

## Knowing How to Compare Apples to Oranges Is Critical

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Feedback from previous articles is a pleasure to receive. Recently a reader wrote, "Your recent article 'Multiple-use units replace farm truck,' was very interesting but your facts are questionable."

The reader questioned the statement, "Driving the diesel pickup 18,000 miles per year would be the same as 171 hours per year . . ."

The reader said, "I believe you were comparing apples and oranges. I think if you said, 'Driving the diesel pickup 18000 miles per year would cost \$6660; this is equivalent to using the truck 171 hours per year ( $\$15.98 \times 171 = \$6660$ ), your statement would have been more understandable.'"

I particularly appreciated the reference to apples and oranges, a common phrase many of us understand, but sometime fail to fully appreciate. In that particular article, the concept of comparing one set of data expressed in miles (apples) and another set of data expressed in hours (oranges) was a challenge. The expansion of the actual calculations enhanced the concept.

I could not help but wonder how often beef producers get caught making the same mistake: talking about one thing, but really using descriptive numbers of very little value. One common example of this is how producers interchange the terms average daily gain (apple) and weight per day of age (orange).

By definition, average daily gain (apple) means the amount of weight a calf gains within a specified time frame. The calf's average daily gain is calculated by subtracting the starting weight from the final weight and dividing the difference by the number of days between the two weights.

At the NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center, the 2002 calf crop had an average daily gain (apple) of 2.11 pounds over the summer. Weight per day of age (orange) is different. This weight represents what a calf weighs on any given day, divided by the calf's age. The Center's 2002 calf crop had a weight per day of age of 2.57 pounds last year.

Both terms seem very similar, but when comparing to a

benchmark value, the terms need to be clearly defined and you need to know which one you are talking about.

Typical values of North Dakota calves in the 2002 CHAPS program for average daily gain were 2.28 pounds, while weight per day of age was 2.83 pounds. The two values differ by more than half a pound. I would not want to buy a set of calves anticipating 2.8 pounds of gain per day, then discover that I had been presented with a figure representing weight per day of age instead.

Apples and oranges are just the beginning. They aren't nearly as difficult as the grapefruit. For our beef discussions, let's say the grapefruit represents weight. So, the neighbor says his calves weigh 600 pounds. What does that mean? Are they big-, little- or medium-framed calves? Are they thin-, average- or heavy-conditioned? You need to understand the terms that describe these variables to appropriately describe a set of calves

Frame score is one of those terms. Based on the average height at the hips at a set age, calves can be adequately described as light-framed, medium-framed or large-framed. Again, are we talking grapes, tangerines and grapefruit?

If I was filling a yard with calves, especially at today's prices, I would want to know exactly what I was getting, because frame directly impacts average daily gain or weight per day of age.

Small-framed steers (grapes) tend to finish around 900 pounds, medium-framed steers (tangerines) tend to finish around 1,100 pounds, and large-framed steers (grapefruit) tend finish in excess of 1,300 pounds. So, get to know your fruit and let's talk so we can communicate.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com). For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.com](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0167.

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## Get to Know Your Fruit Types

Calf Frame Score	Fruit Type	Projected Finish Weight
Small	Grape	900 lbs.
Medium	Tangerine	1,100 lbs.
Large	Grapefruit	1,300 lbs.