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Body Condition Scoring Goats & Sheep

Body condition scoring is a way to evaluate goats and sheep to determine if they are in good condition before breeding. Does and ewes that have a good body condition score are more likely to breed and successfully have lambs or kids in the spring. Body condition scoring is a great tool to use to determine how thin or fat goats and sheep are and if the amount they are being fed needs to be adjusted not only before breeding, but at any time of year.

Body condition refers to the fleshiness of an animal. Body condition scoring is a method used to determine how thin or fat goats and sheep are using a scoring system of one to five. However, goats and sheep cannot be body conditioned scored by simply looking at the animal, it requires placing your hands on the animals to feel for muscle and fat cover. Body condition scoring is most commonly determined in the loin area (between the ribs and hips) by feeling the amount of fat covered over the vertebrae and determining the amount of muscle and fat filling the space between vertebrae along the backbone. In goats and sheep that are very thin the vertebrae may feel “sharp” and the vertebrae will start feeling smoother and more rounded as they gain condition. With a little practice, body condition scoring is a quick and easy tool.

Body condition scores (BCS) are given on a scale of 1-5, with one being emaciated and five being obese. Two to four is the range that we like to see goats and sheep in. Half scores can also be given, for example, a goat can be given a score of 3.5 if it is between a three and a four. The ideal body condition score that an animal should be will depend on the production stage they are in. It is recommended that does and ewes should have a BCS of 2.5 to 3.5 at the beginning of the breeding season and a BCS of 3 to 3.5 prior to kidding and lambing because it is common for does and ewes to lose some weight during lactation. Failure to reproduce, low twinning rates and low weaning weights can result if does and ewes become too thin. On the other hand, if they are over conditioned it can result in does and ewes developing pregnancy toxemia or having difficulty giving birth.

While it can be easy to focus on the does and ewes, it is important to remember the bucks and rams as well. Before breeding bucks and rams should have a BCS of 3 to 3.5. If bucks and rams are too thin during breeding season they will have decreased stamina. However, if rams and bucks are over conditioned they may lack the vigor needed to breed large numbers of does and ewes. If rams and bucks are over or under-conditioned it can result in fewer females being bred and settling during the first heat cycle, which can lead to a longer lambing/kidding season in the

spring. If rams and bucks are too thin they should be given supplemental feed starting roughly a month before breeding season to increase their body condition and ensure they are in good physical shape.

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