

# REDUCING LABOR

With Sheep  
and goats

Labor is a primary constraint to profitable sheep and goat production and industry expansion in the US. Compared to beef cattle, small ruminants require significantly more labor inputs. With rising costs, societal pressure for higher agricultural wages, and the hidden cost of unpaid farm labor, implementing labor-saving techniques is vital to most farms. Many labor-saving techniques require a financial investment (which needs to pay for itself), but there are some strategies that simply require changes in management.

## Genetics & Culling

- **Select Adaptive Breeds & Cull High-Maintenance Animals**

Use breeds that work in your system. Animals requiring much intervention (birthing assistance, deworming, hoof trimming, etc.) are non-starters and should be culled.

## Lambing & Kidding Management

- **Compact Lambing/Kidding Seasons (~3–4 weeks)**

Shortening the lambing/kidding window significantly reduces overall monitoring and intervention time.

- **Encourage Unassisted Birthing**

Select for easy birthing and strong mothering instincts. Don't be overzealous with your shepherding—allow ewes/does to birth on their own and care for their offspring. Intervene only when necessary.

- **Lamb/Kid Late or on Pasture**

Lambing/kidding on pasture reduces time spent monitoring, bedding, and feeding (though parasite and predator risks must be managed).

## Feeding & Watering Automation

- **Install Frost-Free Automatic Waterers**

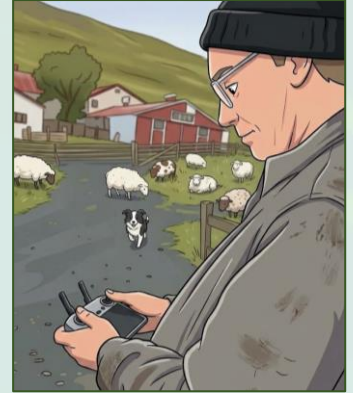
Eliminate daily labor spent filling water troughs, carrying buckets, or breaking ice.

- **Invest in Feed Handling Machinery**

Invest in machinery for mixing, moving, and distributing feed (and other farm needs).

- **Utilize Large Capacity & Automated Feeders**

Deploy large-capacity self-feeders, drive-through feed alleys, or lick feeders (which allow self-feeding while limiting intake). Automate orphan feeding with buckets, milk bars, or automatic milk feeders.



## Handling & Chore Efficiency

- **Set Up a Central Handling System**

A central handling system reduces livestock and human stress and drastically cuts handling time. Well-trained herding dogs can facilitate many jobs.

- **Batch Chores & Reduce Handling Frequency**

Batch your chores to cut back on the number of times you handle your animals.

- **Optimize Animal & Pasture Flow**

Put thought into system layout for feeding, birthing, and moving animals, as well as your pasture fencing layout. Plan for efficient movement of livestock.

## Technology & Precision Agriculture

- **Deploy Cameras & Drones**

Monitor livestock and farm infrastructure remotely.

- **Implement Electronic Identification (EID)**

Streamline data collection, individual animal management, and record keeping.

- **Invest in Virtual Fencing**

GPS collars reduce the labor associated with grazing, especially rotational grazing.