

I've bought a property - now what?

Fact Sheet series for the
Small Rural Landholder

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Purchasing a property for the first time presents both challenges and opportunities. There are numerous aspects of land and animal management to consider when deciding what enterprise type or mix of agricultural activities to pursue.

New landholders who haven't had previous experience of managing a rural property need support, in order to ensure a smooth transition running their new property.

Sourcing reliable information and mentors is complex given many people may have differing advice and experiences.

This fact sheet provides some useful considerations, resources and references for those starting out.

Initial questions to address

Firstly, it may be helpful to establish answers to the following questions before undertaking any major commitments:

1. What do you want to do with the property?
2. Is it a weekend retreat, or do you have plans to run commercial livestock or crops – if so, what species (and how many head if appropriate)?
3. Do you have any experience running these animals or crops?
4. Do you have good support from people who currently farm these commodities/ using your proposed methods?
5. Do you plan to use conventional farming methods or are you interested in using organic or biodynamic practices (or a combination)? This is critical to answer as there are restrictions to what, when and how you can use certain chemicals (particularly depending on your neighbour's practices), and to become Certified Organic or Biodynamic producers there are strict protocols you must adhere to and requirements you must meet before you can be accredited.
6. Are there any overlays/environmental considerations you need to be aware of that may affect your plans?
7. How can you incorporate good environmental stewardship with your rural pursuits?
8. What do your neighbours farm? This can heavily influence your options/limitations depending on how similar or different your goals and management methods are, so it's worth talking to your neighbours at length.

9. What sort of condition is the property in? Does it have secure, safe boundary fences, established water points and any shedding or useful outbuildings/infrastructure?

10. What is the soil and pasture condition in? Is it regularly fertilised or improved?

11. Is weed control established? Are there any waterways running through the property?

12. What is the water storage capacity (e.g. number of dams, bore points, tanks, mains connections)?



What are my options?

Should you wish to run livestock, it is really important to become educated on their requirements and identify some reliable mentors and experts before you take on any animals.

It's a great idea to speak to your neighbours and ask their experiences – perhaps they might agree to a share herd arrangement to give you an idea of the species or breed requirements before you purchase your own livestock.

This may also work in future should you and your neighbour/s decide to manage your land concurrently and expand your capacity and ability to rotate pastures and share costs etc.



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COMMON GROUND



Understanding your obligations as a rural landholder is important

- Animal welfare
- Groundcover
- Stock management
- Vegetation
- Biosecurity (pests, disease, weeds)
- Waterways
- Farm infrastructure
- Fencing
- Pastures

Are just some examples of areas of management you must attend to on a regular basis.



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For general information contact:

Port Phillip and Westernport CMA
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Animal welfare

If you have minimal livestock experience it is strongly advised you start out with small numbers of animals and those species which are relatively low maintenance with regards to management and veterinary care. For example, beef cattle store steers or self-shedding meat sheep breeds are commonly kept and relatively low maintenance, and so there is an abundance of reliable advice and veterinary expertise available.

Be aware that livestock have different fencing, yarding and husbandry (health) requirements, so these may influence your decision also.

You may consider avoiding high maintenance species or breeds such as alpaca, miniature horses/ponies, deer or rare breeds until you have thoroughly established the species or breed and have the appropriate support network, veterinary expertise and experience keeping less complex animals.

Equines are highly susceptible to metabolic diseases such as laminitis when grazed on or fed supplementary forages high in sugar and starch like those which are commonly fed to cattle and sheep.

Alpaca have specific nutritional needs, in particular, Vitamin D, Copper and Selenium requirements are often not met by diet alone and warrant supplementation (usually through veterinary prescription).



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Summary of considerations

- What are your plans?
- Are there any overlays/restrictions?
- What do your neighbours farm?
- What sort of farming methods are you planning to undertake and what sort of considerations and preparation will you need prior to starting out (e.g. chemical use, Organic Certification etc.)
- What is the current condition of the property?
- Do you need to attend to or improve fencing, infrastructure, water, pasture improvement, waterways, weed control?
- If planning to run livestock, what species or breed will you keep?
- How much support and research have you got in order to keep these animals with best practice welfare?
- How many head can your property comfortably hold year round?
- Are the current fencing, infrastructure, pasture composition, water sources and farming methods you wish to adopt conducive to keeping these animals?

Where to from here?

Organic or Biodynamic Certification

Contact the relevant Organic and Biodynamic certification organisations for more information.

Diet and Nutrition:

For further dietary advice please seek veterinary or professional animal nutritionist advice.

Landcare

Landcare networks and groups can be a great source of information and support for landholders. They often run field days, discussion groups and workshops focusing on sustainable land management and farm planning.

To find out more information about networks and groups in your region visit <http://portphillipwesternport.landcarevic.net.au/>

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