



FACT SHEET

MARCH 2019

EWE BODY CONDITION SCORING (BCS)

Body condition scoring is a quick and easy low cost management tool to increase ewe productivity and flock profitability. Body condition scoring assesses the amount of body fat or condition by feeling the vertical (spine) and horizontal processes along the loin area as shown in the diagrams below. It is based on a scale of 1-5, 1 being very skinny and 5 being very fat.

TIMING AND TARGETS

There are three key times to body condition your flock:

1. Weaning
2. Pre tupping/pre-mating
3. Scanning

The target is to have all of your flock condition score 3 or better all year around.

SUGGESTED MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

BCS +3 ↑ - Pasture control and maintenance
- Follow lambs/light ewes

WEANING

BCS -3 ↓ - Preferentially feed, run with ewe lambs or rotate ahead of ewes
- Use a summer feed crop
- Cull repeat offenders
- If tight for feed, consider selling younger lighter ewes and keep older, heavy ewes

BCS +3 ↑ - Pasture control and maintenance

PRE-TUPPING

BCS -3 ↓ - Preferentially feed, supplementary feed if needed
- Mate to a terminal sire
- Do a faecal egg count test, respond accordingly

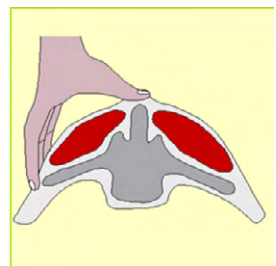
BCS +3 ↑ - Pasture control and maintenance

SCANNING

BCS -3 ↓ - Possibly use a long acting anthelmintic (worm drench) Consult your vet
- Identify those that haven't lifted in condition and preferentially feed
- Feed multiple bearing ewes with lower condition scored ewes on good pasture





HOW TO BODY CONDITION SCORE

Place your hand behind the 13th rib. Using the balls of the fingers and thumb, feel the backbone with the thumb and the end of the short ribs with the finger tips behind the last rib. Feel the muscle and fat cover around the ends of the short ribs and backbone.



EW E BODY CONDITION SCORING MADE EASY

Note: It is common to use increments of 0.5 of a BCS; when a ewe is not quite good enough for one category but better than the one below. Don't break it down any more than this though!

Body condition score—feeling across and UNDER short ribs	Description - how it feels - compared to an 'average' hand
<p>1.0</p> 	<p>The ends of the short ribs feel like the ends of your fingertips, when you push your fingers under the short ribs there is no muscle underneath, just skin. Spine is prominent, there is virtually no muscle on the back and it feels concave.</p>
<p>2.0</p>	<p>Muscle depth under short ribs equivalent to distance from first knuckle to finger tip. Can feel spine, back muscle is slightly concave and not rounded.</p>
<p>2.5</p> 	<p>Muscle depth under short ribs about equivalent to distance from second knuckle to first knuckle when fingers are flexed. Need some pressure to feel short ribs. Some cover on spine, back muscle flat.</p>
<p>3.0</p> 	<p>Muscle depth under short ribs about equivalent to distance from 3rd knuckle to 2nd knuckle when fingers are flexed. Need moderate to strong pressure to feel short ribs. Back muscle rounded.</p>
<p>4.0</p> 	<p>'Prime'. Can only feel short ribs with really strong pressure, back is rounded with plenty of fat cover, muscle under short ribs deep; nearly the distance from first knuckles to the beginning of your wrist joint.</p>
<p>5.0</p>	<p>Obese; fat rolls either side of spine; spine is in a dimple; impossible to feel short ribs; fat either side of tail head. Almost never see in a commercial flock.</p>

Courtesy of Totally Vets, Fielding

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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RMPP LEARNING MODULES

 www.knowledgehub.co.nz

- Ewe body condition scoring
- Principles of feeding from lambing to weaning
- Principles of feeding from mating to lambing
- Sheep mating management

B+LNZ RESOURCES

- Making every mating count
- A guide to feed planning for sheep farmers
- Tips for managing ewes with triplets
- Condition scoring at flushing pays dividends at lambing

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