

Material Reuse

By
Linda DeHart

With a larger herd to maintain, I have moved up over the past year to buying my feed in palletized tons rather than a few bags here and there. The sticker shock of buying in larger lots really brings home how much I am spending to keep my herd healthy! I am sure all of you out there are feeling the pinch. We don't see this reflected in the checks we bring home from the buyers, do we? Many goat farmers are making the decision to sell out entirely. It is a shame to see this happen but what is a person to do?

Have you spent a lot of time and energy bringing your herd to a point where you are producing the type of animals that are growing well? Perhaps the alternative to selling out your entire herd would be to do a drastic reduction down to those animals that you deem to be the does and buck that are the true foundation of your herd. Culling deeply is hard but would leave you with a smaller and thus more financially less draining enterprise. Returning to a lesser work load would allow you to take a look at your infrastructure. Many of us have retrofitted throughout our herd expansion and find ourselves with less than ideal pastures or dry lot conditions. We have had to deal with ongoing problems caused by overcrowding and overgrazing. Rather than continuing in this way, perhaps being willing to down size would be the saving grace to be able to survive and continue to enjoy our animals.

My husband, Larry, recently noticed that some of our bags of feed seemed to be on the light side. We brought the bathroom scale down and did some random weights. Our specialty feed was weighing in at 47# per bag. They were supposed to be 50#. When you figure at 40 bags per ton/pallet, we were short by 120#. My feed store agreed with my weight discrepancy and I received extra bags to make up the difference. We found out that the company in question apparently do a check every 500 bags or so. That lot shorted a lot of goat farmers. We are careful now to have a bag on each pallet weighed at the feed store before we bring it home. Over time this would have been another drain on the pocket book. I am not saying that the feed company was in error purposely but it is a good idea to keep a watch on this.

I know that most of us really try to reuse materials on our farms. My area has talked about trying to get some group buying going. It would be nice to also start thinking about trading used equipment. I have done a lot of fence replacement as my original fencing was just the rolls of field fencing. This type of fencing is less expensive but also lends itself to being highly abused by my horses and goats. So I now find myself with many rolls of used woven wire fencing. I am trying to reuse it in areas that I don't need to worry about escape artists but it would be nice to offer it out in trade for something else that might be useful to me. I used to look at it as something to take to the dump but I would much rather it be reused by someone that really can't afford the purchase of new fencing. What kinds of things do you have lying around that you would like to make available to another farmer?

We are in tough economic times. Some of us are feeling the squeeze more than others. We still have a good market for our animals but as our costs have soared over the past year with no let up in sight, we have not seen our compensation change. In talking with folks that have been in the livestock business for a long time this is an ongoing problem. One thing that we do need to remember is that when we buy equipment and feed, we are at the mercy of the vendor...or are we? By joining together to make purchases we certainly can make the effort to 'shop around' and make it known that we are doing so and that a large buy will go to the best estimate. If we do it enough we might just be able to save a bit of change.

OMGP was originally formed by a group that wished to help one another. This ideal included the small as well as the large producer. I think that it is important that we return to this model of farmers working together for the good of all of us. I have been accused of writing 'hand holding' educational articles. I am guilty of this. I am the first to admit that my aim has always been and will continue to be targeted to those that love what they do as goat farmers and want to become better at what they do. This aim will also include the folks that want to start a herd and have little experience to go on. I was there not so long ago and have appreciated all of the help and encouragement that I have received from the members of OMGP. I am proud of all of us!

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