

FACTSHEET

Ewe Body Condition Scoring (BCS)

October 2022

Body condition scoring (BCS) is a quick and easy, low cost management tool that can 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 thin and 5 being very fat.

TIMING AND TARGETS

There are three key times to body condition score 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

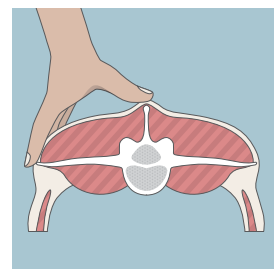
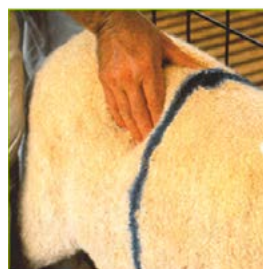
BCS ≤3 ↑ - On target. Increasing feed allowance required from 3-4 weeks pre-lamb.

SCANNING

BCS <3 ↓ - Identify those that haven't lifted in condition and preferentially feed if possible. Even being in a smaller mob will frequently help.
- Plan to set stock low condition multiple ewes in safer paddocks with good feed.


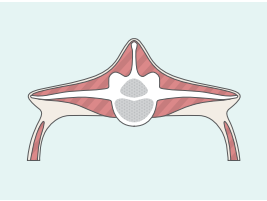

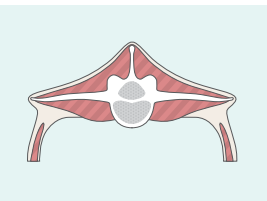
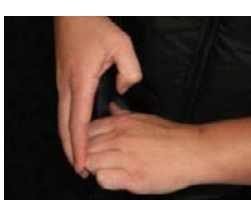
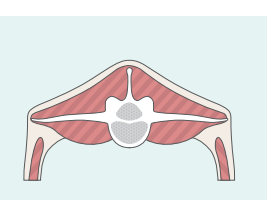

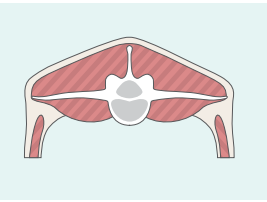

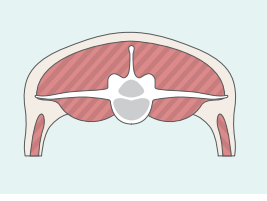
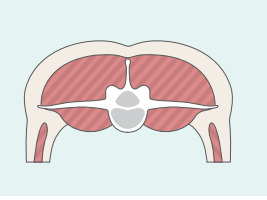
HOW TO BODY CONDITION SCORE

Place your hand behind the 13th (last) rib. 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.



ewe 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 very prominent, there is virtually no muscle on the back and it feels concave. You can feel the short ribs individually from above.</p>
<p>2.0</p>  	<p>Muscle and fat depth under short ribs equivalent to distance from first knuckle to fingertip. You can feel indentations between the short ribs when you run your fingers across the ends of them. Can feel spine easily, back muscle is slightly concave and not rounded. You can't easily palpate the short ribs from above.</p>
<p>2.5</p>  	<p>Muscle and fat depth under short ribs about equivalent to distance from second knuckle to first knuckle when fingers are flexed. Need minimal pressure to feel short ribs, can't easily feel indentations between them when you run your fingers across the ends of them. Spine is less prominent, back muscle flat.</p>
<p>3.0</p>  	<p>Muscle and fat depth under short ribs is about equivalent to distance from 3rd knuckle to 2nd knuckle when fingers are flexed. Need moderate pressure to feel short ribs. Back muscle becoming rounded.</p>
<p>4.0</p>  	<p>'Prime'. Can feel short ribs with strong pressure, back is rounded with soft light fat cover, muscle and fat under short ribs is deep; nearly the distance from first knuckles to the beginning of your wrist joint.</p>
<p>4.5</p>	<p>'Fat'. Can barely feel short ribs, back very round with good fat cover, but without excess fat deposits seen at BCS 5.</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>

Photos courtesy of Totally Vets, Feilding

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This fact sheet was put together with the help of Amanda Bowie and Totally Vets, Feilding.

B+LNZ 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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