

I know that none of us is as precise in language as we would like to be. We tend to generalize according to our own backgrounds, and we are more adept at giving correct designations to the things with which we are most familiar. And, there are other times when we know that what we are saying is not technically precise, but it is "what we call it here." An example is "popple." Anyone who has grown up in our area calls an aspen or poplar tree a "popple." Most of us would feel strange saying anything else. For the same reason, a "tree frog" will always be a "tree toad" to me.

I often wonder what people think as they drive or walk through an area. When they look at the woods, do they automatically name--at least, mentally-- what they see? I have heard folks who have lived here all their lives call all evergreen trees "pines." This has puzzled me. Spruce trees of various sorts, balsam firs, white, red, and jack pines, hemlocks, cedars, and the larch or tamarack that loses its needles--they are very different from each other. Just as are maples, birch, ash--which we are unfortunately losing to the emerald ash borer now--, beech, etc.

We all have different deficiencies in this way. We are influenced by our childhood experiences, our interests, the way we live our lives, and by the work we do. Living in a rural area, though, it would be nice if people would educate themselves a little in some important areas.

When a non-farmer looks at cattle, he or she is apt to see "cows." This seems wrong to those of us who have been around these animals all our lives. We see cows, sometimes, too, but we understand that they are "mother cattle." We see steers, bulls, heifers, and calves. "Steers" are bulls that have been castrated. If we are looking at a mixed herd, we automatically think "cattle."

We sell freezer beef. Many customers will ask for a quarter or half of a "cow." We don't sell cows as freezer beef. We sell steers and an occasional heifer. It sounds better if they say they want "a quarter of a beef."

We raise sheep, too. Oddly enough, the same people who call all cattle "cows" refer to all sheep as "lambs." The word "sheep" is like "cattle" in that it refers to the whole flock. In that bunch of sheep might

be ewes, rams (called bucks in our area), and lambs, some of which might be wethers and some ewe lambs. "Wethers" are buck lambs that have been castrated.

I am sure that I am as guilty as anyone else in speaking of something that is unfamiliar to me. But, I am willing to learn and to correct my terminology if at all possible.

Finally, something that particularly grates on us here is any of the common references to "manure." This product of animal digestion is a valuable resource in growing pasture, hay, and food crops. Composted, it becomes a fresh-smelling component of fertile soil. Manure is best called just that. At least, when you come to our farm, remember--don't say "poop" or the "s-word" or the "c-word." We might even invite you back.