

Reducing Feed Costs

Feed accounts for a significant amount of the cost of raising sheep and goats, probably over 70 percent. Unfortunately, feeding livestock has become increasingly expensive. However, there are some things you can do to reduce feed costs.

Limit feed

While limit feeding takes more labor, there is less feed wastage and animals gain more efficiently.

It's probably not going to work for large operations but can be a good option for smaller farms.

Lick feeders are a low labor option for limit feeding.



Invest in feed storage

Feed storage allows you to purchase feed ahead of time and in bulk, which may save you money. It doesn't take a very large flock/herd to justify the cost of a bulk feed bin.



Minimize feed wastage

Feed that is wasted is dollars coming out of your pocket. The biggest causes of feed wastage are improper storage, overfeeding, and not using proper feeders.

Alternative feedstuffs

Depending on your geographic area, there may be by-product feeds available that provide nutrients at a lower cost than traditional feedstuffs.



Improve production efficiency

Anything that improves production efficiency reduces feed costs. Feed costs are lower for females that raise multiple births. Cull less productive females. It is costly to feed animals that are not producing, e.g., ewe lambs and doelings (breed them!).

Milk replacer is expensive. Wean orphans early (4-5 weeks).



Feed least cost rations

Sometimes grain is a more economical source of nutrients than forage. Sometimes barley provides energy at a lower cost than corn. A bag of minerals isn't cheaper if the animals have to consume a lot more of it. Compare nutrient costs. Have forages and by-product feeds tested so you know what's in them.

Balance rations

Bagged feed is expensive. You can save considerable money by learning to balance your own simple rations, e.g., corn + protein pellet or barley + soybean meal + minerals. It's usually less expensive to combine ingredients than to buy complete feeds.

Maximize grazing

Pasture and browse are usually the most economical sources of nutrients for sheep and goats. Rotationally graze your pastures and manage them for optimal productivity. Plant forages to extend the grazing season and/or fill seasonal gaps.

Use scales

All feed should be weighed and purchased (or priced) by weight. A sheep and goat's nutritional requirements are based on weight. They must consume so many pounds, kilograms, or grams of nutrients per day. Hay bales and scoops of grain vary considerably in weight.