

AGE DETERMINATION IN BEEF CATTLE

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Beef cattle depend on forages as their major source of nutrients. To be able to graze and physically break the roughage down into small particles, the animal's teeth must be in good condition. The age of a beef animal has a direct effect on the animal's teeth and subsequent productivity.

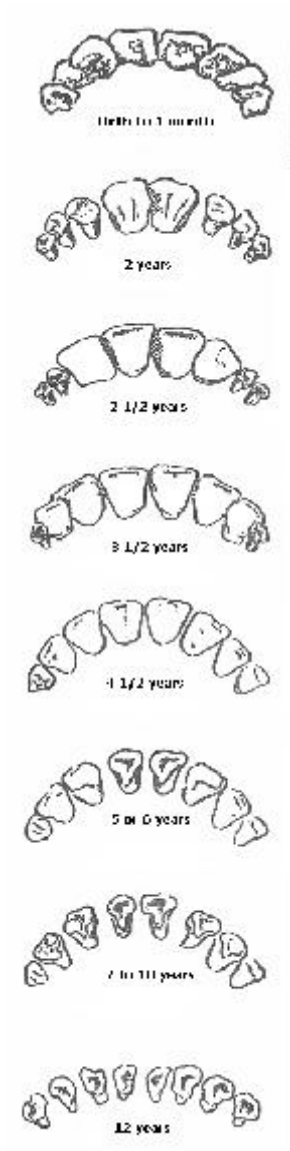
Being able to estimate an animal's age is an important factor in making management decisions. The animal's teeth are generally used as an indicator of age when actual birth dates are not available.

The time of eruption and the amount of wear are the major factors used to estimate age.

The entire set of eight temporary incisors appear in the calf by 1 month of age. The first two central incisors are replaced with permanent teeth by 2 years of age. By 3 years, the first intermediates (one of each side) are fully developed. At 4 years, the second set of intermediates are present. By the age of 5 years the animal usually has a full set of incisors with the corners fully developed.

Wearing of the teeth starts to become quite noticeable by the age of 5. Considerable wear is found at 7 to 10 years of age. By age 12 the arch in the animal's mouth has disappeared and the teeth become triangular. Progressive wearing to stubs is also quite noticeable.

A graphic description of the teeth at various ages follows:



Adapted from the Stockman's Handbook, 4th edition, 1970, The Interstate printers and Publishers, Inc., Danville, IL