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## **I Goofed and Compared Apples to Oranges** **John Paterson, Extension Beef Specialist and Editor**

In last week's Prime Cuts, I goofed by comparing apples to oranges. I gave readers the web address of a really helpful program from the University of Nebraska which would quickly compare the cost of protein and energy (TDN) for different feedstuffs (<http://westcentral.unl.edu/agecon/>). I mistakenly compared three hays **AND** a commercial supplement that I would consider feeding to a cow herd. Two of my colleagues took exception to me comparing grass and/or legume hays to a commercial supplement. They are right. I shouldn't have done this (I knew better) because of the reasons discussed below. I did not intend to confuse the reader. The following comments from beef nutritionists Kim Hager and Butch Whitman set me straight.

JP,

I read and thoroughly enjoy the Prime Cuts newsletter. I consider it to be a valuable resource to the Montana Beef Industry, as well as the Agribusiness sector that serves the beef industry.

With that said I feel that I have to take exception with some of the content of the February 29th edition pertaining to the "Feed Cost Calculator". I think this is a good tool to help producers evaluate the true fed cost of feedstuff nutrients, but I do not think that one can lump "Commercial Supplement" into the feedstuff category. Range cattle supplements are generally designed to be fed at very low levels (Free-Choice Mineral - 2 to 4 oz/hd/day or Cake - 1 to 4 lb/hd/day) to fulfill diet nutrient deficiencies such as protein, vitamins, minerals, antibiotics, etc. Most times these supplements are used as the only way to fulfill these deficiencies and maintain proper digestion and assure adequate forage intake.

Again I want to reiterate that I think the "Feed Cost Calculator" is a worthwhile tool, but if "Commercial Supplement" is used as one of the feedstuffs, the end result and final calculations would be incomplete and grossly inaccurate.

Thanks,

*Kim*

Kim R. Hager, MS, PAS  
Beef Nutritionist CHS Nutrition  
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John,

I think it is essential that this calculator be accompanied by guidelines for first deciding what type of supplement to consider (based on animal nutrient requirements and forage quality). Then after the user is in the right ball park, this calculator can have value in calculating per unit costs among similar types of supplements. Without guidelines, this simple calculator could do more harm than good. It perpetuates the misconception that all energy and protein sources are alike. It ignores the form of energy, source of protein, or partitioning of protein (continued next page).

It says nothing about associative effects of feeds or the effect of feed processing. Without guidelines, people are led to believe choosing a supplement is as simple as calculating the cost per unit of nutrient. When supplementing energy on range, they might conclude that corn has the same value as wheat midds or corn gluten feed. When supplementing protein, they might conclude that three pounds of a 10% protein is equivalent to 1 pound of a 30% protein.

I think at least provide a foot note:  
**"The simple calculation of cost per unit of nutrient does not take into account the form of energy, source or digestibility of protein, associative effects of feeds or the effect of feed processing"**. Then if people at least ask "what does all of that mean" or "how can you account for all of that in a simple calculator" we will at least have opened the door for more learning.

Best regards,

*Butch*

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