

Cost-effective Feeding of Alpacas - Pellets

We are all under some financial pressure to ensure that our feeding costs are as cost-effective as possible – unless we are so financially secure that money doesn't matter!

Personally I prefer to feed straight feed oats (straight from the farmer if possible) as a grain supplement together with access to a mineral block designed for sheep. The oats are a very good source of fiber and calories and are highly digestible; they also 'tickle' the walls of the stomach and so increase acid flow and roiling thus ensuring complete exposure to the acid which helps soften the oats to enhance breakdown after regurgitation and cud chewing. The result is improved micro-bacterial activity and reproduction and so better utilization of all the elements that go to make up this grain, for the benefit of the body.

Prepared pellets are a blend of many products and by-products, vitamins, minerals and other items usually listed on the product identifier attached to each bag. The aim of the manufacturer is to produce a product that will meet as much of the nutritional needs of the livestock animal as possible and most mixed feed does just that. However, sometimes there is a grain or two that is not in the best interests of the animal and the form of the pellet is not always the ideal way to deliver that nutrition to the animal either.

In alpacas, most feeds contain cracked corn as a base (and cheap bulk source) along with other by-products that are combined with combinations of other products and balanced with mineral and vitamin mixes. The disadvantage of these pellets is not only the hard edges/points of the cracked corn (which can damage the stomach lining and, in severe cases lead to ulcers) but the very nature of the pellet. Pellets are very dry and absorb moisture very readily at which point they become very mushy and tend to settle as a solid mass in the bottom of the stomach. When this happens there is much more work for the stomach to do to mix it up efficiently with the stomach acid and to deliver it to the mouth for mastication and it may be that some of it does not make it back to the mouth.

In looking for an alternative to the common alpaca pellet, we came across rabbit pellets after a client put us on to them.

Rabbit pellets are smaller in diameter (probably because rabbits have smaller mouths!) and have no corn – they are based on alfalfa as the bulking agent. They too are fortified with minerals and vitamins and are very digestible. Because they have no grain they are lighter in weight and because they are smaller in size they are easier to move around the stomach.

All are good points but the biggie is THEY ARE CHEAPER!!

About 30% cheaper from our feed mill!

Here are the nutritional comparisons:

Item	Alpaca pellet	Rabbit pellet
Crude protein	15%	16%
Crude fat	2 – 9%	>2%
Crude Fiber	<9%	<19%
Salt	<1%	.35 - .65%
Ash	<13%	<9%

Ingredients:

	Corn	Barley
Ground grains		
Wheat mixed feed	Y	Y
Alfalfa meal	Y	Y
Soybean oil meal	Y	Y
Cane molasses	Y	Y
Safflower oil meal	N	Y
Lactobacillus	N	Y
Yeast culture	N	Y
Enzymes	N	Y
Corn distillers dried grain	Y	Y
Vitamins	Y	Y
Mineral supplements	Y	Y
Cost/50lb bag	\$15	\$10

NOTE: We have noticed no difference in the condition of our alpacas since converting to rabbit pellets six months ago – we are merely reporting our experience and making no recommendation for anyone to do the same.