the property). It may or may not be accurate. To know exactly where your property lines are, it is best to have the property surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor. Fences are not an accurate method for determining your property line. *

*Note: Under Colorado state law, a fence that has been in place for 18 or more years may become a legal property boundary.

Most property owners do not own the mineral rights under their property. It is up to you as the landowner to know who owns the mineral rights and what the mineral rights owner has the right to do on your property. The southeast section of the county was mined for coal. Over time these mines may collapse causing surface subsidence. Contact the Colorado Mine Subsidence Program for additional information. The western part of the county in the foothills and mountains has many abandoned hard rock mines. These mines can be hazardous from a personal safety standpoint and potential water pollution. Contact

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

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the Colorado Inactive Mine Program and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for additional information. A Colorado Storm Water Discharge Permit may be required if you have an old mine on the property.

Rural subdivisions often have homeowner's associations that maintain the common subdivision elements such as the roads and open spaces. The association most likely charges annual dues for this maintenance. Not all associations operate effectively. You should be given a copy of the by-laws when you purchase the property. If you want to have a say in how your subdivision operates, get involved. This is a good way to get to know your neighbors. A dysfunctional homeowner's association or poor covenants can cause problems for you and even involve you in expensive litigation.

Many subdivisions planned unit developments, Nonurban Planned Unit Developments (NUPUD) and Transferred Development Rights Planned Unit Developments (TDRPUD) have covenants that limit property use. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants and make sure that you can live with those rules. A lack of covenants can cause problems between neighbors.

As with any neighborhood, properties change ownership. You might want to check the zoning on surrounding properties to see what is allowed. You don't want to move into your dream property and two years down the road find that the next-door property has been sold and will now become a loud business. Areas may be designated in a county or city's comprehensive plan as a growth area and experience urban and suburban development.

Other areas in the county, maybe possible sites for NUPUDs or TDRPUD receiving sites or other more intensive use which may be allowed under the Land Use Code (LUC).

Colorado water law can be very confusing to new rural residents. Water is owned by the citizens of Colorado and you must have a legal right to use any water that crosses or is on your property. Just because you have a pond, ditch or stream crossing your property does not mean that you can use that water. Colorado has a priority system for water rights. Even though you have a water right you may not be able to use it. Until those whose rights are older have received their allotment, you may not use any of your rights.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

Most of these considerations will be covered in more detail in later sections of this document.

Ditch companies have easements across properties so that they can maintain the ditch system possibly with heavy equipment. Do not alter the ditch in any way without having the ditch company's approval first. For example, do not plant trees or shrubs along the ditch (there is a setback that extends 50' from the ditch centerline). If the trees or shrubs are interfering with ditch operations, the ditch company can remove them.

For most properties, water rights are not sufficient to consider the property "irrigated". Most small acreage water rights are only provide some additional water in the spring or early summer.

Water can be a hazard for young children. Ditches and ponds attract young children both yours and neighbors. Check with your insurance company to see if you need additional insurance or what you can do to mitigate the hazard and liability.

Nature (Emergency, Weather, Wildlife)

The property's physical characteristics may provide great beauty and pleasure, but it can be a hazard. If you build in a forested area, the trees around your home provide protection and privacy but they are fuel for a forest fire that may destroy your home. Defensible space is a must on any property forested or grassland. Although it is not a guarantee that your home survives, it is the best defense you can take. Mitigation and defensible space may be required for you to get homeowners insurance. Defensible space is an ongoing every year project that you need to maintain. It is not a one and done project. Homeowner's who fail to maintain the defensible space have been known to lose their insurance coverage.

While we all like a gentle rain or snow falling in winter, weather can take on a whole new meaning living in a rural area. Rural residents must be prepared both for their family and livestock (see Livestock section for more information) to be stranded (not able to leave or return home) for several days and be without electricity or water when severe weather strikes or may have to evacuate due to wildfire or flood.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

Most of these considerations will be covered in more detail in later sections of this document.



The stream running through your property provides habitat for wildlife, but it can flood during spring runoff and excessive precipitation events. A flash flood may occur, especially during the summer months, and turn a dry gully into a river. Heavy spring runoff can cause a very small creek to become a major river. It is wise to take these possibilities into consideration when building. Is your house or building lot located in a designated flood plain? Do you need flood insurance? Will you be limited to what you can do, i.e. remodel, build, etc. due to the building location?

Steep slopes are not good for building and land can slide during periods of higher precipitation, earthquakes or when stabilizing vegetation is removed during a wildfire or other natural disaster. If you build on a north facing slope or in steep valley, you may not get any sunlight during winter months. Snow stays around longer in these shaded areas and heating costs are higher and can limit the possibility of solar energy use.

Our soils determine construction techniques. Expansive soils (bentonite clay) may require you to put in a different foundation type to prevent cracking. If the house is already there, you may be faced with repairs due to a cracking foundation.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

Most of these considerations will be covered in more detail in later sections of this document.

The attributes that attracted you to the property also attracts wildlife to your property. Remember that in most cases they were there first. You need to learn how to manage your pets, livestock, garden, landscaping and trash in such a manner to not be an additional attractant that ends in conflict. Your trash, cat, dog, chickens or other livestock can provide an easy meal for a coyote, mountain lion or bear.

The Rocky Mountain Region has been ranked as a Zone 1 area for radon by the Environmental Protection Agency. A Zone 1 area has the highest radon potential possible. Radon is listed as a Group A carcinogen and is known to cause cancer in human beings. It is recommended that all new dwellings and buildings in Boulder County be built using the EPA recommended Radon-Resistant Construction Techniques. Remodeling or selling a property may require installation of a radon mitigation system. Information on these construction techniques and on mitigating existing buildings can be provided by Boulder County Public Health Environmental Health Program. <https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/family-home-consumer/preventing-radon-problems-in-the-home-9-953/>
<https://cdphe.colorado.gov/radon>
<https://www.bouldercounty.org/environment/healthy-home/radon/>

Agriculture (Agriculture, Weeds)

It is the policy of Boulder County to promote the agricultural conservation and preservation resources. Owning rural land means knowing how to be a good land and resource steward.

Colorado is a “Right to Farm” state. The “Right to Farm” legislation protects farmers and ranchers against frivolous litigation. However, if you have evidence of obvious animal neglect or abuse, or other illegal activity, contact the Sheriff’s Office. Community Planning and Permitting Department handles issues concerning noxious weeds.

Farmers do not work a typical eight to five work day, Monday through Friday. They often work at night, early morning and weekends to plant and harvest crops and take care of livestock. Their operations may create dust when working the land or smoke when burning ditches and they may use chemicals on their crops. Chemical and fertilizer application can be expected as part of normal agricultural operations.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

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Farmers and ranchers have the legal right to use certain public rights-of-way and historic easements as “stock drives” to move their livestock across public and private lands and drive or transport their farm equipment on public roads. Expect to see slow moving equipment on rural roads. For their safety and yours, please be patient!

Livestock operations have odors, flies and noise. Livestock can be dangerous. Make sure that you and your children know how to safely handle your and animals. If you don't have livestock, you may want to learn about neighboring livestock. Most ranchers and livestock owners are glad to talk to you about their operation, its hazards and it's a good way to get to know them.

Colorado is an open range, “Fence Out” state. This means that you must fence any livestock out of your property. While most ranchers fence in their livestock to protect their animals, there are areas where you are the one that must fence livestock off your property. If you do have a lawful fence on your property and the livestock trespass through the fence, you may be able to collect for damages caused. Under Colorado law, agricultural landowners who share a property line have a duty to equally share in fence maintenance or in the fence construction that divides the two properties.

There are laws regarding free-roaming pets (particularly dogs). If you reside near livestock, you need to be aware that pets can be destroyed if they harass livestock.

Those residents who intend to keep livestock on their property should be prepared to handle and store manure properly to prevent water pollution and prevent being a neighborhood nuisance. While some odor can be expected from a livestock operation, steps should be taken to minimize the odor. Pollutants from large and small animal feeding operations have been known to contaminate both surface and ground waters. Owners of these operations need to have resources available enabling them to minimize water quality impacts from their activities. Contact CSU Extension or NRCS Office for additional information on “Best Management Practices” for managing manure.

Livestock owners need to be prepared to deal with sick and dead livestock. Prior to purchasing livestock, identify and develop a relationship with a veterinarian who can provide medical care for your species. When livestock dies, you also need to be prepared to deal with the carcass. The options for carcass disposal are hauling to a landfill or rendering or cremation (very expensive for large livestock), composting or on site burial (following regulations to prevent ground water contamination).

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

Most of these considerations will be covered in more detail in later sections of this document.

Landowners should try to utilize the “best management practices” as they relate to soil and water management such as limiting disturbances in riparian areas, managing exotic pests, preserving wildlife habitat and migration corridors. These practices can potentially reduce sedimentation, soil erosion and increased nutrients in the watershed. Contact the CSU Extension or NRCS Office for additional information.

Farmers, ranchers and ditch companies often burn or clear out ditches to keep them free of debris, weeds and other obstructions. In addition, fires are used for the preparation of soils for crop production and livestock grazing, or for the clearing of fence lines for commercial agricultural operations. These burns create smoke that some may find objectionable.

Agricultural burning (i.e. fields, ditches) is generally exempt from requiring a burn permit. Conversely, it is illegal for county residents to burn trash, leaves, etc. If you are burning for agricultural purposes or have an open burning permit, please contact the local fire department, Boulder County Public Health (for air quality restrictions) and Boulder County Communications Dispatch Office 303-441-4444 before and after the burn. You may want to get a burn permit from the Boulder County Sheriff's Office even though agricultural burns are exempt.

Under the Colorado Noxious Weed Law, landowners are responsible for managing noxious weeds on their property. Land management, or lack thereof, can lead to conflict among adjacent property owners and can sometimes carry legal penalties (if you do not manage Colorado “A” listed noxious weeds, the county can hire a contractor to spray the weeds and then add the cost onto your property taxes). Work together with your neighbors to keep weeds from spreading (See Article 14-400 Boulder Land Use Code). Contact CSU Extension or Boulder County Weed Supervisor for further information on weed management.

Boulder County Land Use Code limits the number of livestock that are kept on a property. This number may exceed the number that the land can support without additional feed sources. Contact the Boulder County Community Planning and Permitting Department for further information. The CSU Extension or NRCS Office can assist you in determining how much forage your property can reasonably produce and how many animals you can sustainably keep on your acreage.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RURAL LIVING

Most of these considerations will be covered in more detail in later sections of this document.

Boulder County receives 13 – 15 inches of precipitation per year. As a result, small acreage land owners can easily over graze their properties. This results in no vegetation in pastures and dust. Actively managing the grazing on your property is critical not just to maintain the vegetation but for soil health. The CSU Extension and NRCS Office can assist you with grazing management information.

Landowners wanting to operate a small-scale farming operation such as hay production, livestock, horse boarding, organic food production (Community Supported Agriculture or family only) or other such operations should know what is allowed per land use code, what operations are feasible on the property, the impact to the land and have business and marketing plans. If food production is the objective, landowners need to know how to produce the food safely and how to reduce possible food borne illnesses.

