

In 2007, Ten Ways to Cut Your 4-H Livestock Feed Costs

Keeping feed costs down is one way to improve profits with your 4-H livestock project. Here are 10 suggestions to cut your livestock feed costs:

1. **Good Records.** This is particularly important as 2007 feed costs are rising rapidly. Monitor livestock performance and feed them what they need, not what they may want.
2. **Fresh Water.** This may seem as an automatic, no brainer; but livestock need and want plenty of fresh, clean, cool water all the time. Water is inexpensive and is the most important part of a good nutrition program to reduce feed costs.
3. **Weigh the feed!** Do not guess how much they are eating each day. Record the facts. Mix the feed ingredients properly before feeding. The feedbunk should be nearly empty when it is time for the next feeding.
4. **Feedbunk Management.** Livestock need to be fed at the exact same time every day for the best feed efficiency and the best average daily gain. Make sure the feeders are in good repair. These tips can save a tremendous amount on costly feed.
5. **Protein Supplementation.** There is recent research that has shown livestock with high rates of gain respond to higher levels of protein. However, before spending extra money on protein, carefully evaluate the livestock and your management to determine if a response in feed efficiency can be expected. Even if there is, carefully weigh your supplement decisions.
6. **Mineral Supplementation.** Evaluate your mineral supplementation program. A protein supplement that is complete with minerals may be sufficient and offering minerals in any other form may not be necessary. This is just an added cost to your feeding program. Feed only what is needed. Keep salt available daily.
7. **Alternative Feedstuffs.** Many feeders are searching for alternatives to high priced corn. Your best bet is to look locally for feeds that may have a cost advantage in your ration. You need to be practical in your selection of feedstuffs. Can I actually handle the different feeds and do they really make the ration cheaper?
8. **Feed an Additive.** There are products available for each of the different types of livestock being fed. Most will improve feed efficiency by 5-15 percent. The payback for improved feed efficiency is much greater with higher feed costs. **Warning!** Read the label and feed proper feed additive in the approved amount to the appropriate project animal! This is part of your Food Safety & Quality Assurance requirement.
9. **Implants for Beef.** Growth implants are another technology that will improve feed efficiency 10-20 percent. Learn about the differences in implants and choose the one that matches your beef cattle and management. This is for market beef only!
10. **Do the Little Things.** Basic management that requires little more than time can pay big rewards in improving feed efficiency with high feed costs. Providing a clean dry and comfortable sleeping and resting area will greatly increase feed efficiency. When working with or handling livestock be kind and gentle to reduce livestock stress.

Prepared by Dennis DeWitt, Iowa State University Extension Livestock Field Specialist, Spirit Lake, Iowa. dewitt@iastate.edu 712.336.3488 April 20, 2007