



The Feed Cost Playbook

Small-flock numbers that change decisions - cost per egg, waste, laying rate and margin.

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Companion tool: the free Cost per Egg Calculator at fynbrex.com/cost-per-egg-calculator/

The Feed Cost Playbook

How to bring down what each egg costs you to produce — and, just as importantly, how to tell which change is actually worth making. Feed is usually the largest single cost in a small laying flock — the FAO estimates it at [about 75% of the cost of producing eggs](#). That makes it the obvious place to look, but it is also where a lot of effort gets wasted, because most of the ideas people try are hard to measure and hard to compare. This guide sets out the levers that genuinely move your cost per egg, in the order worth trying them, with the arithmetic shown so you can put your own numbers in. It pairs with [the cost per egg calculator](#). Work out your figure there first, then use this page to decide what to change.

Start with the one number that matters

Cost per egg is the number worth keeping an eye on, because it lets you test any change against a single figure. Cost per tonne tells you what feed costs. Cost per egg tells you what feed costs *you*, for the eggs you actually collect.

Take a simple example. Feed is £400 a tonne, and each hen eats 125 grams a day.

- 125 grams at £400 a tonne is **5p per bird per day**.
- Over a week that is **35p per bird**.
- If that hen lays five eggs a week, feed costs you **7p per egg**.

That is the whole calculation. Everything else in this guide is a way of changing one of those three numbers: the price you pay, the amount each bird eats, or the number of eggs you get.

Feed is most of the cost, but waste is the cheapest thing to fix

The gap between what you buy and what the birds actually eat is the most common source of unnecessary cost on a small holding, and it is usually the quickest to reduce. It does not require a new supplier, a new ration or any money at all.

Suppose each hen only needs 125 grams to produce what she is producing, but 140 grams a day is disappearing. That is 12% more feed than the eggs justify. On 200 birds the shortfall is 3 kilograms a day. At £400 a tonne — 40p a kilogram — that is **£1.20 a day, or roughly £440 a year**, spent on nothing.

The usual places it goes:

- **Spillage.** Feeders set too low, or filled so full that birds rake feed onto the ground while looking for the pieces they prefer.
- **Wild birds and rodents.** A rat population living off your feed can be a serious monthly cost, and it rarely announces itself.
- **Moisture and spoilage.** Feed left open, or stored where it takes on damp, is both wasted and a health risk.
- **Overfeeding.** Ad-lib feeders in a small flock often deliver more than the birds need, particularly once they are fully grown.

None of that costs anything to check and most of it costs very little to fix. Do this before you look at anything else on the page.

Laying rate moves cost per egg more than feed price does

This is the part most people miss. The feed a hen eats does not drop just because she stops laying — so a laying dip spreads the same cost over fewer eggs, and cost per egg rises quickly.

Using the same 35p per bird per week:

- At **6 eggs** a week, feed costs **5.8p per egg**.
- At **5 eggs** a week, feed costs **7p per egg**.
- At **4 eggs** a week, feed costs **8.8p per egg** — a quarter more per egg than at five.

Now compare that with shopping around. Knocking 5% off your feed price takes your 7p down to about 6.7p, a saving of roughly a third of a penny per egg. A laying dip from five eggs to four adds 1.8p per egg. In other words, **a laying rate problem is worth several times more than a feed price problem** at this scale, and it is far more common.

Laying rate is not really a feed cost question at all. It responds to light — especially day length through winter — to the age of the birds, to water availability, to stress and handling, to disease, and to whether the ration is genuinely balanced for laying rather than just cheaper per tonne. If your numbers have drifted, look there before you go shopping for a better price on layers' pellets.

What buying in bulk actually changes

If your feed is £400 a tonne in 25 kilogram bags and £370 a tonne in a half-tonne bulk bag, the bulk price is 7.5% cheaper. On a flock of 200 birds eating 25 kilograms a day, you get through about 9.1 tonnes a year, so the saving is **roughly £270 a year**. That is real money for a small flock.

It is also where people get it wrong, because bulk only pays while three things hold:

- **You can store it properly.** Dry, sealed, off the floor, and out of reach of vermin. A pallet of feed in a damp shed is a much bigger loss than the £30 a tonne you saved.
- **You turn it over faster than it degrades.** Feed that sits through a warm spell loses quality, and mouldy feed is not a saving at any price.
- **Your flock is big enough.** Below a certain number of birds, a bulk order simply ages faster than you can feed it. That is the point where bulk stops helping, and it depends on your storage and your climate, not on a rule of thumb.

The honest test is turnover: if you cannot use the batch well before it starts to go off, you are buying a discount on something you will not get full value from.

Home mixing and alternative rations

Mixing your own ration can cut cost per tonne, but it only reliably cuts cost per egg if you can get consistent, cheap local ingredients and balance the ration properly — energy, protein and calcium, along with the amino acids that actually drive laying. Getting that wrong does not usually show up immediately. It shows up as birds eating more, laying less, or both.

The trap is comparing the wrong numbers. A home mix that saves you £40 a tonne but adds 8% to what each bird eats has not saved you anything, and if the laying rate drops by even a few per cent over the cycle it has cost you money.

So judge it the same way you judge everything else here: over a full cycle, on cost per egg, with the rest of your management held steady. If you change the ration and something else at the same time, you will never know which one did the work.

Cost per dozen, price per dozen, and where margin really comes from

It helps to see cost per egg and margin per dozen side by side, because they respond very differently to effort.

At 7p per egg, your cost per dozen is 84p. Say you make a genuine 0.5p improvement in cost per egg — a real result, not a guess. That takes cost per dozen down to 78p, so **you gain 6p of margin per dozen**.

Now compare a price change. Moving your selling price from £2.50 to £2.70 a dozen adds **20p of margin per dozen**, more than three times as much, for a decision you can make this afternoon.

That comparison is worth sitting with, but it is not an argument for ignoring costs. Cost per egg has a floor — it cannot go below zero — and it is limited by how good you get at the practical work. Price is limited by what your customers will pay, which is a real ceiling of its own. Volume, price and cost all move margin, and the mistake is to spend all your attention on the hardest one to change just because it feels like the most serious.

What you should stop doing is watching cost alone. **Track margin per dozen.** A week where costs fell but the laying rate fell further is not a good week, and a cost-only spreadsheet will not tell you that.

The weekly record sheet

None of the above works without a record. Fill it in on the same day each week, so the weeks are comparable. Print this page - or grab the standalone sheet at fynbrex.com/record-sheet/

Week	Eggs collected	Feed used (kg)	Feed cost	Other costs	Total cost	Cost per egg	Price per dozen	Margin
Week 1	1,000	175	£70.00	£30.00	£100.00	10.0p	£2.50	£108.33
Week 2								
Week 3								
Week 4								
Week 5								
Week 6								
Week 7								
Week 8								
Week 9								
Week 10								
Week 11								
Week 12								

Week 1 is an illustrative example only (flock of 200 hens, feed at £400 a tonne, other costs £30 a week). Replace every figure with your own.

None of the above works without a record. This is the one thing you can do today that makes every future decision easier, and it takes a few minutes a week. Fill it in on the same day each week, so the weeks are comparable.

Week 4 in that example is the one to study. Feed cost fell, which looks like progress — but the eggs fell further, so cost per egg was the worst of the four weeks and margin dropped by more than £20. A cost-only record would have hidden that completely.

The sheet prints fine on A4, and it works just as well copied into a notebook by hand with the same columns. What matters is that the columns exist and get filled in, not where.

What not to waste time on

A few things that look productive and generally are not:

- **Switching brands on price per tonne alone.** Compare cost per egg over a full cycle. A cheaper feed that the birds eat more of is not cheaper.
- **Chasing tiny formulation or additive changes you cannot measure.** If you cannot see the effect in your own records, you cannot claim it worked.
- **Buying software before you have four weeks of written records.** A spreadsheet, or this sheet, will carry you a long way first.
- **Optimising labour, housing or equipment while feed is most of your cost.** Those changes can matter, but they rarely pay back as quickly as fixing waste.
- **Acting on a supplement or additive recommendation with no numbers behind it.** Feed is the dominant cost, and it is also the easiest place to spend money that does not come back.

If you want to go further, the practical groundwork is in [farm records](#) — what to write down and how to keep it usable — and in [feed and nutrition](#), which covers ration basics for small flocks. Between them they cover the two things this guide depends on: a habit of recording, and a ration you understand.

Sources for the figures

Two kinds of number appear on this page. The arithmetic examples are round numbers chosen to make the sums easy, and they are labelled as examples. The published ranges are these:

- **Feed is about 75% of the cost of producing eggs** — FAO, [Egg production](#), in *Egg marketing: A guide for the production and sale of eggs* (FAO Agricultural Services Bulletin 150).
- **A laying hen eats 100–150 g a day** in small and backyard flocks — Alabama Cooperative Extension System, [Feeding the Laying Hen](#), 2022.
- **100–105 g a day once mature, at a body weight of 1,700–1,800 g**, for a modern brown-egg hybrid — Poultry Hub Australia, [Nutrient requirements of egg laying chickens](#).
- **A small backyard flock averages 200–240 eggs a hen a year** — UF/IFAS Extension, [Raising Backyard Chickens for Eggs](#), publication AN239.
- **200–300 eggs a year** for UK hens — RSPCA, [Egg laying hens in UK farming](#).
- **208 eggs a year, a weekly rate of four**, for a typical bird — FAO, [Egg production](#).
- **Three or four eggs a week** for retired commercial hens, which many UK flocks are — British Hen Welfare Trust, [How many eggs a day does a hen lay](#).
- **100–120 g a day for an average adult hen** (UK) — British Hen Welfare Trust, [Feeding your hens](#).

The cost per egg calculator starts from 120 g of feed and 4.2 eggs a bird a week, both chosen to sit near the centre of the ranges above rather than at the flattering end of them. Feed prices, bag sizes, flock sizes and laying rates in the worked examples are illustrative rather than quoted from a supplier or a trial. Your own records beat everything above.

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