



*Open View Solar, grazed three years without mowing.
Route 7, New Haven, Vermont, looking east.
Photo courtesy of Alex DePillis, November 2016.*

Solar Grazing Checklist for Shepherds and Solar Site Managers

Put yourself in the other person’s shoes:

The **shepherd** must show how their way of managing vegetation will be both low-risk and cost-effective for the solar site operator. Equipment won’t be damaged, solar personnel will be able to access the site and work safely, everybody is adequately insured, the service cost-effectively manages vegetation, and the contractor is trustworthy.

The **solar site operator** must be able to accommodate the shepherd’s basic requirements to access the site and protect sheep from predators.

While the solar site operator will probably understand and value a lower carbon footprint, good relations with the local community, and overall marketing value, these are potentially icing on the cake, not the main motivation.

Solar Site Operator Considerations

- For sites not yet complete, upgrade to a sheep -friendly seed mix (see “Resources” section).
- Expect to pay a shepherd what you pay for mowing.
- A well-grazed site will look different from a mown site. See resource list “A Guide to Farming-Friendly Solar” for photos or ask your shepherd for pictures.
- Update your insurance if necessary.
- Consider providing the map of the site from the §248 energy permit process, as found in the section on pre-filed testimony. See “Resources” section for access to these documents.
- Walk the site with the shepherd.
- Arrange for the shepherd to have 24/7 access.
- Discuss perimeter fencing adequacy. If the shepherd anticipates your fence being part of their plan, take the shepherd’s advice as to whether it’s adequate.
- Get a grazing plan from the shepherd that will adequately manage vegetation.
- Agree who will fence off anything that would be in danger of being damaged by a sheep.



Sheep entering site from trailer. Image courtesy of American Solar Grazing Association.

- If you have a contractor who will regularly be on the site, have them meet the shepherd.
- Get a clear cost estimate and a sample contract.
- If the first year works out well, consider entering a longer-term lease. This can save money and allow the farmer to invest in seed and time to make the site a better pasture.

Shepherd Considerations

- Update your insurance if necessary.
- Walk the site with the site manager and determine a fencing plan to keep sheep in and predators out.
- Explain how you will get your vehicle(s) or truck-and-trailer combination in and out of the site.
- Consider offering the solar company a one-page orientation for their personnel about dealing with sheep at the site. See example in “Exhibits” section of the sample contract in the “Resources” section.
- Include signage saying there are sheep inside, to close the gate(s) immediately after entering or exiting, not to feed the sheep, and including your cell phone number. See the example in the “Exhibits” section of the sample contract in the “Resources” section
- Come up with a grazing management plan that will keep vegetation in check. Work with NRCS, your Extension agent, or a private consultant, as necessary.
- Decide how to provide water. If it’s the solar site operator’s water supply, come to terms with them regarding water use. Share your plan about where water and/or feed/minerals will be placed.
- Be clear about whether you’ll have a dog or any animal other than sheep on site and for what purpose. If so, make sure vaccinations are kept up to date and be able provide records upon request.
- If you’re offered a site without woody growth, consider offering a guarantee that there will be no woody

growth taller than one foot at any time.

- Decide what type of contract to offer. Consider using sample contracts from ASGA (solargrazing.org/contract) as a starting point. Consider various fee structures (Typically per acre or per site for a growing season). Be open to starting with only a year.
- Explain your overall plan to the site manager.
 - Beginning and end dates sheep will be on site
 - Number of animals and perhaps aspects of the grazing plan (e.g. paddock arrangements)
- If there’s a significant change in your overall plan, tell the solar site operator as soon as possible.
- If the first year works out well, ask for a longer lease.



Sheep grazing site in late summer. Image courtesy of American Solar Grazing Association.

Considerations for Both Parties

- Have an initial orientation with solar company’s O&M crew and get a basic safety training for the site. Discuss how the site might be divided into paddocks that allow solar technicians to work without hindrance from sheep, perhaps by excluding the site entrance and main access roads.
- No pesticides (herbicide, fungicide, etc.) used on the site without prior permission of the other party.
- Document activity and visits. Take pictures if needed.

- Planned and unplanned visits by either party:
 - For planned visits: both how to reach each other and how much notice to give each other.
 - For unplanned visits: provide guidance to other party as to what precautions to follow. Agree that you will notify the other party as soon as you know an unplanned visit will occur or has occurred.
- Consider the goodwill benefits of buying/selling/bartering lamb, wool, and/or sheep-milk cheese.

Resources & More Information

For Shepherds

- *Solar Grazing 101*: youtube.com/watch?v=63n-lnS-4Fr0, starting at 24 minutes and 10 seconds
- *Grazing in Solar Farms - Teaching Tools for Beginning Farmers*: youtube.com/watch?v=Q1u4X0rYqTs.

For Shepherds and Solar Site Operators

- American Solar Grazing Association: solargrazing.org
 - Sample grazing contracts: solargrazing.org/contract
- Vermont Land Link: vermontlandlink.org
 - Shepherd posts the kind and amount of land they're looking for, preferred towns or counties.
 - Solar site operator posts the land available, including locations and details of each site.

- Seed mixes
 - Ernst Seeds: ernstseed.com, (800) 873-3321
 - L. D. Oliver Seed: ldoliverseed.com, (802) 893-4628
 - Northeast Ag Sales: neagsales.com/seed, (802) 626-3351
- Guides to policy and practices
 - *A Guide to Farming-Friendly Solar* (2017): uvm.edu/extension/sustainableagriculture/guide-farming-friendly-solar
 - *Grazing and Solar Energy in Vermont's Working Landscape* (2020): uvm.edu/extension/sustainableagriculture/news/grazing-and-solar-energy-vermonts-working-landscape
- Solar permitting cases, including site maps for any case filed after mid-2017: epuc.vermont.gov.



Sheep being led into trailer. Image courtesy of American Solar Grazing Association.

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