

What's the cheapest, best way to feed sheep this winter?

DOYLESTOWN — It is going to cost more to feed your sheep this year, says Michael Fournier, Bucks County Agent

The dry conditions throughout the summer caused a large reduction in hay and corn yields in southeastern Pennsylvania. Hay prices are already high and some sweet feeds, which are the major mixed feeds used by sheep producers, are over \$12 per hundred pound bag.

What is the cheapest way to feed sheep this winter and still provide them with enough nutrients to stay healthy?

Hay, of course, will always need to be fed. The only alternative to this would be corn cobs. These can be ground and mixed with soybean oil meal to make a cheap substitute for hay. However, few people have access to cobs, so hay will still be the major feedstuff.

Four major feeding periods from pregnancy to weaning are described by the National Academy of Sciences in their publication Nutrient Requirements of Sheep. Feed requirements for these periods and recommendations on how to meet them are discussed.

These recommendations are for a 130-pound ewe. For larger or smaller ewes, make the appropriate adjustments.

Only three kinds of hay are discussed: alfalfa, timothy and orchardgrass. In the calculations, it was assumed

that the alfalfa had 17.5 percent crude protein and the grass hays had about 9 percent crude protein. Mixed hay (clover-grass) was not discussed because the percent of clover in mixed hay in this area varies from as little as 10 percent to as much as 75 percent. A good mixed hay, should be fed in an amount somewhere between the alfalfa recommendation and the grass hay recommendation.

The first 15 weeks of gestation, during the ewes' daily nutrient requirements have not changed too much from the summer because the fetus is not growing very rapidly. Therefore, her feed requirements can be met with rations: 3.5 lbs alfalfa hay per day, 3.5 lbs timothy hay per day, 3.5 lbs orchardgrass hay per day. With alfalfa roughly 30 percent more expensive than grass hay, it would not be economically sound to feed alfalfa during this period because the cheaper grass hays will meet the ewes' needs.

A ewe's nutritional requirements during the last 6 weeks of pregnancy and the last 8 weeks of nursing a single lamb are about the same. Therefore, they are treated as one feeding period.

During these two periods the ewes' energy and protein requirements are high and the feed must be adjusted proportionately. These feed requirements can be met by any of the following rations:

3.5 lbs alfalfa hay + 1 lb. corn per day, 4.5 lbs timothy or orchardgrass hay + 3/4 lb corn (no 2 shelled, cracked) per day, 5.0 lbs timothy or orchardgrass hay + 1/4 lb corn per day; 4.5 lbs timothy or orchardgrass hay + 1/2 lb of any Ration A-D per day.

Again, during this feed period it probably makes more sense economically to feed one of the grass hays.

First 8 weeks lactation nursing a single lamb and last 8 weeks lactation nursing twins, during the ewes' daily nutrient requirements are very high, she requires a considerable amount of feed per day. The following rations can meet her requirements: 4.0 lbs alfalfa + 1 1/4 lb corn per day; 4.5 lbs alfalfa + 1 1/2 lb corn per day; 5.0 lbs alfalfa + 1 lb. corn per day; 4.0 lbs timothy or orchardgrass hay + 2 lb any Ration A-D; or 5.0 lbs timothy or orchardgrass hay + 1.5 lb any Ration A-D.

If any alfalfa hay is used, the first 8 weeks of lactation would be a good time to use it because it will supply a lot of the ewes' nutrients. Once the ewe has lambed, grass hay must be supplemented with a mixed feed to meet the ewes' needs as corn alone does not contain enough protein.

There is no other time in a ewe's reproductive life when her nutrient requirements are higher than when she is nursing twins. This requires a great deal of feed as shown

in the following rations: 4.5 lbs alfalfa + 2 lbs. corn per day; 5 lbs alfalfa + 1.5 lb corn per day, 5.5 lbs timothy or orchardgrass hay + 2 lbs Ration D.

As in the above example, this would be the time to feed alfalfa because of the high protein requirements of the ewe.

By feeding mainly grass hay and using alfalfa during the first part of lactation, you can get by with only corn as your supplemental grain. If you can get alfalfa at a reasonable price, it might be wise to feed it during nursing. Otherwise, you will need a mixed feed during the first 8 weeks of lactation.

Remember that the rations mentioned for each feeding period should be fed 1/2 in the morning and 1/2 in the evening. Ewes should always have access to salt and clean fresh water.

RATIONS USED IN

EXAMPLES

Ration A

14% Protein

60 lb cracked shelled

corn; 20 lb whole oats; 10 lb wheat bran; 10 lb. commercial protein supplement (36%)

Ration B

15% Protein

80 lb. cracked shelled corn; 20 lb. commercial protein supplement (36%).

Ration C

14.6% Protein

50 lb. whole oats; 30 lb. cracked shelled corn; 10 lb. wheat bran; 10 lb. commercial protein supplement (36%)

Ration D

17% Protein

55 lb ground shelled corn; 25 lb. wheat bran; 20 lb commercial protein supplement (36%)

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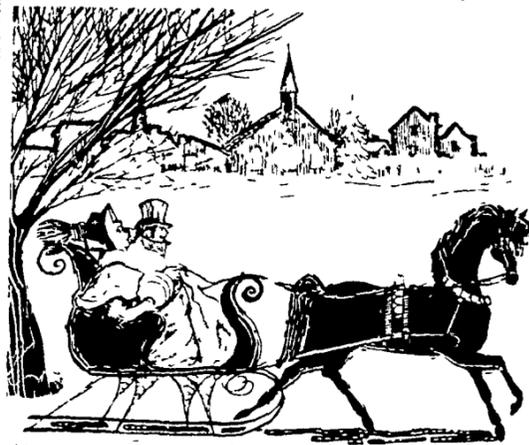


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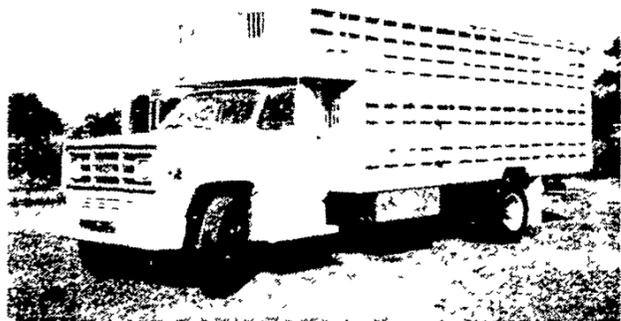


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