

A PRACTICAL FIELD GUIDE

Starting a Targeted Grazing Business

For the owner of a small herd, a trailer, and a serious interest in building a service business — with readiness scorecards, a job screener, a pricing framework, and a 90-day launch plan.



Based on operating lessons from **Santa Fe Goat Guys**
Interactive version, updates, and community: santafegoatguys.com
Goat and Sheep Grazers group: facebook.com/share/g/19RCwNh2yi

The central idea

Owning goats is not the business. The business is safely solving a landowner's vegetation problem, on schedule, without creating a new problem. The goats are the tool. Your judgment, systems, pricing, and reliability are what the customer buys.

This guide is educational and reflects one operator's experience. It is not legal, tax, veterinary, insurance, ecological, or regulatory advice. Verify all state, county, city, animal-health, fire, transport, and business requirements before accepting paid work. Resource and regulatory references were reviewed in July 2026 and may have changed.

How to Use This Guide

Read this once from beginning to end. Then use the checklists before every estimate and job. The purpose is not to make the business sound easy. It is to help you discover, cheaply and safely, whether your herd, equipment, market, and temperament fit the work.

An honest view from SFGG

A couple dozen goats and a trailer are enough to test the model. They are not enough to promise every property can be treated profitably. Treat the first season as a controlled pilot, not as proof that you should immediately buy more goats.

Launch Readiness Scorecard

Area	Ready means...
Herd	Animals are healthy, accustomed to electric net, load reliably, and can be counted and handled by one or two people.
Containment 	You have enough tested net, an effective energizer and ground system, spare components, and a backup enclosure plan.
Water	You can deliver and store enough water even when a customer's hose, well, or access fails.
Transport 	Truck, hitch, trailer, tires, brakes, gates, lights, insurance, and loading procedures are ready for commercial use.
Animal care 	You have a veterinarian relationship, health records, parasite plan, hoof-care plan, first aid, and emergency transport plan.
Predators and dogs	You have a realistic night plan and a written customer requirement for controlling dogs.
Business 	Entity, bank account, bookkeeping, insurance, contract, tax treatment, and invoicing are in place.
Sales	You can explain the result, exclusions, price, and customer responsibilities without calling the goats a magic solution.
Cash 	You can cover feed, repairs, insurance, and animal care if paid work is delayed or seasonal.

A "no" in an area marked  — containment, transport, animal health, business/insurance, or cash reserves — is a stop sign. Fix it before advertising widely.

1. Decide What Business You Are Actually In

Targeted grazing is the controlled use of livestock to accomplish a defined vegetation-management objective. The operator controls the animal type, density, timing, duration, frequency, and location. That is different from merely turning goats loose on forage.

Market	Good first-season fit?	Why / caution
Private rural and exurban properties	Best starting point	Fast decisions and small sites, but minimum pricing is essential.
Small vineyards, orchards, or farms	Conditional	Potential repeat work, but valuable plants, fencing, and timing create liability.
HOAs and open space	Later in first season	Good repeat potential; requires board sales, public safety, signage, and stronger insurance.
Municipal, school, institutional	Usually later	Credibility and acreage, but procurement, public interaction, and documentation are demanding.
Utilities, rights-of-way, solar	Advanced	Special hazards, access controls, insurance, and contract requirements.
Large wildfire-fuel projects	Not with a small herd alone	May require a larger herd, multiple crews, night security, water logistics, and performance specifications.

Recommended first niche

Begin with small private parcels close to home where mowing is difficult, brush is goat-palatable, access is safe, the owner can control dogs and people, and the expected result can be shown in photographs.

2. Understand What a Small Herd Can Actually Deliver

Do not publish a universal acres-per-day claim. Consumption and visible progress change with animal size, vegetation species, plant moisture, density, slope, weather, supplemental feed, and the desired finish. A dry, sparse acre is not the same job as a dense blackberry thicket or a wet spring pasture.

Promise the process, not an uncontrolled outcome

- Define the treatment boundary and exclusions on a map or photograph.
- Specify the planned herd size and estimated grazing window.
- Describe the vegetation response you expect, including what will likely remain.
- State that permanent weed eradication, bare-ground clearing, or guaranteed wildfire protection is not included.

- Recommend follow-up methods where goats alone are insufficient.

Job screening: green, yellow, red

Job characteristic	Green light	Yellow light	Red light
Access	Safe trailer entry and turnaround	Requires careful backing or road control	No safe unload, turnaround, or exit
Vegetation	Known palatable brush/weeds	Mixed vegetation or uncertain timing	Known toxic plants cannot be isolated
Containment	Clear net route and good energizer setup	Rocky, wet, brushy, or many corners	Fence cannot be energized or checked daily
People / dogs	Owner controls access and pets	Neighbors or occasional visitors	Uncontrolled dogs or heavy public use
Result	Reduction and suppression	Customer expects manicured appearance	Customer expects total clearing or eradication
Economics	Meets minimum price near home	Travel or multiple moves add cost	Customer will not pay for safe execution

Any red light is not a pricing problem — it is a safety, welfare, or expectations problem. Either the condition changes or you decline. Three or more yellows stack up: quote an explicit complexity premium and be willing to lose the bid.

3. Build a Narrow, Professional First Offer

The first offer should be simple enough to estimate repeatedly and specific enough that the customer understands what is being purchased.

Included

- Pre-job site assessment and written estimate.
- Temporary electric-net setup when suitable.
- Managed grazing by the stated herd for the stated period.
- Daily animal, fence, water, and site checks.
- Paddock changes reasonably required by forage and animal behavior.
- Before-and-after photographs and a brief completion summary.

Excluded unless separately priced

- Chainsaw work, mowing, herbicide, hauling, stump or dead-fuel removal.
- Permanent fencing, erosion repair, reseeding, or restoration guarantees.
- Around-the-clock staffing, public-event management, or traffic control.

- Hazardous waste, old wire, glass, aggressive dogs, unsafe structures, or inaccessible water.
- Schedule changes, extra mobilizations, or customer-requested work outside the mapped area.

4. Price the Operation, Not the Appetite of the Goats

The customer is buying mobilization, setup, containment, water, daily care, risk management, equipment wear, administration, and opportunity cost. A per-animal-per-day number can be one internal input, but it should not become the only way you price.

Price component	What it must cover
Assessment / planning	Site visit, mapping, plant identification, estimate, contract, scheduling.
Mobilization	Truck and trailer time, fuel, loading, unloading, setup, teardown, and equipment wear.
Managed grazing	Herd use, daily labor, water, fence checks, paddock moves, animal care, documentation.
Complexity premium	Steep or wet ground, heavy brush, multiple paddocks, public exposure, night security, difficult access.
Travel	Mileage and operator time outside the included radius.
Contingency / margin	Repairs, weather disruption, unbillable time, overhead, owner pay, and profit.

Minimum price test

Before sending a quote, calculate all owner hours, helper hours, loaded truck-and-trailer miles, calendar days occupied, direct supplies, and a contribution toward annual insurance and equipment replacement. If the resulting owner pay and margin are unacceptable, raise the price or decline the job.

Illustrative five-day job — not a rate recommendation

Internal calculation	Example
Herd service	$28 \text{ goats} \times \$8.50 \times 5 \text{ days} = \$1,190$
Assessment, setup, and teardown	\$450
Travel within included radius	\$0
Customer price	\$1,640
Gross per occupied calendar day	\$328 before labor, feed, insurance, repairs, taxes, and overhead

The lesson is not that \$1,640 is correct. The lesson is that a price can look substantial while producing weak owner compensation after two hauling events, setup, daily checks, communication, and weather risk. Track actual time and revise every estimate. The interactive calculator at santafegoatguys.com runs this math with your own numbers.

5. Never Quote Blind

Photographs and satellite maps help screen a lead. They do not replace walking the site. The site visit is where you decide whether the work is biologically suitable, physically safe, contractually clear, and economically worthwhile.

Site assessment checklist

- ☐ Exact boundary, usable acreage, sensitive areas, and plants to protect.
- ☐ Vegetation species, density, height, growth stage, moisture, dead material, and toxic-plant concerns.
- ☐ Slope, mud, loose rock, holes, cliffs, drainage channels, waterways, and erosion risk.
- ☐ Trailer route, road condition, gate width, overhead clearance, turnaround, and emergency exit.
- ☐ Water source, hose reach, flow, storage, trough placement, and backup water plan.
- ☐ Fence route, grounding conditions, corners, gates, brush contact, and escape pressure points.
- ☐ Roads, neighbors, loose dogs, livestock, wildlife, children, hikers, bicycles, and public access.
- ☐ Night plan, guardian-animal plan, predator pressure, shade or shelter, and severe-weather plan.
- ☐ Trash, wire, glass, machinery, irrigation, poisonous ornamentals, structures, and contamination.
- ☐ Customer's visual definition of success, deadline, follow-up plan, and authority to approve work.

Decline or postpone the job when...

- There is no safe trailer movement or unload plan.
- The customer will not control dogs, visitors, or workers.
- Toxic plants or hazards cannot be reliably excluded.
- The fence cannot be energized, monitored, or kept out of heavy traffic.
- The expected result is impossible for goats alone.
- The job would force animal welfare compromises.
- The price needed to perform safely is unacceptable to the customer.

6. Build the Operating System Before Selling Hard

A professional operation removes avoidable improvisation. Use the same pre-departure, setup, daily, move, emergency, and teardown checklists on every job.

System	Minimum standard
Containment	Tested net, energizer, batteries/solar, adequate grounding, voltage tester, corner supports, spare net and repair kit.
Water	Tanks/troughs, hoses and fittings, transport capacity, backup containers, freeze/heat plan.
Handling	Panels or trailer gates for a loading funnel, halters, catch plan, count procedure, escape-recovery plan.
Animal health	Vet contact, health and ID records, first aid, thermometer, hoof tools, parasite monitoring, isolation plan.

Safety	Fire extinguisher, reflective gear, headlamps, signage, weather alerts, communication, emergency contacts.
Records	Signed agreement, map, site notes, photos, daily log, incident form, invoice, job-profit record.

Daily operating rhythm

- ☐ Count the animals and inspect attitude, appetite, gait, eyes, feet, manure, injuries, and body condition.
- ☐ Check water quantity and cleanliness.
- ☐ Walk the complete fence and test voltage; correct brush contact, sagging, wildlife damage, and weak grounding.
- ☐ Check weather, fire restrictions, wind, heat, flooding, and public activity.
- ☐ Photograph progress from fixed points and record labor, problems, and changes.
- ☐ Move or resize the paddock before hunger, boredom, overuse, or fence pressure creates trouble.
- ☐ Tell the customer about material changes or delays the same day.

7. Add Biosecurity to the Business Model

Moving animals from property to property exposes the herd to parasites, disease, toxic plants, contaminated water, sharp debris, and contact with other livestock. Biosecurity is not only an animal-health issue; it is a scheduling and profitability issue.

- Do not allow nose-to-nose contact with unknown sheep or goats unless deliberately managed.
- Ask about livestock disease, recent animal movement, herbicide/pesticide use, contaminated soil, and toxic plants.
- Keep health, identification, vaccination, hoof, fecal-test, treatment, and mortality records.
- Clean manure, mud, seeds, and plant material from trailer, panels, boots, and equipment when weed or disease transfer is possible.
- Establish a veterinarian-approved parasite program; avoid routine deworming without evidence and follow-up efficacy checks.
- Have a quarantine and testing procedure for new animals before they join the working herd.
- Build recovery days into the schedule when travel, poor forage, weather, or health concerns justify it.

Do not let paid forage dictate animal welfare

A customer site is not automatically adequate nutrition. Goats may selectively browse, trample, or refuse plants. Monitor body condition and rumen fill, and supplement or leave the site when the treatment objective conflicts with herd health.

8. Treat Risk Management as Part of the Product

- Use an appropriate business entity, separate banking, accurate bookkeeping, and written tax guidance.
- Carry commercial general liability that explicitly contemplates livestock working away from your premises.

- Confirm commercial auto, trailer, care/custody/control, animal mortality, workers' compensation, and umbrella needs.
- Use a signed agreement covering scope, exclusions, access, pets, water, weather, schedule, payment, photographs, damage reporting, and termination.
- Collect a deposit when mobilization, scheduling, or procurement creates meaningful cost.
- Keep animal identification and movement records and verify interstate rules before crossing state lines.
- Create a written emergency plan for escape, injury, wildfire, flood, severe heat, road incident, predator attack, and customer interference.

9. Sell Trust, Not Novelty

Goats get attention. Reliability wins the contract. Prospects want to know whether the animals will escape, whether the property will improve, whether dogs and children are safe, what the finished site will look like, and what happens when conditions change.

A clear prospect explanation

"We use a managed herd inside temporary electric fencing to reduce selected vegetation. We inspect the property first, define the treatment area and expected result, then manage the animals, water, fencing, and paddock moves each day. Goats are especially useful where brush or terrain makes mechanical work difficult. They are not a complete replacement for every vegetation-management method, so we will tell you what they can and cannot accomplish."

Best early sales channels

- Before-and-after photographs from consistent angles.
- A Google Business Profile and simple website with service area, process, limitations, insurance, and inquiry form.
- Referrals from landscapers, arborists, foresters, weed districts, watershed groups, conservation districts, property managers, and wildfire contractors.
- Demonstration projects chosen for visibility and economics — not free work with no learning value.
- Educational posts about vegetation timing, site preparation, dog safety, and integrated follow-up.
- Customer reviews emphasizing communication, containment, care, and results.

10. A 90-Day Launch Plan

Period	Actions	Proof required before moving on
Days 1–30: Prepare	Complete legal/insurance review; train herd to net and loading; inspect equipment; create forms; calculate minimum price; identify local plants and risks.	A safe mock setup, successful loading drill, signed insurance confirmation, complete job packet, and written minimum-price calculation.

Days 31–60: Pilot	Run 2–4 small, close, controlled jobs. Track every hour, mile, move, repair, animal issue, and customer question.	At least two documented jobs with before/after photos, actual job P&L, revised checklist, and honest customer feedback.
Days 61–90: Repeat	Pursue referrals and one repeat/seasonal account. Publish useful content. Tighten service area and decline criteria.	Evidence that at least one customer type will pay a price that covers labor, overhead, risk, off-season costs, and profit.

11. Track the Numbers That Tell the Truth

Measure	Question it answers
Revenue and deposit collected	Was the sale large enough and was cash collected on time?
Owner and helper hours	What did the work actually pay per labor hour?
Loaded miles and hauling hours	Is the service radius too broad or travel underpriced?
Setup, moves, and teardown time	Did complexity pricing cover field labor?
Calendar days occupied	What was the herd's opportunity cost?
Repairs, feed, bedding, water, consumables	Is pricing funding direct costs and replacement equipment?
Incidents and near misses	Which operating rule must change?
Lead source and closing rate	Which relationships produce profitable customers?
Repeat/referral potential	Is this durable demand or a novelty purchase?
Animal performance	Did the job preserve body condition, health, and behavior?

12. Grow Only After the System Works

A larger herd can produce more work, but it also magnifies transport, fencing, water, feed, labor, predator, and cash-flow problems. Expansion should follow signed demand and proven operations.

Expand when...	Do not expand because...
You consistently decline profitable work during the season.	You assume more goats will repair weak pricing.
Repeat contracts can fill a larger herd's schedule.	You like buying livestock more than selling services.
Truck, trailer, labor, water, containment, and night systems are reliable.	One prospect mentioned a large future job.
Rates cover owner pay, maintenance, insurance, debt, winter feed, and profit.	You are already overwhelmed by moves, care, or cash flow.
You have a winter and shoulder-season plan.	You have not produced job-level profitability records.

13. The Seven Lessons SFGG Would Pass On

- 1. Start smaller than your ambition.** A few successful local jobs teach more than broad advertising. Protect the herd and your reputation while you learn.
- 2. Charge for complexity.** Terrain, weather, access, dogs, public interaction, multiple paddocks, and travel are not details. They are the job.
- 3. Define "done" before unloading.** Put the map, treatment goal, likely remaining vegetation, exclusions, and customer responsibilities in writing.
- 4. Containment is the first product.** A beautiful ecological story does not matter if goats escape or a dog enters the paddock.
- 5. Do not confuse forage with profit.** Free feed can still be an unprofitable job once labor, hauling, equipment, and opportunity cost are counted.
- 6. Build a mixed-tool network.** The best answer may combine goats with mowing, tree work, herbicide, hand crews, seeding, or follow-up grazing.
- 7. Seasonality is a business-model problem.** Feed, insurance, debt, repairs, and animal care continue when customer demand slows. Summer revenue is not automatically distributable cash.

Know Your Region Before You Price It

Grazing advice does not transfer cleanly between climates. What works in high-desert New Mexico can fail in a wet coastal valley, and a state is rarely one operating environment. Before your first paid job, answer these questions for the exact county and watershed where you will operate.

Issue	Questions to answer for your region	Business implication
Climate and forage	How much moisture, when does vegetation grow and cure, how large are the seasonal swings?	Build regional and seasonal estimates. A wet-spring job may have far more biomass and mud than acreage suggests.
Primary vegetation	Which plants dominate — and which are toxic, regulated, or need repeated browsing?	Learn local plant identification, palatability, toxicity, and treatment timing. Never rely on another region's plant list.
Soil and access	Rocky and dry, or saturated and steep? What do roads and ground do in each season?	Plan site-specific grounding, mud-season access, erosion care, and riparian protection.
Electric fencing	Does dry soil weaken grounding? Does fast wet growth or forest debris load the fence?	Carry a voltage tester, multiple ground rods, brush-clearing tools, and a setup design for both wet and dry conditions.
Parasites and hooves	Does local moisture and temperature raise parasite or foot-rot pressure?	Use veterinarian-guided fecal monitoring, selective treatment, efficacy checks, hoof inspection, dry resting areas, and recovery time.

Predators and loose dogs	Coyotes, cougars, bears, wolves, domestic dogs — and what do local rules allow?	Do not assume one guardian or night strategy fits every location. Consult current wildlife rules and local producers.
Wildfire and market drivers	Is fuels reduction the main sales driver, or invasive plants, restoration, vineyards, parks?	Sell the local problem. The pitch that wins fire work is not the pitch that wins blackberry work.
Water and heat	Is water scarce — or abundant but legally and physically hard to access?	A visible water source is not a water plan. Confirm legal access, quality, delivery, storage, and backup.
Season length	What months have usable forage, passable access, and customer demand?	Model revenue by month. Longer green seasons do not eliminate winter feed or weather downtime.
Public and regulatory setting	What do city, county, and state require for temporary commercial grazing, fencing, signage, animal health, and movement?	Check rules before each new service area. Owning livestock does not automatically authorize commercial grazing on every site.

Regional due diligence before the first paid job

- ☐ Call your state department of agriculture's animal health program and confirm identification, movement, interstate entry, and record requirements for your herd.
- ☐ If moving animals across a state line, verify the current Certificate of Veterinary Inspection, import permit or eCVI, official identification, and any emergency disease restrictions before movement.
- ☐ Ask the city and county whether temporary commercial grazing, electric fencing, signage, road access, or public-property work requires special approval.
- ☐ Contact the county weed district, soil and water conservation district, university extension office, local fire district, watershed council, and NRCS field office.
- ☐ Build a local toxic-plant and noxious-weed reference. Do not rely on a plant list from another region.
- ☐ Establish a veterinarian relationship and a climate-appropriate parasite and hoof protocol before scheduling consecutive jobs.
- ☐ Create separate pricing assumptions for each distinct operating zone you serve.
- ☐ Develop cleaning protocols so the trailer, nets, boots, and animals do not carry weed seed or contaminated material between properties.

Field Checklist: First-Conversation Questions

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- ☐ Where is the property, and what exact area should be treated?
 - ☐ What vegetation is the concern, and what is its growth stage now?
 - ☐ What does a successful result look like? What may remain?
 - ☐ Has the property been grazed, mowed, sprayed, burned, or cleared recently?
 - ☐ Can a truck and livestock trailer safely enter, turn, unload, and leave?
 - ☐ What water is available, and what is the backup?
 - ☐ Are there dogs, livestock, children, tenants, workers, roads, or public access?

- ☐ Which plants, trees, gardens, irrigation, structures, or habitat must be protected?
- ☐ Are there known hazards, toxic plants, contaminated areas, old wire, cliffs, or unstable ground?
- ☐ What timing matters, and who can sign the agreement?
- ☐ What follow-up work is planned after the goats leave?

Field Checklist: Estimate & Agreement

- ☐ Customer and legal property address.
- ☐ Mapped treatment area and exclusions.
- ☐ Vegetation objective and non-guaranteed expected result.
- ☐ Planned herd size and estimated dates and duration.
- ☐ Included assessment, setup, daily management, moves, documentation, and teardown.
- ☐ Customer duties for access, dogs, people, water, hazards, and notifications.
- ☐ Excluded services and recommended follow-up.
- ☐ Price, deposit, taxes, change-order process, payment schedule, and late-payment terms.
- ☐ Weather, fire restriction, animal welfare, cancellation, and termination language.
- ☐ Insurance, damage reporting, emergency access, photography, and signature provisions.

Recommended Learning Resources

Start with practitioner experience, then use extension and veterinary sources to test what you hear. No single operator, podcast, handbook, or social channel should substitute for local plant knowledge, veterinarian guidance, insurance advice, and job-level records.

The Goat Grazing Podcast — Max Wade ("Cowboy Max")

Practitioner-first resource on the operating realities of a goat-grazing company.
podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-goat-grazing-podcast/id1813766083

Cowboy Max YouTube channel

Field videos and practical discussion from Max Wade of Galloping Goat Grazing.
youtube.com/@cowboymax4209

Goats On The Go

National network and affiliate model built around targeted grazing; evaluate the affiliate program as a business purchase.
goatsonthego.com/affiliate-faq

Goat and Sheep Grazers group on Facebook

Our community group — working graziers comparing notes on containment, pricing, predators, plants, and the business side.
facebook.com/share/g/19RCwNh2yi

Targeted Grazing 101 — American Sheep Industry Association

Business-oriented handbook: startup, logistics, husbandry, plant timing, growth.
sheepusa.org/shop

Targeted Grazing: A Natural Approach to Vegetation Management and Landscape Enhancement

The classic technical handbook — the ecological foundation beneath the service business.
rangelands.org/targeted-grazing

Society for Range Management — Targeted Grazing Committee

Professional community, webinars, and practitioner/research connections.
rangelands.org/targeted-grazing

ATTRA Grazing Planning Manual and Workbook

Disciplined framework for resource assessment, written grazing plans, monitoring, and adjustment.
ncat.org/publication/attra-grazing-planning-manual-and-workbook

Texas A&M AgriLife — Targeted Grazing with Goats and Sheep

Concise extension overview of management variables, infrastructure, and contract applications.
agrilifeextension.tamu.edu

American Consortium for Small Ruminant Parasite Control

Evidence-based parasite management, selective treatment, resistance-aware practices.
wormx.info

SARE: A Comprehensive Exploration of Targeted Grazing with Goats

A replicable project tracking startup cost, customers, marketing, grazing plans, troubleshooting.
projects.sare.org/sare_project/fnc19-1168

Your state department of agriculture, noxious weed program, extension service, and USDA NRCS field office

Every state has its own versions — animal health and movement rules, regulated weeds, county-level forage expertise, and conservation-practice standards. Find yours before the first paid job.
nrcs.usda.gov

How to Learn Without Copying Someone Else's Mistakes

- Ask every practitioner: what herd size, climate, vegetation, customer type, daily labor, service radius, and pricing structure are behind this advice?
- Separate ecological effectiveness from business profitability. A treatment can work biologically and still lose money.
- Watch for survivor bias. Social media shows successful paddocks more often than escapes, sick animals, unpaid invoices, and winter cash flow.
- Take one useful idea at a time into a controlled pilot. Measure it before making it a company standard.
- Build a local advisory circle: veterinarian, extension agent, weed specialist, conservation district or NRCS contact, insurance broker, mechanic, and one experienced grazing operator.

The next move

Choose one representative property near home. Walk it using the checklist. Build a written grazing prescription, operations plan, and estimate using real hours, miles, risks, and your region's conditions. Do not advertise broadly until the price and plan are strong enough that you would willingly repeat the same job ten times.

Join the community. The interactive version of this guide — with a readiness scorecard, job screener, price calculator, and 90-day plan tracker — lives at santafegoatguys.com. And the **Goat and Sheep Grazers group on Facebook** (facebook.com/share/g/19RCwNh2yi) is where operators compare notes on containment, pricing, predators, plants, and the business side nobody warns you about. Have a lesson from your own operation? Submit it through the site — we publish the best ones with credit.

Shared freely with the goat and sheep grazing community by Santa Fe Goat Guys, based on operating lessons in northern New Mexico. Educational only — not legal, tax, veterinary, insurance, ecological, or regulatory advice.