Choosing the land: site selection and zoning guide

From the 508 Ministry agriculture ministries kit, 508ministry.com/impact/agriculture/

1. **Flat or gently sloped.** Level to gently sloping ground is the easiest to farm, build on and keep from washing away. Steep ground erodes, makes fencing and driving harder, and sends runoff into the beds. Visit the day after a rain: there should be no standing water.
2. **Zoned for farming.** Look for land zoned agricultural (often coded A-1, AG or AR) or rural residential that lists gardens and livestock as allowed uses. Codes differ by county. Find the parcel on the county zoning map (planning or GIS office), then read the ordinance for animals allowed per acre, setbacks, barn and fence rules, and whether you may sell produce at a farm stand. Ask the planning office to confirm in writing.
3. **Ag-use or farm tax exemption.** Many states lower the property tax assessment for land in agricultural use. Minimum acreage, income and use rules are set by the state and county. Ask the county assessor what applies to the parcel and what happens if the land stops being farmed.
4. **Water.** Is there a well, and has its flow and water quality been tested recently? Where your state requires water rights (common in the West), confirm they transfer with the land. Note the irrigation source: well, ditch, pond or town water. Rain tanks help, but one dry summer shows whether they are enough.
5. **Soil test.** Check the soil type and drainage on the county soil map, then send a sample to a soil lab through your county extension office before you buy. Ask about past use: old dumps, treated-lumber areas and former orchards can leave contamination. USDA Web Soil Survey.
6. **Road access.** Confirm the deed gives legal access, not just a path across a neighbor's land. A livestock trailer, a delivery truck and an ambulance should all be able to reach the gate. Find out who grades or plows the road.
7. **Flood zone.** Look the parcel up on the FEMA Flood Map Service Center. Avoid a mapped floodway. Land in a flood zone can bring flood-insurance rules and lost crops. Walk the land after heavy rain to see where water pools or runs. FEMA Flood Map Service Center.
8. **Hardiness zone.** Enter the ZIP code of the parcel in the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. The zone tells you which fruit trees, berries and perennials survive winter there. Also write down the average first and last frost dates. USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map.
9. **Distance to market and help.** How far is it to a feed store, a large-animal vet, a farmers market, a church and neighbors who can help? A plan that sells produce works best within a short drive of customers. Find your county USDA service center.

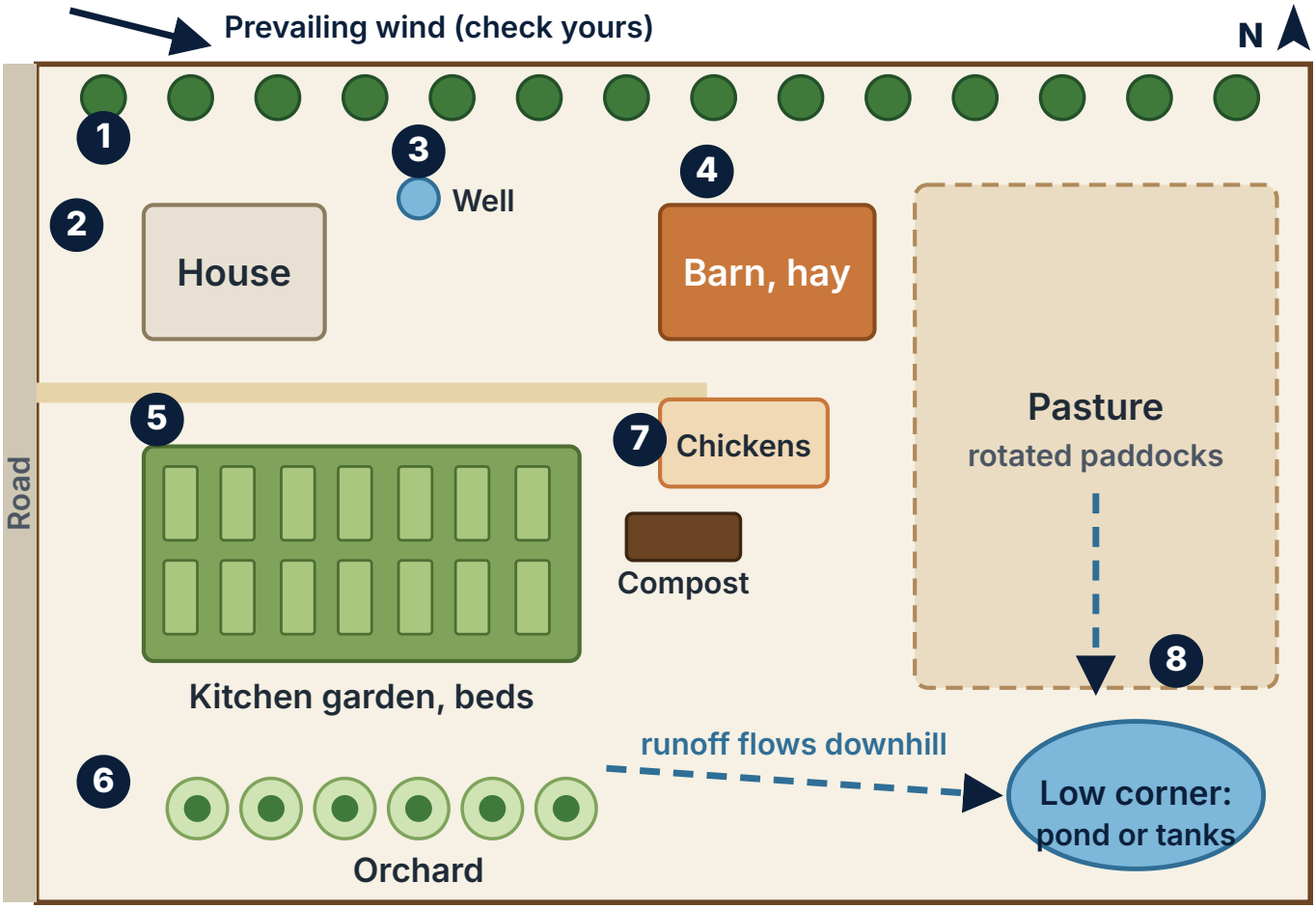
Zoning and tax rules are set by your county and state. Ask the offices named above and get answers in writing.

Land-search checklist

Land-search checklist (print it and take it to every parcel)

	Check	Write it down
☐	Ground is flat or gently sloped; no standing water after rain	Slope: _____
☐	Zoning allows gardens and the animals I plan to keep	Zone code: _____ Animals per acre: _____
☐	County zoning office confirmed in writing	Name and date: _____
☐	Ag-use or farm tax exemption: assessor says	Rules: _____
☐	Water: well flow and water-quality test, or water rights	Test date: _____
☐	Soil test sent through county extension	pH: _____ Lab result date: _____
☐	Legal road access in the deed; trailer and truck can reach the gate	Road owner: _____
☐	Flood zone checked on the FEMA map	Zone: _____
☐	Plant hardiness zone checked for this ZIP code	Zone: _____ Frost dates: _____
☐	Sun: open to the south; room for a windbreak on the north and west	Notes: _____
☐	Distance to feed store, vet, market, church	Miles: _____
☐	Who will hold title (see owning the land through the ministry)	Decision: _____

Preferred location plan



South: the sun side. Not to scale; a flat or gently sloped parcel.

1. **Windbreak.** A row of trees on the north and the windward side cuts wind on the house, animals and garden. Prevailing wind direction varies by place, so check yours.
2. **House near the road.** Short driveway, and the house sits uphill of the barn, compost and animals.
3. **Well uphill.** Keep the well uphill and well away from the barn, compost and runoff.
4. **Barn and hay downwind.** Animal smells blow away from the house. The barn sits beside the road side of the pasture so feed deliveries are easy.
5. **Kitchen garden south of the house.** Full sun, a few steps from the kitchen door, and nothing tall to the south of it.
6. **Orchard on the south edge.** Trees to the south of the beds never shade them.
7. **Chickens and compost between barn and garden.** Manure goes a short way to the compost, then to the beds.
8. **Pasture and a low corner for water.** A gentle slope carries runoff to a pond or tanks in the low corner, away from the house and well.

Owning the land through the ministry

The land you farm is a long-term asset, and who holds the title matters. 508 Ministry can help you set up two kinds of trust for it.

A land trust that holds the property

The trust holds title to the farm land and is placed under the ministry's 508(c)(1)(A) trust, so the land is held for the ministry's purpose and not in one person's name.

A real-estate holding trust for income property

For property that earns rent, such as a farmhouse rental or acreage leased to a grower, a real-estate holding trust keeps the property and its records in one place under trust.

A real-estate holding trust is not a REIT. A REIT is a specific kind of tax entity with its own IRS requirements, and we do not call these trusts REITs.

> **This is general information, not legal or tax advice. Talk to your own tax professional and an attorney in your state before you buy land or move property into a trust. Rules differ by state and by your situation.**

Book a call: book.startmybusiness.us/coreypearson/508-holiday-offer-fit-call-with-corey-pearson **Start the questionnaire:** 508-trust-services.vercel.app/questionnaire

Typical retail prices from the listed product pages on the date checked; local prices vary. Prices checked 2026-11-13. 508 Ministry, c/o Corey Pearson, 1155 Twain Ave #108148, Las Vegas, NV 89169.