

LICENSE to LEASE

The land your cattle graze may offer another source of income — leasing it to hunters.

There are some important considerations, though, before taking this step toward added revenue.

BY JINA HIPPE

Finding a place to hunt can be a challenge for sportsmen if they don't have close ties to the land. One option that many hunters are taking is land leasing, which provides benefits to both the hunter and the landowner. Lease hunting allows landowners to sell access to their property for sportsmen to hunt wild game.

Charlie Lee, Kansas State Extension wildlife specialist, says lease hunting is a growing market.

"There is a lot of interest from the public, hunters and landowners," Lee says. "Most of the hunters don't have anywhere to hunt except on private land. People are willing to pay if they don't have to do the legwork of finding a place to hunt for free."

Lee says there are several things that landowners must consider when deciding whether they would like to lease their land for hunting purposes.

First, landowners must assess what they have. They must decide if the land and the game they own is worthwhile and determine if there is a market available. Lee says it is important not to overlook local customs.

"You have to remember when you start a new business that you are going to change some local customs," Lee says. "If you used to allow your friends and family to hunt for free, you might be looked at as the bad guy."

Another important point to remember is that lease hunting is a people business, Lee says.

"You are going to have to continually deal with the public — you're not going to be hunting with just your friends and neighbors," Lee says. "With new people come new personalities, which might lead to personality conflicts."

A landowner also must determine what sportsmen will need. Lee says sportsmen look for less competition



from other hunters, do not want to feel intimidated and want the experience to be convenient.

"Hunters also want the opportunity to see wildlife," Lee says. "They don't necessarily want to harvest the trophy animals, but they at least want to think they have the opportunity."

One of the most important parts of developing a lease-hunting program is developing a detailed, written contract. Some of the key things that must be included in the lease contract are a description of the land, conditions of the lease, remedies for breach of the lease's responsibilities, and the lessor's responsibilities.

The next step in developing a lease-hunting program is determining if the landowner can afford the liability insurance. These requirements vary from state to state.

"Just because you are getting money from having people utilize your property, you are not more liable than if you were just allowing people to hunt on your property for free," Lee says.

Once a lease-hunting program is established, Lee says landowners should remember to start small.

"Don't jump into one of the full-scale operations in your first year," Lee says. "There are many techniques that need to be mastered in each area of lease hunting, and they shouldn't all be tackled in the first year."

When making the final decision about whether to develop a lease-hunting program on the land, remember to consider the opinions of hunters.

"Don't use your values of what it takes to make a successful recreational experience," Lee says. "Mainly, hunters want the opportunity to see game."

