What’s the Score: Sheep

BODY CONDITION SCORING (BCS) GUIDE

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Page 2: Labelled illustration of a Sheep.

Page 3: Cross section of the loin area.

Page 4: Overview of all the body condition scores for a Sheep. Each body condition score will have an illustration to match and describe what you should be looking for in determining the body condition score of your animals.
LABELLED ILLUSTRATION OF A SHEEP
Illustration of a Sheep with a BCS score of 2.
BODY CONDITION SCORING OF SHEEP

Throughout the production cycle, sheep producers must know whether or not their sheep are in condition (too thin, too fat, or just right) for the stage of production: breeding, late pregnancy, lactation.

Weight at a given stage of production is the good indicator, but as there is a wide variation in mature size between individuals and breeds, it is extremely difficult to use weight to determine proper condition. Body condition scoring describes the condition of a sheep, is convenient, and is much more accurate than a simple eye appraisal.

A body condition score estimates condition of muscling and fat development. Scoring is based on feeling the level of muscling and fat deposition over and around the vertebrae in the loin region (Figures 1-3). In addition to the central spinal column, loin vertebrae have a vertical bone protrusion (spinous process) and a short horizontal protrusion on each side (transverse process). Both of these protrusions are felt and used to assess an individual body condition score.

**FIGURE 1**
Feel for the spine in the centre of the sheep’s back, behind its last rib and in front of its hip bone.

**FIGURE 2**
Feel for the tips of the transverse processes.

**FIGURE 3**
Feel for fullness of muscle and fat cover.
BODY CONDITION SCORES FOR SHEEP
Overview of all the body condition scores for Sheep

BCS 1

WHOLE BODY
- Emaciated
- Boney processes can be easily felt

SPINE
- Dorsal spinous processes are sharp and prominent
- Easily felt through skin

LOIN
- No fat cover
- Loin muscles very shallow

TRANSVERSE PROCESSES
- Transverse processes sharp
- Easy to pass fingers underneath them

BCS 2

WHOLE BODY
- Thin
- More difficult to feel between each process

SPINE
- Dorsal spinous processes still prominent, but not as sharp

LOIN
- Loin eye muscle fuller
- Virtually no fat cover

TRANSVERSE PROCESSES
- Transverse processes rounder on edges
- Slight pressure needed to push underneath them
**BCS 3**

**WHOLE BODY**
- Average

**SPINE**
- Spinous processes smoother and less prominent
- Some pressure required to feel between them

**LOIN**
- Loin muscle full, some fat cover

**TRANSVERSE PROCESSES**
- Transverse processes smooth
- Firm pressure needed to push fingers under edge

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**BCS 4**

**WHOLE BODY**
- Fat
- Fat accumulations over tail head

**SPINE**
- Considerable pressure needed to feel dorsal spinous processes

**LOIN**
- Loin eye muscle full with discernible fat cover

**TRANSVERSE PROCESSES**
- Transverse processes can’t be felt
BCS 5
WHOLE BODY
• Obese
• Fat pad over tail head
SPINE
• Dorsal spinous processes can’t be felt
• Depression often present where they would normally be felt
LOIN
• Loin eye muscle very full
• Thick covering of fat
TRANSVERSE PROCESSES
• Transverse processes can’t be felt

NOTE: There can be extreme differences between breeds when body condition scoring sheep. Some maternal breeds lay down a lot of internal fat, not detectable externally. Whereas, the more muscular, meat terminal breeds can appear to have better condition over the loin area than the less muscular breeds.