

BEST PRACTICES: Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs) in Solar Grazing

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For first-time LGD owners operating in a solar grazing environment, success depends on proper planning and consistency. Below are key areas to focus on, with references to further resources for in-depth guidance.



BONDING SYSTEM

- ***Bonding to livestock is crucial for LGD effectiveness***—puppies should be raised with sheep from an early age. Canine bonding research suggests that LGD puppies should be bonded with livestock between ~5-14 weeks of age to form a successful bond with the livestock.
- If purchasing a trained LGD, confirm it is bonded to sheep, not humans or other animals.
- Bonding pens should be escape-proof, allowing interaction but preventing excessive human socialization.
- Have a plan for the three sizes of bonding pens. There should be a small pen with minimal livestock, a larger pen of 1-2 acres with more livestock, and then a plan to introduce them to a flock in an open field.
- ***Refer to ASGA's training on LGD bonding for best practices.***



By implementing these best practices, solar grazing operators can ensure their LGDs are well-integrated, effective, and reliable in protecting livestock within a solar site environment.

For comprehensive guidance, consider consulting Texas A&M AgriLife's resources on LGD management and attending relevant training sessions.

Check your state requirements for insurance and animal welfare standards to ensure compliance.



Resources Used

- Texas A&M AgriLife LGD Management Resources (<https://sanangelo.tamu.edu/research/lgd/>)
- ASGA Webinars and Training on LGDs
- Texas A&M AgriLife LGD Feeding Station Factsheet (<https://sanangelo.tamu.edu/files/2022/01/LGD-Feeding-Station-Factsheet-Final.pdf>)
- Neighbor's Guide to Livestock Guardian Dogs (<https://sanangelo.tamu.edu/files/2022/10/A-Neighbors-Guide-to-LGDs.pdf>)

SOCIALIZATION FOR HIGH-TRAFFIC SOLAR SITES

- **Weekly Health Checks & Training:** Conduct weekly health checks, including monitoring body condition, checking for injuries, and evaluating foot health. Integrate leash training and tether training into these sessions to help the LGD become comfortable with controlled handling. Regular socialization through these activities ensures LGDs remain adaptable and calm in high-traffic environments.
- **Gradual Exposure:** Introduce LGDs to herding dogs, workers, vehicles, and machinery gradually to prevent stress or fear-based aggression. Maintain neutral interactions to ensure LGDs remain focused on their protective role.
- **Truck Ride Training:** Introduce LGDs to truck rides early by incorporating leash and tether training. Regular transport exposure will help prevent anxiety and motion sickness, ensuring the dog remains calm and cooperative when traveling between sites. Gradual introduction, positive reinforcement, and short initial trips can help establish a stress-free experience for the LGD.

Some graziers recommend putting up signs that read 'Livestock Guardian Dog at work, please don't pet' to deter human interaction that may interfere with the dog's role.

CONSISTENCY IN TRAINING

- **Routine Establishment:** Establish consistent health check routines to monitor the dog's overall condition and well-being. Puppies are generally more receptive to handling, so incorporate regular checks of their ears, teeth, and paws early on. This helps them become accustomed to human interaction and routine health assessments, ensuring they remain comfortable with handling as they grow. Be careful to avoid playful petting or rubbing outside of the general health type touch. Minimal human interaction with these dogs is vital to the protective mechanism they provide.
- **Essential Training Practices:** In addition to teaching basic commands, it is crucial to introduce leash training, tether training, and vehicle/trailer travel from an early age. This helps the LGD develop confidence, remain calm in various handling situations, and adapt to transport needs without anxiety.
- **For additional details, see ASGA Workshop Recording: Livestock Guardian Dogs - Socialization Methods and Procedures**

UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR

- Be prepared for "teenage" behavior in LGDs around 6-18 months, including chasing, rough play, and testing boundaries.
- Have a correction plan for common issues like chasing, digging under fences, or roaming. Have training aids on hand before adolescence begins.
- Avoid young dogs being unsupervised around young and newborn lambs.
- Avoid overreacting. Adolescence is a phase, and consistent correction helps reinforce boundaries and positive interactions with livestock.

FEEDING SYSTEM

- Consider feeders that reduce waste and protect food from wildlife. Ensure the feeder is sheep proof as well. Dog-proof traps are available to minimize wildlife waste
- Maintain a consistent feeding schedule to reinforce security and routine.
- **See ASGA's webinar on LGD feed systems for details.**