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How to tell the age of goats

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The age of a goat can be estimated from its teeth. As with sheep, the permanent incisors of goats erupt at different times during their lifespan, and these times can vary between individual animals. A knowledge of these different time intervals provides the basis for estimating age.*

As with all ruminant animals, goats only have front incisor teeth on the lower jaw, and goats get two sets of teeth during their life. The first, often called milk teeth, are replaced progressively from the centre by larger, permanent teeth. The central teeth erupt first as a pair, then the next pair, one each side of the central teeth until the animal has eight permanent teeth.

In the sheep industry, age is often described as milk tooth, two-tooth, four tooth, six-tooth or full mouth. This description assumes that people know the approximate age of animals when the various teeth erupt.

When buying stock, a check of their teeth will give an idea of their age, and, as a result, their likely useful life. Age and thus teeth are also important in classifying carcasses. As animals become older their meat becomes progressively darker in colour and less tender. Within the full mouth category, animals are sometimes described as:

- (a) “fresh full mouths”, i.e., the corner teeth have erupted recently and show no signs of wear or age-induced discolouration.
- (b) “sound mouthed”, i.e., all eight teeth are intact, showing some wear but are still firmly in place.
- (c) “broken mouthed”, which describes animals that have lost some or all of their permanent teeth. The age at which animals become broken mouthed varies, mainly due to environmental factors such as the type and quantity of feed available.
- (d) “gummy”, i.e., all teeth are either broken, worn down to the gums or fallen out. A gummy animal is usually old, and may have difficulty in maintaining its condition if feed conditions are hard.

DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of review (November 2003.) However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Agriculture or the user's independent adviser.

It is important to be able to estimate the age of goats when selecting animals for slaughter, selecting replacement breeding stock and culling aged bucks and does.



* Dr Peter Holst and Mr Graham Denny made the observations to confirm the times of teeth eruption.

MOUTHING

Milk (kid) teeth—from birth up to 13 to 15 months—
not all milk teeth are fully erupted at birth.

2-tooth—2 permanent (central) teeth showing (plus 6
milk teeth)—erupt from 13 to 15 months of age.



4-tooth—4 permanent teeth showing—erupt from 18
to 21 months of age.

6 tooth—6 permanent teeth—erupt from 22 to 24
months of age.



Full mouth—8 permanent teeth—erupt from 27 to 32
months of age.

Gummy—all teeth broken, worn down to gums or
fallen out.

