2020 has been a year of trials and we are all only half way through it! As we watch markets struggle, and our profits become questionable, now is an excellent time to revisit both the quality of our feeding programs and the costs of these diets. While the prices of our end products may be struggling, the crop prices are struggling as well and this may prove beneficial to the bottom-lines of all producers. Here are a few things to consider.

Protein is the leading cost of a ration. Although protein is a critical nutritional block it is also the costliest. When considering the total input costs, the quantity of protein needed should rise to the top of the list. Protein is necessary to supply amino acids for protein synthesis in the animal’s body and as a source of nitrogen for the ruminal bacteria. If too little protein is offered in a diet, the rumen will not digest carbohydrates as fast and overall feed intake will decrease. This can manifest as many new problems such as retarded growth, reduced milk production, and poor resistance to diseases. Excess protein on the other hand cannot be stored in the body of a goat and will instead be excreted in the urine. With markets taking on a new form of volatility, it is very important to be certain we are not overbuying and feeding protein. As the leading cost of any ration, excess protein does not pay.

Forage quality or forage quantity? Forage is often a cheaper investment in a feeding program compared to many other inputs such as grain concentrates. I have long advocated for feeding quality forage at all times. Although it may be tempting to try to buy a lesser forage to reduce costs, this is not an area to skimp. Quality forage reduces the overall need of additional supplementation. This does not mean you will never need a grain supplement when you feed a quality forage rather that the quantity of grain you will have to offer will be less. Any time you skimp on forage quality you will have to buy more grain. Your feed guy will love this but your pocket book likely will not. Test your forage, and feed consistently good forage and your input costs will go down. When a feed guy tells you how to need less grain, you can take that to the bank!

Faster growth in market kids is almost always better. That sounds like a feed sales ploy but I promise it isn’t. It is actually simply a matter of measuring risks. The longer we take to raise our kids to the appropriate market weights the higher the risks of illness, injury, or spontaneous death. When we can reduce the days to market we can reduce the total days of feed we will have to offer. More days on feed also puts each producer at a higher risk from fluctuating markets. Although it is tempting do not cut the quality of nutrition to your growing market stock. More days=more risk.

There is no way to ever remove all of the risks when raising livestock. That said, we all could afford to take some time to fine tune our programs in an attempt to reduce some of these risks. 2020 may be a trial, but as producers if we take the appropriate steps we may just get through it unscathed.