How to tell the age of sheep and goats

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How to tell the age of Sheep and Goats using the teeth

Sheep and Goats are ideal small animals that can be raised by a family in a small-scale production system, especially in villages for meat and income. It is important that farmers have some knowledge of the basic management practices such as keeping the records of the age of animals. Age of an animal is important to the farmer for

› Selection and breeding.
› General management of the animals.

The way of estimating the age of an animal by observing the teeth and the pattern of eruption and its wearing condition can be useful for farmers. In situations where there are unreliable or no records kept, the farmer can tell or estimate the age of the animal by opening the mouth and observing its teeth. By observing the number and the type of teeth present and the wear of the teeth, a farmer can tell the approximate age of the animal.

Estimates of the age of eruption of the permanent incisors and indications of wear in these teeth for goats are as follows:

### Eruption of permanent incisors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Estimated Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st pair</td>
<td>15.0 (13.5 – 21.5) months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd pair</td>
<td>20.0 (19.0 – 25.0) months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd pair</td>
<td>24.5 (22.0 – 31.5) months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th pair</td>
<td>28.5 (26.0 – 31.5) months</td>
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### Wear of the incisors:

- Just started: 30.0 – 34.0 months.
- Table of tooth levelled: 42.0 – 48.0 months.
- Reduced in size: 66.0 – 72.0 months.
- Reduced to stubs, broken or absent: over 84.0 months.

Figure 1 - 6 is taken from Quartermain A. and Bhattacharyya N.K. 1988. FAO training manual on village based goat meat production in Asia.
There are 32 teeth altogether in an adult goat or sheep. Out of this total number of teeth, 8 incisor teeth are located in the lower front jaw of the animal. There are about 3 each of premolar and molar teeth that are located just behind the incisors in either side of the upper and lower jaw. The development of molar teeth in live animals is very difficult to see. However, it is an accurate indicator to estimate the age of an animal. It is easier to use the incisor teeth to tell the age of an animal although he or she may come across some difficulties. Otherwise the use of these teeth is the only practical method of estimating the approximate age of an animal.

The farmer with more experience with a particular breed of sheep or goat may judge the age of an animal less than a year by the growth of the deciduous incisors or the milk teeth. Normally it is possible to estimate the age of mature animals from the presence and wear of the first, second, third or fourth pair of permanent incisor teeth. These incisors replace the milk teeth in sequence starting from the central pair and working outwards to the fourth pair. Figure 1-6 shows the incisor teeth of the lower jaw.
Figure 1.0: Kid at birth with milk teeth just cutting.

Figure 2.0: Kid at 1 year of age with full complement of milk teeth.

Figure 3.0: Young goat at 15 months of age showing 2 permanent teeth.

Figure 4.0: Goat at 20 months of age with second pair of permanent teeth.