



Solar Grazing Story: Kaden Kurtz, Central Texas Solar Grazing

Kaden Kurtz did not work with a single sheep until he was in high school. Now, at just 20-years-old, he runs roughly 2,000 ewes across 2,200 acres of solar installations in central Texas – a scale that has surpassed everything his family's century-old farm put into production. A fifth-generation farmer who grew up running Angus cattle and raising corn and wheat, Kaden found his way into solar grazing through a summer job and a mentor willing to share everything he knew. Without that combination, Kaden says, he would have spent his adult life working someone else's hours.

The Family Farm Reality

The Kurtz family has worked the same stretch of central Texas for more than a hundred years. Kaden's grandfather and father ran a cow-calf operation alongside corn, wheat, and milo. *"Before I could walk, I was down there,"* Kaden recalls. *"It's all I really know, and it's what I love to do."*

That early immersion gave him skills most teenagers never develop. Before he turned sixteen, he was operating hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of equipment, learning responsibility through repetition and consequence. He went through FFA in high school, but gravitated toward agricultural mechanics and welding rather than livestock shows. The work ethic held, but the economics proved challenging.

"Selling corn for three dollars and something a bushel wasn't cutting it," Kaden explains. The family's 800 acres were where he wanted to be, but the math was familiar to farm kids across rural America, and Kaden knew exactly where it pointed.

"Our family farm was probably not going to be big enough for me to do full-time," he reflects. *"I probably would have had to go get a job somewhere else."*

Learning the Industry

The summer before his senior year of high school, Kaden was looking for work. He found a listing for a solar farm nearby and got in touch with Chad Raines, a solar grazier operating about twenty minutes from where Kaden lived. There were no sheep involved at first.

"I didn't even know the sheep thing was really big out there yet," Kaden recalls. "I just started mowing, running the tractor and shredder, and kind of learned."



Chad taught Kaden what sheep to look for and what breeds to avoid, how to approach solar companies, how to price a bid, and how solar farms needed to be mowed. He also gave Kaden his first clear direction in the industry.

"He's been a great mentor for me," Kaden says. "That's probably who's taught me the most. His first piece of advice was to join ASGA."

Kaden took that seriously. He was still in high school during all of this, on a work-study schedule that released him at noon, but he spent his free time learning everything he could about sheep and solar grazing. He watched hours of ASGA webinars, attended the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers convention, visited sheep sales to better understand the market, and joined Facebook groups before purchasing his first flock.

He also completed ASGA's Certified Solar Grazing Training in Kentucky, sitting alongside both experienced sheep farmers and newer solar graziers.

"I went to everything I could find about sheep," Kaden says. "I went and just talked to people. At my age, not too many people knocked me for not having all the knowledge that somebody fifty or sixty years old would have. They're usually willing to help."

Starting a Business Before Graduation

When a solar site opened up near his family's own farmland, Chad helped Kaden put together a bid and subcontract the work. In March 2025, Central Texas Solar Grazing ran its first sheep when Kaden was only eighteen.

The site, roughly 200 megawatts, had been fully operational for years, with the solar company handling vegetation control through mowing. Kaden and Chad presented the sheep alternative, and the company agreed to give it a try.

The operation grew faster than Kaden had imagined. His flock now stands at around 2,000 Dorper ewes on 2,200 acres across multiple sites. He runs a hybrid model, where sheep do the primary vegetation work, and mowing is brought in when rainfall pushes the grass ahead of the flock.

Getting that third site – his first without Chad holding any part of the process – came when Kaden was driving down the road and spotted solar panels near his home.

"There was still some construction going on, so there were a lot of people there," he recalls. "I go knock on the door and introduce myself, and the person I needed wasn't there – but they gave me his number."

He texted the site contact without knowing if he'd hear back. Within twenty minutes, his phone rang. After a few conversations, the company asked Kaden to prepare a formal sales presentation. He submitted it, toured the site, laid out what a grazing program would look like, and two weeks later, received word that they wanted to move forward.





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"After that first site, proving, 'Hey, we've done this before, we know what we're doing' – people can see with their own eyes that it works," he says.

He now has two full-time employees helping manage the mowing and livestock operations.

What Solar Grazing Does for Young Farmers

Kaden describes land access as a key incentive for solar grazing. *"There's no way I could have bought that,"* Kaden emphasizes about the 2,200 acres he grazes. *"And at \$10,000 an acre, I don't think many people my age could."*

The financial structure of solar grazing provides something else a young farmer rarely gets: predictability. *"You're signing a contract, and as long as you do your end of it, there's guaranteed money coming in,"* Kaden explains. *"The solar company money covers your costs. So when you take that lamb crop to the sale barn, that's one hundred percent profit."*

That guaranteed income stream also means he could borrow to build his flock with some confidence in repayment. The math of starting a livestock operation without solar backing, he says, would have been much harder to make work.

Beyond finances, the work has reshaped how Kaden thinks about himself professionally. Running a farm is one thing; running a service business on someone else's infrastructure is another. Solar grazing demanded both.

"I had to get away from just the farm and ranch mindset and move into more of a service mindset," he explains, *"because it's a service that we're providing. We have to communicate carefully and act more professionally than you would on your regular home operation."*

Advice for New and Young Farmers

Kaden's advice comes from his own path: find a solar grazer and work for them before you spend anything.

"Make sure you like it first before you get tied up in it financially," he says. *"If you're young like me, go work for them. If you already have a job and can't do that, see what other opportunities are there. Solar graziers in my area are always posting for part-time help in the summer."*

On the business development side, he is direct about resilience. He pitched multiple solar companies before he landed his own contract, and he heard "no" more often than "yes."

"Don't get discouraged," he says. *"Just go door-to-door and start asking. That's the best way I've found."*



When it comes to pricing bids, he stresses going to the site first. The physical conditions – water access, terrain, how the arrays are divided, whether wires run above or below ground – determine what the work will actually cost.

"Don't bid a site blind," he advises. "Walk it, add up everything you think it'll cost to run, and figure out how much you want to make. At least cover your costs."

He also cautions against letting early success tip into overreach.

"Don't get in over your head," he reflects. "If you think it's too big for you, don't do it. And don't get big-headed about having started a company at such a young age. Stay open and keep learning from people who know more than you do."

The support system behind him mattered too. His family stepped in when the operation was getting started, and his grandfather and father covered work he couldn't reach during school hours. He credits them as much as Chad for making it possible.

Looking Ahead

By any measure, Kaden has moved faster than he expected. In less than two years, he built a flock from scratch to 2,000 ewes on 2,200 acres. He's navigating additional contracts, plans to expand further next spring, and thinks carefully about not outpacing what he can actually manage.

The community impact of the work sometimes surprises him. The solar farm he operates sits near his family's own land, ground that was once farmed and then converted for energy production. Seeing sheep out there has changed how neighbors respond to the installation.

"People I know can just stop me on the road and talk to me about what I'm doing," he says. "They like seeing something they can relate to out there, not just panels. It gets the land back into agriculture."

His longer ambition is to pass the same kind of start forward. Chad Raines offered Kaden a full-time job straight out of high school before Kaden decided to build his own operation instead. Kaden wants to be that door for someone else eventually – someone young, serious, and willing to learn.

"Chad helped me, so once I get established, if somebody wanted to come to me, I would be open and willing," he says. "I'll tell you everything I know if you're serious and honest and really want to get into it."

Solar grazing gave Kaden Kurtz something the family farm alone could not: a full-time career in agriculture, on more land than five generations of his family ever farmed, built entirely on a foundation he assembled himself.

"Solar grazing has provided me a career in agriculture that I probably wouldn't have had," he reflects. "It's given me a full-time job working for myself – that I wouldn't have had otherwise."

