

Body Condition Scoring sheep

Body Condition Scoring (BCS) is a simple, effective and cheap management tool for all flock managers to assess the body reserves of adult sheep. BCS is a simple manual check to assess the amount of fat cover and muscle mass which can be scored between 1 (thin) and 5 (fat).

Why is it important?

Body condition is a good indicator of nutrition and health. By using BCS, farmers can adjust the flock's nutrition to optimise productivity and reduce health and welfare problems associated with lean or overfat sheep.

Managing sheep to target body condition through the production cycle can improve lambing and rearing percentages and reduce metabolic disorders. Research has shown that raising an ewe's BCS from 2 to 3.5 can increase fertility by up to 20% and can also ensure increased healthy lambs and a good ewe milk supply. When identifying lean ewes, it is worth investigating the cause as it may be a result of an underlying health issue; for example, infectious disease or lameness.



How often should ewes be body condition scored?

Ewes should be routinely body condition scored at key times of the production calendar including weaning, pre-tupping and pre-lambing. Recording BCS can help to keep track of the whole flock and how they fluctuate between and within years.

Don't forget the rams - aim for a fit ram between 3.5 and 4 at tupping so it is important to include BCS in the ram MOT at least 6 weeks before tupping.

How long does it take for ewes to change BCS?

It takes approximately 8 weeks for ewes to gain one BCS score as it equates to about 12% of liveweight. This is why it is important to BCS ewes at the key times of the year.

Ewes' target BCS at key times of the year:

Grazing condition	Target BCS		
	Tupping	Scanning	Lambing
Lowland	3.5	3.5	3
Upland	3	3	2.5
Hill	2.5	2.5	2

These targets are for ewes in those grazing conditions to manage scanning percentage. Hill ewes tupped in BCS 3.5 may produce more twins than wanted. Prolific ewes may need to be strategically managed at 2.5 to minimise the number of triplets or quads.

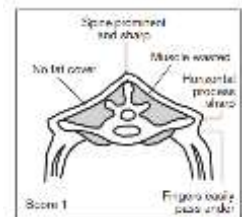
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How to BCS?

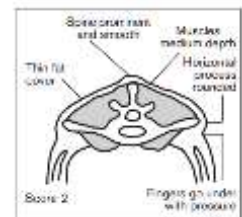
To BCS, feel along the spine and assess how much fat is between the loin muscles. The BCS of ewes are usually scored between 1 (thin) and 5 (fat) but some farmers will use half and quarter scores while others use 'fit' fat' 'thin' as a guide to determine management.



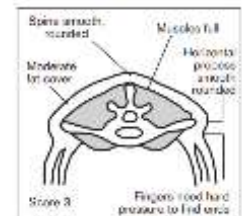
Score 1 – The vertical and horizontal processes are prominent and sharp. The fingers can be pushed easily below the horizontals and each process can be felt. The loin muscle is thin and with no fat cover.



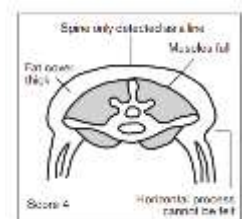
Score 2 – The vertical processes are prominent but smooth, individual processes being felt only as corrugations. The horizontal processes are smooth and rounded, but it is still possible to press the fingers under. The loin muscle is of moderate depth but with little fat cover.



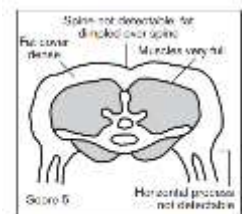
Score 3 – The vertical processes are smooth and rounded; the bone is only felt with pressure. The horizontal processes are also smooth and well covered; hard pressure with the fingers is needed to find the ends. The loin muscle is full, with a moderate fat cover.



Score 4 – The vertical processes are only detectable as a line; the ends of the horizontal processes cannot be felt. The loin muscles are full and have a thick covering of fat.



Score 5 – The vertical processes cannot be detected even with pressure; there is a dimple in the fat layers where the processes should be. The horizontal processes cannot be detected. The loin muscles are very full and covered with very thick fat.



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