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How to Tell

Calf Age

by the Teeth

"Steers or market heifers having the permanent central incisor teeth up in wear are not eligible. Such cattle are considered as having reached an age beyond that consistent with the intent and purposes of this show."

The above rule was applied at the Ak-Sar-Ben 4-H Club Stock Show beginning with 1949. Project rules and show rules may vary in some respects, but in exhibition competition it is desirable to have some practical means of determining the age of cattle in order to place exhibitors on common ground. The right of each show to make its rules is not questioned. Junior exhibitors feeding range-bred calves usually are unable to know the birthdates of the animals. The high percentage of branded calves in the junior exhibits makes it desirable to have some method of determining eligibility of cattle with respect to age. This leaflet is intended to give some help in the age determination.

Extension Service, University of Nebraska College of
Agriculture, and U. S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating
W. V. Lambert, Director

Figure 1.—Age 10 months. A calf mouth showing external face of the incisor teeth.

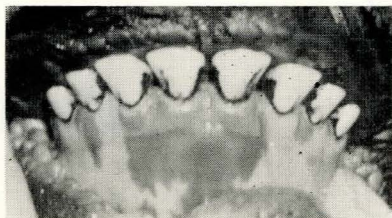


Figure 2.—Age 14 months. External face of the incisor teeth. Note spreading between the two central incisor teeth to make room for the large permanent incisors when they appear.

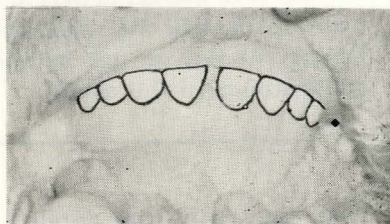
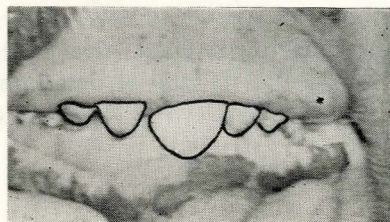


Figure 3.—Age 19 months. External face of the incisor teeth. Note one permanent incisor tooth has erupted. Incisors are commonly called pinchers.



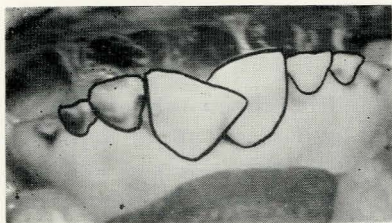


Figure 4.—Age 20 months. The central incisors are well up but note that the jaw has not provided enough space for them. Progress is slower from this stage until both teeth are in place with the inside corners well up.

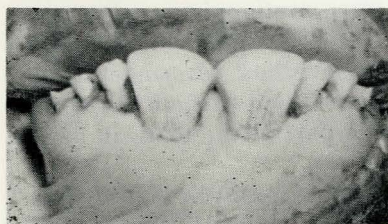


Figure 5.—Age 22 months. The central incisors, or pinchers, are well up with the inside corners almost in line. This mouth is very close to the stage where the tooth rule would make the animal ineligible.

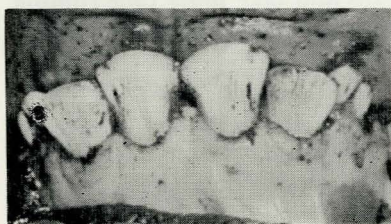


Figure 6.—Age 27 months. The mouth shows the animal plainly too old under the rule. After the central incisors are in place, the intermediates come in faster, but are slower getting up in wear.

The foregoing illustrations were taken from the mouths of animals of three different breeds representing both sexes, all of recorded birthdates. While a two-year-old mouth may vary—rarely as much as three months—the teeth tell quite an accurate story. Definitely, the burden of proof should rest with the exhibitor in case of doubt.

Cattle have eight incisor teeth, all in the lower jaw. At birth two or more of these are present but all eight will have appeared by the end of the first month. As the animal approaches two years of age the center pair of incisors are shed. The time the mouth shows no central incisors is very short. The permanent incisors are much larger than the temporary teeth so there may be some overlapping as they come in. They usually come in at an angle with the upper outside corner of the tooth higher. The gums swell somewhat, covering the permanent incisor until it is partially in place. Then as the tooth erupts, the gum recedes rapidly, showing a large part of the tooth in a very short time.

It is essential that it be understood what is meant by "up in wear." For a two-year-old mouth, this should mean that the teeth are grown into place with both corners of each tooth up in a line straight across the top of all teeth. The permanent teeth may be showing for a few months before this occurs, for the jaw must make room for the much larger permanent teeth. The first intermediates—the second pair of incisors—show within the next six months and take more time coming into wear. But if they show at all there is no doubt that the two year age has been passed.