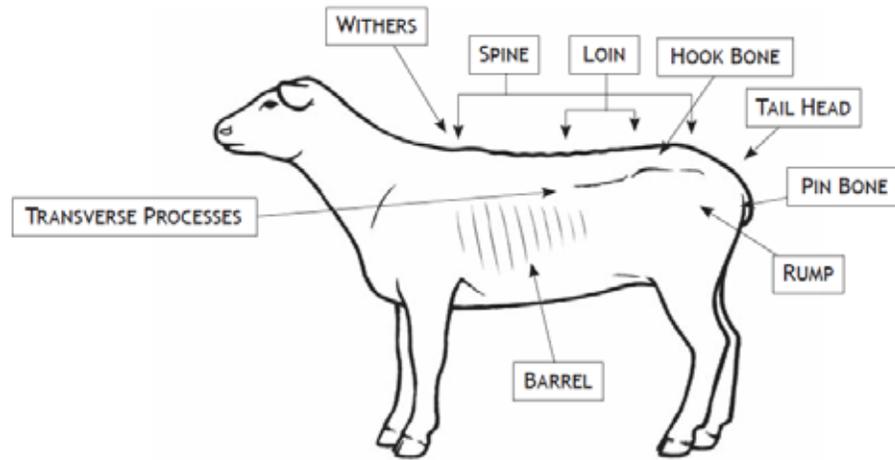




Body Condition Scoring

Illustration of a sheep with a BCS score of 2.¹



CROSS SECTION OF THE LOIN AREA

BODY CONDITION SCORING OF SHEEP

Throughout the production cycle, sheep producers must know whether or not their sheep are in condition (too thin, too fat, or just right) for the stage of production: breeding, late pregnancy, lactation.

Weight at a given stage of production is the good indicator, but as there is a wide variation in mature size between individuals and breeds, it is extremely difficult to use weight to determine proper condition. Body condition scoring describes the condition of a sheep, is convenient and is much more accurate than a simple eye appraisal.

A body condition score estimates condition of muscling and fat development. Scoring is based on feeling the level of muscling and fat deposition over and around the vertebrae in the loin region (Figures 1-3). In addition to the central spinal column, loin vertebrae have a vertical bone protrusion (spinous process) and a short horizontal protrusion on each side (transverse process). Both of these protrusions are felt and used to assess an individual body condition score.

FIGURE 1

Feel for the spine in the centre of the sheep's back, behind its last rib and in front of its hip bone.



FIGURE 2

Feel for the tips of the transverse processes.



FIGURE 3

Feel for fullness of muscle and fat cover.



¹ The source of the materials is www.agriculture.alberta.ca. The use of these materials by the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) is done without any affiliation with or endorsement by the Government of Alberta. Reliance upon NFACC's use of these materials is at the risk of the end user.



Body Condition Scoring (continued)

BODY CONDITION SCORES FOR SHEEP

Overview of all the body condition scores for Sheep

BCS 1

WHOLE BODY

- Emaciated
- Boney processes can be easily felt

SPINE

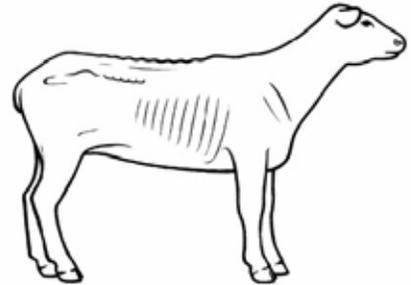
- Dorsal spinous processes are sharp and prominent
- Easily felt through skin

LOIN

- No fat cover
- Loin muscles very shallow

TRANSVERSE PROCESSES

- Transverse processes sharp
- Easy to pass fingers underneath them



BCS 2

WHOLE BODY

- Thin
- More difficult to feel between each process

SPINE

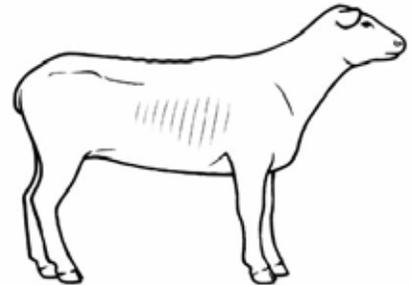
- Dorsal spinous processes still prominent, but not as sharp

LOIN

- Loin eye muscle fuller
- Virtually no fat cover

TRANSVERSE PROCESSES

- Transverse processes rounder on edges
- Slight pressure needed to push underneath them



BCS 3

WHOLE BODY

- Average

SPINE

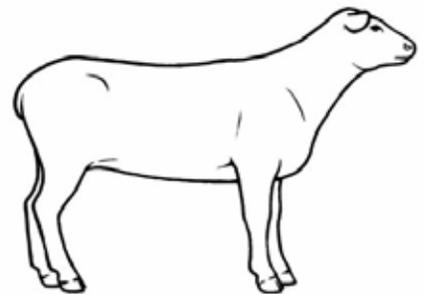
- Spinous processes smoother and less prominent
- Some pressure required to feel between them

LOIN

- Loin muscle full, some fat cover

TRANSVERSE PROCESSES

- Transverse processes smooth
- Firm pressure needed to push fingers under edge





Body Condition Scoring (continued)

BCS 4

WHOLE BODY

- Fat
- Fat accumulations over tail head

SPINE

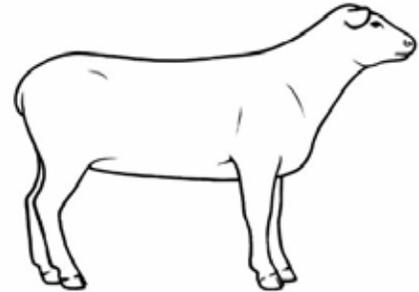
- Considerable pressure needed to feel dorsal spinous

LOIN

- Loin eye muscle full with discernible fat cover

TRANSVERSE PROCESSES

- Transverse processes can't be felt



BCS 5

WHOLE BODY

- Obese
- Fat pad over tail head

SPINE

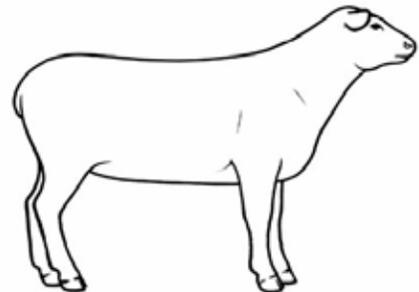
- Dorsal spinous processes can't be felt
- Depression often present where they would normally be felt

LOIN

- Loin eye muscle very full
- Thick covering of fat

TRANSVERSE PROCESSES

- Transverse processes can't be felt



NOTE: There can be extreme differences between breeds when body condition scoring sheep. Some maternal breeds lay down a lot of internal fat, not detectable externally. Whereas, the more muscular, meat terminal breeds can appear to have better condition over the loin area than the less muscular breeds.