

Body Condition Scoring (BCS) in Goats

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Different goat breeds come in different shapes and sizes. A large belly can mean pregnancy, body fat, a full rumen, or just relaxed ligaments. Weights can help measure medication doses but are not specifically indicative of body fat. A Body Condition Score helps identify obese animals and those needing to gain weight.

To calculate a BCS, palpate it with your hands on three specific regions:

- Lumbar (on the back, behind the ribs)
- Sternum (breastbone)
- Intercostal (ribs and between the ribs)

Sources:

Michigan State University; American Institute for Goat Research (Langston University)

Assessment

1. Try to grab the spinous and transverse processes (places on vertebrae that stick out). Can you easily see them and are they easy to grab with a thumb and forefinger? Do you feel any muscle or fat between the skin and bone?
2. Can you see and feel a deep depression below the spine (flank)?
3. Grab skin at the sternum. Is it easy to grab and move around? Can you feel the bones and cartilage beneath?
4. Can you see and feel the ribs? Can you feel spaces between the ribs?

What is the best body condition score for goats?

Healthy goats should maintain a BCS between 2.5 and 4.0. Does higher than 4.0 may have difficulty conceiving and may risk pregnancy toxemia during gestation. Scores below 2.5 indicate ill thrift, which can be due to age, neglect, illness (such as Johne's disease), or high parasite load.

SCORING

Measure individual scores in increments of 0.5. For instance, a goat may receive a score of 3.5. Scores of 2.0 and lower indicate goats in low condition (too skinny) and scores of 4.0 and higher indicate goats in good condition or obese.

1.0: The goat is clearly emaciated and may act weak. Ribs and spinous processes appear jagged and prominent, and the flank is hollow. It is easy to grasp spinous/transverse processes between a thumb and forefinger, and little to no muscle is felt between skin and bone. The skin moves loosely over the sternum, and bones/joints feel prominent underneath. Fingers can easily palpate intercostals (spaces between ribs).

2.0: The backbone is still visible, with spinous and transverse processes easy to grasp, but muscle mass can be felt below the skin. The flank appears hollow but not cavernous. Sternal fat can still be grasped and moved, but is thicker and joints/bone is less evident. Ribs and intercostals can still be felt.

3.0: A thick layer over the vertebrae makes them difficult to grasp. A hollow can still be felt until the spinous processes. Sternal fat is thick and can be grasped but doesn't move much; joints beneath are barely felt. Ribs can be felt but an even layer of fat covers them.

4.0: Neither backbone nor ribs can be seen, and a thick layer of muscle and fat lies between skin and bone. Individual vertebrae cannot be felt, and a smooth line extends along spinous processes. Sternal fat is wide, difficult to grasp, and cannot be moved. Animal appears sleek.

5.0: Backbone and ribs cannot be seen or felt due to thick fat. Spinous processes form a depression along the backbone, and fat bulges along transition from spinous to transverse processes. Sternal fat cannot be grasped and now joints fat covering the ribs.

