

# Alternatives to Pellets:



## Part 3 - Putting it all together

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Ruminant Nutrition

**S**uggestions made in this series not only give producers more control over their animals' nutrition, they can also save them money. This is achieved through both lower feed costs and lower veterinary bills. Reducing mineral excesses and obesity, and restricting protein and energy supplements to lactating females and any that are underweight should lead to healthier and more productive alpacas.

The basics, as covered in the first article in this series, include:

- Regular body scoring, a minimum of two times a year, but preferably more often. Awareness of condition is crucial for making feeding decisions.
- Weaning males off pellets and other bagged supplement except minerals.
- Use of a locally sold mineral mix rather than expensive online purchases.
- Daily and preventive use of probiotics. Probiotics can help keep animals healthy despite daily and extreme stress and lower vet bills. Animals also make more efficient use of feed.

A protein/energy supplement can be formulated a variety of ways, depending on producer confidence:

- By a local feed mill with computerized formulation. Just tell them which ingredients you wish to include and the protein level. In this case, 15% CP (crude protein). Note, not all mills carry all ingredients; you may have to shop around. A minimum of 500 to a 1000 pounds is usually required. All you need is mixing, no pelleting.
- By the producer with the aid of a simple spreadsheet program such as Excel, as discussed in the second article in this series.
- The simplest method, and a good place to start, involves the use of just one ingredient: either rolled or crimped oats. This grain is high in both protein and energy, and can be used to replace expensive pellets. Other ingredients can be mixed with it, but be prepared to be surprised: Oats, supplemented with a locally purchased mineral mix (available free-choice) may be sufficient. Oats contain more energy than most pelleted feeds, so a smaller amount may need to be fed to maintain ideal weight. Always use body scoring to tell you how your feeding system is working. Although the price tag for a bag of crimped oats seems similar to many pelleted feeds, it is actually cheaper to use, especially if following the above guidelines.

Feeding of any home - or mill-formulated supplement should be tightly controlled, especially until the producer is comfortable with the condition of their animals on that feed. Do not expect that any protein/energy supplement will have the same impact as commercial pellets. Pelleted supplements contain vitamins, minerals, and preservatives, which dilutes the energy value. Always body score prior to delivery and toward the end of lactation. These are crucial times since lactation is a major energy drain. It is difficult for a lactating alpaca to gain weight during this time.

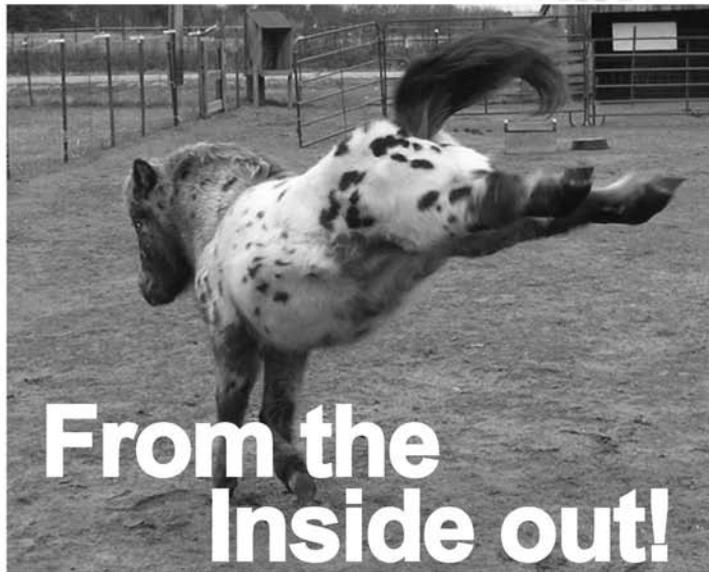
Although lactating females are often also pregnant, the fetus is still small and demands for hypertrophy are low. Weight gain is best accomplished after weaning and before the fetus enlarges.

Microorganisms not only digest feed, they are a significant part of the immune response. Stress can kill microbes, whether directly (as in lower feed intake), or indirectly (by redirection of energy to the muscles,

and away from the gastrointestinal tract). An animal with a weakened immune response is vulnerable to infection. Vet visits can be very expensive, avoid or minimize them with the regular use of probiotics.

A comprehensive program that includes body scoring, limited use of a protein/energy source, a locally procured mineral mix, and probiotics can keep animals healthy and save money. This system offers three levels of producer involvement in diet formulation. Very little information is out there regarding do-it-yourself alpaca feeding. Hopefully the information in these articles will help get you started. For more information contact Lark Burnham at [lark@natures-way.com](mailto:lark@natures-way.com) for more information.

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