

Finally, You Can Rent a Farm Animal

It costs as little as a dollar per day to rent a sheep. If you want to.

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Illustration: Cari Vander Yacht

Sheep, chickens, and even falcons have joined the sharing economy.

Rocky Mountain Woolly Weeders <http://www.woollyweeders.com/index.html>

Animal: Sheep

Price: From \$1 per sheep per day

Location: Sonoma, Calif.

A lot of mowing, pruning, and fertilizing happens in wine country, where the land can be rocky and uneven—perfect terrain for sheep. They trim the grass under and between rows of vines to golf course lengths in 24 to 48 hours, says owner Don Watson. Fred Cline, proprietor of Cline Family Cellars in Sonoma, recently rented about 2,000 sheep for landscaping. In the summer, when grapes are small and too bitter to eat, the animals eat leaves off the vine, allowing more air to reach the fruit and prevent mold. Cline says sheep are much more economical than humans and “don’t complain.”

Rent-a-Chicken <<http://www.rent-a-chicken.net/>>**Animal:** Chickens**Price:** From \$300 for two chickens for six months**Locations:** Traverse City, Mich., with availability in 18 states

Rent-a-Chicken representatives deliver two hens (each of which lays an egg almost every day), a coop, and food in the spring and then retrieve it all in the winter. “We give a tutorial on everything you need to know on how to care for the chickens,” says founder Leslie Sutor. For the past three years, Evelyn Elsing has rented chickens at her summer home in Traverse City. The farm-fresh eggs are nice, she says, but what she really likes is that “they sing, and they carry on, and they have their little personalities. It’s fun to get to know them.”

Falcon Force <<http://www.falconforce.com/>>**Animal:** Falcons**Price:** From \$65 per hour**Location:** Los Angeles

Falcon Force, owned by master falconer Vahe’ Alaverdian, supplies farms and orchards with trained falcons—most jobs require four—in harvest season to scare off starlings and other birds that are drawn to ripening fruit. “We’re like security guards,” says Alaverdian, who owns 39 raptors and works in California, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. (The falcons are supervised and kept at a weight intended to prevent them from eating the pests.) Falcon Force spends about 30 days each spring at Roy Farms in Moxee, Wash. Mark Flamm, the blueberry manager, says, “Let’s say we have a \$3 million crop. We could easily lose 10 percent. So that’s \$300,000. Vahe’ being here for 30, 35 days is cheap insurance.”

The Pollination Connection <<http://pollinationconnection.com/>>**Animal:** Bees**Price:** From \$175**Location:** Danville, Calif.

Owner Denise Qualls rents bees to almond farmers, delivering and maintaining hives in January and February, when bees pollinate blossoms. Dirk Ulrich, who rents hives for his 100-acre almond farm in Ballico, Calif., among other properties, says about 1.8 million hives are required in the state annually: “You can go up Highway 80 at Donner Pass, and there’s bee truck after bee truck after bee truck going by at Christmastime.”

Rent-a-Ruminant <<http://www.rentaruminant.com/>>**Animal:** Goats**Price:** From \$275 for 15 goats**Locations:** Seattle; Vancouver Island, B.C.; Dallas

Goats gobble invasive weeds such as poison ivy, poison oak, thistle, and kudzu, preventing new growth and fertilizing the ground as they roam. Herds are useful in hilly yards, hard-to-reach areas, and spaces where machines could cause damage, says Rent-a-Ruminant owner Tammy Dunakin, who adds that franchises are available. Russ Ayers, landscape manager for the Issaquah Highlands Community Association, near Seattle, rents goats from Dunakin for about a month every summer to landscape 20 acres of the wooded community of about 4,000 homes. “If you were to pay humans to do what the goats do for us, you’d pay about four times more per acre,” Ayers says.