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What you will learn

1. Assess the suitability of a parcel of land for your farm or ranch operation
 - 1.a. Summarize key components of a land assessment
 - 1.b. Identify tools, resources and contacts for conducting a parcel evaluation
 - 1.c. Assess land use policies and community factors specific to the selected site
 - 1.d. Describe the relationship between property features and conservation, business and personal goals



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What is a Land Assessment?

A land assessment is a way to evaluate a property in the context of its neighbors and community

- It inventories natural resources, physical characteristics and existing infrastructure.
- It documents historic and current land use.
- It evaluates a specific site and setting including owner, property and community considerations.
- It analyzes carrying costs.



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Why Conduct a Land Assessment?

- To identify the pros and cons of a specific site for ag production
- To make sure it is compatible with the kind of farming or ranching you want to do
- To see if you can afford it and overcome any limitations
- To compare properties to find the one that's best for you: does it meet your personal, financial and business goals?



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How to Assess a Specific Site

- Collect information like maps and photos
- Visit the site and community setting - talk to people!
- Identify experts to consult with on specific issues/concerns
- Document what you find: use a checklist
- Perform due diligence



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Key Features to Assess

- Location and configuration
- Natural resources
- Infrastructure and improvements, including housing
- Land use and management
- Property rights and limitations
- Carrying costs, including taxes
- Community support for agriculture



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Location and Configuration

- Location, location, location
 - Where is the property located?
 - What are local weather patterns and growing seasons?
 - How is road and highway access?
 - Are services readily available?
 - Is housing affordable?
 - Are neighbors friendly toward agriculture?
- Configuration
 - Size, shape and orientation of fields and parcel
 - Neighboring land use and cover



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Natural Resources

- Soil suitability
- Water sources: quality and quantity
- Topography
- Other natural resources: forests, wetlands, habitat
- Mineral and other subsurface resources


*Find out about the health and conditions
of these resources*



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Infrastructure and Improvements


- Look at the location, suitability and condition of:
 - Housing
 - Buildings, barns, sheds and hoop houses
 - Farm roads/driveways
 - Fencing
 - Conservation practices
 - Water systems: e.g., irrigation, wells, filtering, etc.
 - Septic systems and other utilities
 - Other facilities which may affect your farm or ranch



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Land Use and Management

- What is the current land cover and use?
- What has the site been used for in the past?
- Is it in active management now?
 - Are there areas needing restoration?
- Is the land being managed in accordance with a conservation plan?


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Property Rights and Potential Limitations


- Are any property rights owned or leased by others?
 - E.g., water, timber, energy, mineral rights, etc.
- Are there any limitations on the use of the land?
 - Conservation easements or other deed restrictions, utility easements or right of ways
 - Public access
 - Compliance with federal/state laws
 - Local laws, including zoning and health codes


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Carrying Costs

- Property taxes
- Water and other utilities
- Conservation practices
- Needed improvements/restoration
- Special assessments


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Community Support for Agriculture

- Does the community plan for agriculture?
 - Does its comp plan specifically include agriculture?
- Does it have policies to protect farmland?
- Does it support the economic vitality of local farms and ranches?
- Does it provide support for ag markets and infrastructure?



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Analyzing Results from Reading the Land

- Does the property meet your needs and goals?
- Do you need another site visit or professional help to decide?
- Does the price reflect the value of the property for your operation?
- If this site doesn't completely meet your needs, visit other properties and compare the pros and cons.



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Add Screen Shots of Websites You Plan to Use for the Practice Exercise

- For example:
- [Google Earth](#)
 - [Web Soil Survey](#)
 - Local government website



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