

Animal Science

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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 animals 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 one month of age. The first two central incisors are replaced with permanent teeth by two years of age. By three years the first intermediates (one of each side of the pincers) are fully developed. At four years the second set of intermediates are present. By the age of five years the animals 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 five. Considerable wear is found at seven to ten years of age. By age twelve 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 is presented on the back of this card.

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Additional information on beef cattle nutrition can be obtained by contacting your local Agricultural Extension Service Office or from the Extension Animal Science Home Page: www.utextension.utk.edu/ansci

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