

How to body condition score (BCS):

The hair coat can often prevent you from seeing the true shape of a goat and therefore, it is important that the hands-on assessment is done. A visual assessment alone is not adequate to assess poor body condition.

If you cannot score all your goats, choose a subset of goats in your herd. Alternatively, combine body condition scoring with other routine husbandry procedures such as hoof trimming or vaccination. Recording BCS is important as it may help you identify changes in an individual animal that may indicate disease or inform breeding and culling decisions. With practice, body condition scoring should take only 10-15 seconds per animal.

The three main locations to assess when performing body condition scoring are the lumbar spine, ribs, and sternum/breast bone (see figure 1). You are feeling for the bones in the goat. The amount of fat and muscle the goat has will change your ability to feel the bones underneath. If it is easy to feel the bones, the goat doesn't have enough fat and muscle. If you have trouble feeling the bones, the goat may have too much fat.

Ideal body condition (acceptable range):

For most stages of production: **3.0** (2.5-4.0)

At kidding or before winter: **3.5** (3.0-3.5)

Does at breeding: **3.0** (2.5-3.5)

Bucks at breeding: **3.0** (3.0-3.5)

Does may lose up to one point during peak lactation, but should be allowed to regain this before kidding.

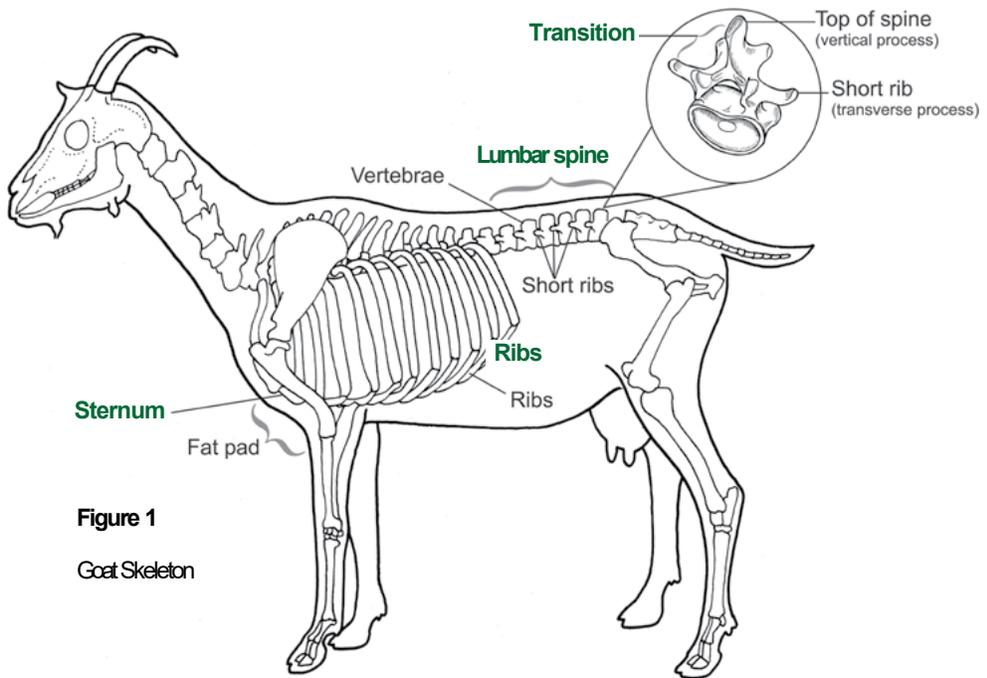


Figure 1
Goat Skeleton

Tip: Giving each goat a specific body condition score is not as important as being able to determine if your goat is under-conditioned (too thin), over-conditioned (too fat), or properly conditioned (healthy weight).

Lumbar Spine: This is the part of goat behind the ribcage and in front of the tail, also known as the loin. The spine is made up of many connected vertebrae. Vertebrae have three processes that stick out – one on each side (short ribs) and one straight up (top of spine). Move your fingers from one vertebrae to the next, noting the shape of the space the between processes on the sides and top. See if you can slip your fingers under the short ribs or pinch the top of the spine. Feel the amount of fat or muscle in the space between the top of the spine and the short ribs (transition) (see figure 1).

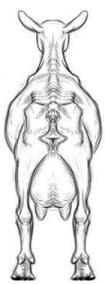
Ribs: Assess the amount of muscle and fat cover over the ribs, behind the front leg. Try to push your fingers into the space between two ribs and note how much pressure it takes to feel for this space.

Tip: Having an independent person perform body condition scoring on your goats may be beneficial. If the majority of your goats are a little over- or under-conditioned, you may think that is normal. You can always ask your veterinarian or nutritionist to perform body condition scoring on your goats and compare your assessments.

Sternum: Assess the amount of muscle and fat over the sternum or breastbone, between the goat's front legs. This area has cartilage (slightly softer than bone) that connects the ribs to the breast bone. Note how easily the cartilage is felt. Grasp the fat pad on the sternum/breast bone to judge how large it is and whether you can move it.

Tip: Body condition scoring is not about ranking your goats, but comparing them to the scale. Do not pick a doe that you think has an ideal BCS and compare everyone to her. Each goat should be compared to the BCS chart.

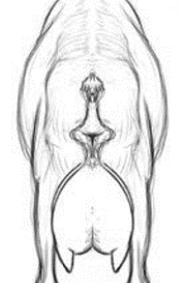
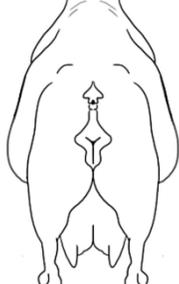
Body Condition Score for Dairy Goats*

| | BCS 1** | Lumbar spine | Ribs | Sternum | |
|------------|---|--|--|--|---|
| Emaciated |  | <p>Top of spine: clearly visible, can easily be pinched. Deep depression between each vertebra.</p> <p>Short ribs: form a continuous shelf that fingers can grasp. Deep depression between each.</p> <p>Transition: no fat and little muscle is felt between the top of the spine and short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: Clearly visible. Fingers easily penetrate space between ribs.</p> | <p>Cartilage: easily felt</p> <p>Fat pad: can easily be grasped between thumb and forefinger and moved side to side.</p> |  |
| Thin |  | <p>Top of spine: visible, some muscle can be felt between skin and bone.</p> <p>Short ribs: form a shelf that fingers can grasp.</p> <p>Transition: deep depression from the top of the spine to the short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: some can be seen. Fingers easily penetrate space between ribs.</p> | <p>Cartilage: not easily felt.</p> <p>Fat pad: can be grasped and moved slightly from side to side.</p> |  |
| Ideal |  | <p>Top of spine: not prominent, slight hollow between vertebrae. Cannot easily be grasped.</p> <p>Short ribs: shelf is slightly noticeable, cannot be grasped.</p> <p>Transition: smooth slope from top of the spine to short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: difficult to see. Space between ribs felt with pressure.</p> | <p>Cartilage: barely felt.</p> <p>Fat pad: wide and thick. It can be grasped, but has very little movement.</p> |  |
| Overweight |  | <p>Top of spine: cannot be seen. No indent between vertebrae. Top of spine is flat and cannot be grasped.</p> <p>Short ribs: no ridge or shelf present.</p> <p>Transition: rounded from the top of the spine to the short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: cannot be seen. Side of the animal is flat in appearance. Space between ribs only felt with strong pressure.</p> | <p>Cartilage: cannot be felt.</p> <p>Fat pad: difficult to grasp, cannot be moved side to side.</p> |  |
| Obese |  | <p>Top of spine: buried in fat, slight indent surrounded by bulging fat. Rump looks like the top of a heart. Individual vertebrae cannot be felt.</p> <p>Short ribs: individual vertebrae cannot be felt.</p> <p>Transition: fat bulges out from the top of the spine to the short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: not visible. Space between ribs cannot be felt.</p> | <p>Cartilage: cannot be felt</p> <p>Fat pad: cannot be grasped or moved.</p> |  |

*One unit of Body Condition Score is equivalent to 7-10 kg (15-22 lb)

**Unfit for transport other than under advice of veterinarian

Body Condition Score for Meat Goats*

| | BCS 1** | Lumbar spine | Ribs | Sternum | |
|------------|---|--|--|--|---|
| Emaciated |  | <p>Top of spine: clearly visible, can easily be pinched. Deep depression between each vertebra.</p> <p>Short ribs: form a continuous shelf that fingers can grasp. Deep depression between each.</p> <p>Transition: no fat and little muscle is felt between the top of the spine and short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: Clearly visible. Fingers easily penetrate space between ribs.</p> | <p>Cartilage: easily felt</p> <p>Fat pad: can easily be grasped between thumb and forefinger and moved side to side.</p> |  |
| Thin |  | <p>Top of spine: visible, some muscle can be felt between skin and bone.</p> <p>Short ribs: form a shelf that fingers can grasp.</p> <p>Transition: deep depression from the top of the spine to the short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: some can be seen. Fingers easily penetrate space between ribs.</p> | <p>Cartilage: not easily felt.</p> <p>Fat pad: can be grasped and moved slightly from side to side.</p> |  |
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| Obese |  | <p>Top of spine: buried in fat, slight indent surrounded by bulging fat. Rump looks like the top of a heart. Individual vertebrae cannot be felt.</p> <p>Short ribs: individual vertebrae cannot be felt.</p> <p>Transition: fat bulges out from the top of the spine to the short ribs.</p> | <p>Ribs: not visible. Space between ribs cannot be felt.</p> | <p>Cartilage: cannot be felt</p> <p>Fat pad: cannot be grasped or moved.</p> |  |

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