

# Condition Scoring: Sheep & Goats

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Body condition scores (BCS) have widely been used across species to monitor body fat coverage. BCS plays an integral role in nutritional management decisions.

Like dairy cattle, sheep and goats utilize a 5-point scale to evaluate BCS. A score of 1 indicates an animal that is emaciated and a score of 5 is an animal that is obese. Proper BCS is necessary for optimal production and animal longevity. Sheep and goats falling at either extreme have a higher incidence of pregnancy toxemia, dystocia, low milk production, decreased fertility, along with other health complications.

To accurately determine BCS, animals should be palpated. Visual evaluation alone can be deceiving. Sheep in full fleece can appear markedly larger than they actually are (likewise with thick-coated goats). When condition scoring there are three main areas to evaluate: the spinous process (how pronounced are the vertebrae), rib cage (how much of the rib cage can be seen/felt), and loin eye (degree of fat covering over the loin area).

Body Condition Scoring Table			
Score	Spinous Process	Rib Cage	Loin Eye
1	Look and feel sharp. Easy to identify	Easy to see, feel, and feel under (looks like a shelf)	No fat covering
2	Easy to identify but feel smooth	Smooth and more rounded.	Smooth, even fat cover
3	Smooth and rounded	Smooth, even feeling.	Smooth, even fat cover
4	Can feel spine with firm pressure, but no points felt	Individual ribs not apparent but can palpate indent between ribs	Thick fat covering
5	Smooth, spine cannot be felt	Ribs cannot be seen or felt.	Very thick fat covering. May appear lumpy or jiggly.

Consistency is key when it comes to BCS. Make sure you have the same person evaluating your animals to accurately track any changes.

Ideally, your sheep and goats should score at around a 3 for optimal performance. Thinner animals may struggle to conceive, have lower twinning rates, and suffer from pregnancy toxemia in late gestation. Heavier animals may struggle with performance efficiency as well as pregnancy toxemia. Trying to get markedly heavy or thin animals to appropriate weight can be very stressful on them and is not recommended near parturition. Monitoring BCS of your sheep and goats regularly will allow you to better target their nutritional needs before larger problems arise.