

11.0 Animal Nutrition

Swaziland has what appears to be a thriving animal feed milling industry. There are currently three animal feed milling companies in the country which are for logistical reasons situated in the Matsapha industrial area, with depots and other retail outlets distributed in the out of town farming communities around the country. There are also imports of animal feed from companies in neighbouring South Africa, that are sold through farm input retail stores in the country.



Feed and nutrition of animals are important aspects of animal farming since the quality of feed determines whether or not the animals grow and produce at an economically efficient level as well as produce the desired quality of products. From a business aspect, animal feed is generally accepted to account for approximately 70% of the total variable costs of an animal farm. It is therefore of paramount importance for both the cost and quality of the feed to be conducive for a biologically and economically efficient production system. The costs of animal feeds have been increasing, sometimes for a couple of times within a calendar year and by so doing increasing the costs at which animal farmers are able to produce a unit of animal products.

Inflation, increasing fuel and electricity costs are constantly driving up the costs of farming, making it imperative for farmers to find more efficient systems through which to produce animals and their products. The increase in environmental consciousness has led to some countries such as the USA seeking for sources



of fuel alternative to petroleum products. This has meant that some of the maize grain (a primary ingredient in animal feed, especially in monogastric animals) is now increasingly being diverted into fuel ethanol production concomitant to the established spirit alcohol production. This decreased grain availability coupled with droughts and floods further increase the demand and subsequently the unit cost of maize grain. Most of the ingredients used in formulation and mixing of animal feed are imported from abroad (primarily the USA and South American countries) and are normally traded in American

Dollars. The Dollar/Rand exchange rate also influences the cost of feed ingredients and hence the cost of feeds. Other contributing factors are the transcontinental ocean shipment, land storage, the terrestrial transportation costs, import taxation of the feed ingredients and finally the costs of mixing and packaging of the feed.

The profitable solution that some farmers use is highly intensive production systems that optimise the biological performance of the animals while striving for the maximisation of production economic efficiency. These solutions are feasible in developed countries in which the farmers farm intensively in large farming operations (exploiting economies of scale) and also receive farming subsidies from their governments. Farmers in developing countries are battling to attain economic efficiency without subsidies.

