

The Waiting Game

Contingency Planning for Solar Grazing Operations



Solar grazing represents a powerful economic opportunity for farmers to earn a stable income and to access land to expand their flock far beyond what their home farm can support. However, construction setbacks and delays in solar site development can push back the contract start date. In some cases, projects may be postponed indefinitely or cancelled. This creates a difficult “waiting game”, where sheep may already be purchased and ready to work, but access to grazing land is not available.

Contingency planning should be a critical part of every solar grazing operation. Contract delays can lead to unexpected costs and logistical complications that force the grazer to make difficult decisions about flock management. A well-thought-out contingency plan will help graziers successfully navigate these waiting periods while protecting their animals and business.

Understanding Solar Project Timelines

Solar development timelines can last several years and involve multiple phases. Understanding the project timeline is critical for contingency planning. After a site is permitted, the project enters the construction phase and is controlled by engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contractors. This phase involves several steps: engineering, procurement, construction, commissioning, and close-out. Solar graziers often sign contracts for new sites during or near the end of construction. The construction phase also carries the highest risk of delays due to weather, supply chain issues, or technical challenges. Site access is typically controlled by EPC contractors during construction, which can complicate timing for graziers.

Delays can also be caused if the vegetation is not fully established or if site conditions are not sufficient for grazing. Understanding when vegetation will actually be growing is critical. Some EPC contracts will require vegetation to be established during the construction phase and others may not begin vegetation establishment until the end of construction. It is important for graziers to communicate with the solar site owner about how seeding, the vegetation establishment process, and vegetation conditions are proceeding and will affect the grazing start date.

PHASE 1: Development | 3 to 7 years

The solar developer controls the project but may not be the final owner.

PHASE 2: Construction and Commissioning | 12 to 24 months

The EPC Contractor controls the site and site access.

PHASE 3: Operations | 30+ years

The long-term owner or independent power producer (IPP) controls the site.

Regular communication with project managers helps graziers stay informed about timeline changes. In some cases, negotiating partial or block-by-block access to completed sections of a site can allow for earlier grazing.

Planning for Contract Delays

A comprehensive contingency plan should identify alternative grazing locations in advance. This may involve working with extension services, tapping into local agricultural networks, or building relationships with nearby landowners who have available pasture, cover crops, or crop residues. In some cases, alternative vegetation management opportunities can serve as temporary grazing solutions.

If grazing is not immediately available, graziers may consider developing feedlot or confinement capabilities to house and feed

sheep on a temporary basis. Having clear protocols for transitioning sheep between pasture and supplemental feeding helps maintain rumen health and reduces the risk of digestive issues from abrupt changes.

Strong communication is another key component. Establishing consistent channels with solar developers and proactively requesting updates helps graziers respond to potential delays. Maintaining enough operating capital to cover 90-120 days of expenses provides a necessary buffer during uncertain periods.



Who Can Support Contingency Planning

Successful contingency planning requires engagement with a network of trusted partners. Extension specialists can help identify available grazing land, provide rental rate guidance, and assist with animal unit calculations. Solar developers and EPC contractors are key sources of information on project timelines and site access, making early and frequent communication essential.

Local landowners can provide temporary grazing opportunities, and veterinarians offer guidance on maintaining animal health during transitions between grazing and supplement feeding. Financial institutions can play a role by helping establish operating reserves or contingency funding.

Resources for Developing a Contingency Plan

A strong contingency plan is easier to build with the right support network. Graziers can draw on a range of technical, local, and industry resources to identify options and make informed decisions.

- County extension services;
- Solar developers;
- Agricultural universities;
- Local agricultural networks;
- Local feed suppliers; and
- Experienced solar graziers.

Business Benefits of Contingency Planning

Proper contingency planning offers important long-term benefits. It allows graziers to preserve trained flocks rather than resorting to distressed sales during delays, while also demonstrating professionalism and reliability to solar partners.

Well-prepared operations are more resilient, with the flexibility to adapt to changing timelines and industry conditions. This reduces financial risks, strengthens a grazer's competitive position, and supports long-term business sustainability, even during periods of uncertainty.

This fact sheet is based on a 2024 ASGA Webinar "Where do I put my flock now? Contingency planning for Solar Grazing".
[Members can watch a replay on the Network »](#)

