



SHOW SOLUTIONS

Can't I just buy the cheapest feed?

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The question that the title of this article asks is one that has been posed to show feed reps since the dawn of the show feed industry. The answer is a resounding **YES**, you could buy the cheapest feed. Feed costs can and do represent a significant expenditure when raising a project — but at the same time, there are many factors that go into feed costs.

1. Price per bag: Do not get caught up in the price per bag. All that price per bag consists of is a figure. What may be less expensive at first blush may cost you more in the long run. Livestock projects were designed to teach you the basic economic factors of livestock production, and this includes feed efficiency and average daily gain. The motto is generally true: You get what you pay for. Let's look at \$10-per-bag feed versus \$13-per-bag feed. Feed conversion is a very important part of livestock production. If you gain 230 pounds from start to finish on your pig project and you convert at a rate of 4 pounds of feed to 1 pound of gain, that means that 920 pounds of feed at \$10 per bag equals \$184 in feed costs. If you feed the \$13-per-bag feed and you convert at a rate of 3 pounds of feed to 1 pound of gain, that means that 690 pounds of feed equates to \$179.40 per pig in feed costs. Without weighing and recording your feed usage and knowing your gain, you are totally in the dark as to the true feed costs. How many people truly know the feed conversion numbers for their animals? The answer is less than 10 in 100. Very few people keep records of weighing their feed and weighing their animals that would be detailed enough to allow them to determine a figure on this. People who sell based on price do not sell based on features and benefits. There is more to being the cheapest than simply price per bag.

2. Comparing feed tags: It's not really what is on the tag; it's what is in the bag. Let's look at a 16% show feed. The \$10-per-bag stuff is 16% protein. It consists of 700 pounds of 48% soybean meal and 1,300 pounds of sticks and mud. The tag says 16%* protein, but how much good does this feed do you? The \$13-per-bag feed has 200 pounds of 25% protein premix in it, 375 pounds of 47.5% soybean meal and 1,425 pounds of corn in it for a 16% protein. Which do you think the pig is going to do better on? **IT'S NOT WHAT'S ON THE TAG BUT WHAT'S IN THE BAG!** Ask questions of your feed supplier, such as: What is included in the feed that will keep my pigs on the feed? What do you have in the feed to build immunity? What ingredients in your feed will help with feed conversion and average daily gain? Again, **DON'T FALL INTO THE TRAP OF PRICE PER BAG.**

3. Buying a good-feeding project: This may be one of the most critical decisions that you make for your project. So many factors go into making a good-feeding project. Appetite is the first thing you should look for, as it equates to pig health. Give me a pig that will eat, and I will be able to manipulate that pig as I need to, as long as he has the genetic potential. Give me a pig that will not eat, and I cannot do anything. Remember: Your selection of a project is like getting married. You are married to that project for the year.

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Things such as the right conformation, the right size, the health status and the genetic makeup of the pig all are factors to be considered. The intangible factor is the attitude of the project. High-stress animals are generally not good feeders, so this needs to be included in your considerations when selecting your project. **DO YOUR HOMEWORK.** Do not buy based solely on internet pictures; go to the farm, ask questions and see with your own eyes that your project ticks the boxes of a good feeding project. Once again, correct size, correct conformation, genetic makeup, health status, appetite and attitude are the key factors when selecting a project.

4. Feed additives because they are a necessity: Don't feed a supplement because the grand champion at your state fair was feeding it; feed it because it's what YOUR project needs. Let's face facts: Feed additives can be the most expensive expenditure of your feed bill if you let them. Only purchase additives that enhance your project. Become a student of the game — know which additive you need to feed when and how your animal responds to that additive. Pigs that are phenotypically correct require fewer feed additives, so spending a little more on the right pig and a little less on feed additives may be what you need to do.

5. Become a good manager of your project: Doing the little things at the right time, not procrastinating and treating your project as you would want to be treated will help lower your feed costs. Vaccinations, worming, the correct environment and biosecurity are all are factors in reducing feed costs. You cannot be a knucklehead and ignore this part of management. More money is spent on not taking care of the little things — which turn into big things — than any feed costs.

In conclusion, **YOU CAN FEED THE CHEAPEST FEED.** The cheapest feed ultimately boils down to the best diet, coupled with the best selection of your project, the best management of your project and becoming a student of the game — and realizing what the true costs are, helping you come to the conclusion that **IT'S NOT JUST COST PER BAG.**

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