

Texas Rural Land Purchasing Checklist

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Built on Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's [Owning Your Piece of Texas](#) handbook, this fact sheet provides research-based guidance to help first-time and transitioning rural real estate buyers better understand key considerations when purchasing rural land in Texas. It is intended for educational purposes and reflects general principles of Texas landownership.

Clarifying Goals and Budget

Before beginning a land search, buyers should clearly define their primary goals for the property, such as livestock production, wildlife management, recreation, or long-term investment. Establishing a realistic budget early in the process is critical and should include not only the purchase price, but also surveys, title work, fencing, water infrastructure, access improvements, property taxes, insurance, and other costs. Prospective buyers should clearly define their goals for the property early in the process as this will impact decisions including location, budget, financing options, and even property tax valuation.

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Evaluating Location and Land Characteristics

Prospective buyers should carefully consider whether the region of Texas in which the land is located can reasonably support their intended land use. Important factors for buyers to consider include long-term climate and rainfall patterns, soil type and potential for productivity, existing vegetation, rangeland condition, and topography. Additionally, access to public roads, emergency services, and utilities should also be considered, as these factors can influence initial investment expense, usability, and long-term value.

Understanding Property Rights

One of the most important steps in purchasing rural land is understanding which property rights convey with the sale and, conversely, which do not. These may include surface rights, groundwater rights, surface water considerations, and mineral rights. Some rights, including mineral rights, groundwater rights, and even wind rights, may have been severed or reserved and no longer convey with the property. Buyers should not assume that all rights automatically transfer with the property. Easements for roads, utilities, or pipelines can also affect land use. Existing leases on the property, such as grazing, farming, wind or solar leases, may impact the rights of a subsequent purchaser. Taking time to investigate the status of each of these property rights is an important part of the negotiating process.

Title Review and Due Diligence

Careful title review is essential prior to purchase. Buyers should examine ownership history, deed restrictions, easements, liens, leases and property tax status. Title insurance can help reduce ownership risk. A current survey is strongly recommended to confirm boundaries, acreage, legal access, and the presence of any encroachments or rights-of-way. The more buyers know about the property, the better.

Zoning, Regulations, and Local Rules

Although many rural properties in Texas are not zoned, buyers should confirm whether there are any applicable county or municipal zoning ordinances. Required permits for water wells, septic systems, or driveway access should be identified early. Local ordinances and county stock laws, including whether the county operates under open range or closed range rules, can significantly affect landowner responsibilities and potential liability.

Water and Infrastructure Considerations

Reliable water access is a key concern for most rural properties. Buyers should evaluate existing wells, water availability, and applicable groundwater conservation district regulations that may exist. Infrastructure such as fencing, roads, gates, utilities, and access points should be assessed carefully, and the potential cost of repairs or new construction should be considered before purchase. A critical step during the property evaluation process is to engage experts in the area who can properly evaluate and appraise existing infrastructure.



Agricultural Tax Valuation

Many rural properties qualify for agricultural, open-space, or wildlife management special-use tax valuation, which can significantly reduce property taxes. Buyers should verify the property's use history, any applicable acreage requirements, and the required intensity of use standards, as well as the potential for rollback taxes if land use changes. Early communication with the county appraisal district is strongly encouraged and highly recommended.

Landowner Liability and Risk Management

Texas law provides certain liability protections for landowners, including the Recreational Use Statute, Agritourism Act and the Farm Animal Liability Act, but these protections are not absolute. Buyers should understand their potential liability exposure, particularly if allowing public access for recreation, hunting or other events. Adequate liability and property insurance are important risk management tools for property owners to consider. Likewise, landowners may want to consider written liability release forms for guests. Landowners may also want to consider setting up a business entity such as an LLC to limit potential liability exposure. The decision about whether to use a business entity or which type might be best should be discussed with an attorney and an accountant.

Red Flags for First-time Buyers

First-time buyers should proceed with caution if they encounter unclear or disputed legal access, assumptions about mineral or water rights without documentation, outdated or missing surveys, undisclosed easements, inconsistent agricultural tax valuation history, limited water information, or visibly deferred infrastructure maintenance. Pressure to waive inspections, surveys, or title review should also prompt careful reconsideration. These issues do not necessarily prevent a purchase, but they warrant additional investigation and professional guidance.

Making an Offer and Closing

Rural land purchases should be completed using a Texas Real Estate Commission–approved contract or an attorney-drafted agreement tailored to the property. Buyers should carefully review all documentation and ensure that inspection periods, disclosures, contingencies, and deadlines are clearly addressed. Financing for rural land often differs from residential mortgages, and all closing documents should be reviewed carefully to confirm that negotiated terms and property rights are accurately reflected.



Succession Planning and Stewardship

After purchase, landowners are encouraged to develop a management plan aligned with their goals and to engage with their local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office for education and technical assistance.

Long-term stewardship planning, including succession and estate planning, can help ensure the land is managed and transferred according to the owner's wishes.

Professional Advice

This fact sheet is intended for educational purposes only and does not substitute for legal, financial, or tax advice. Buyers are encouraged to consult qualified professionals when making rural land purchase decisions. Working with an attorney licensed in Texas to review and draft land-related documents is highly recommended.



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