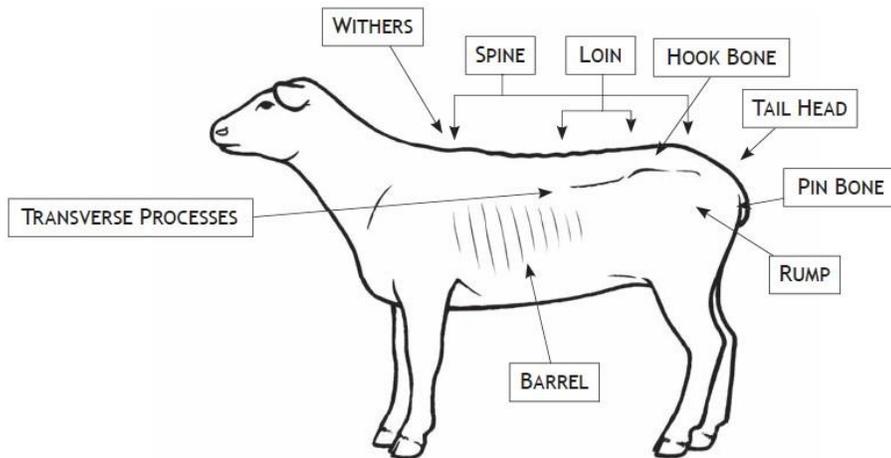


Body Condition Scoring of Sheep

Sheep with a BCS score of 2.



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.

CROSS SECTION OF THE LOIN AREA

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.

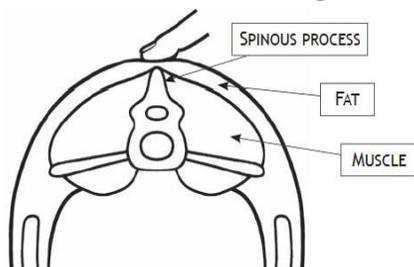


FIGURE 2

Feel for the tips of the transverse processes.

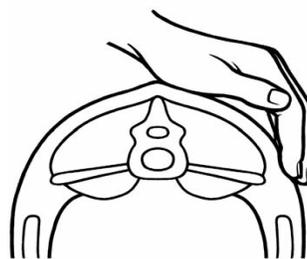
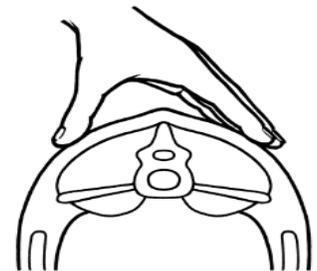


FIGURE 3

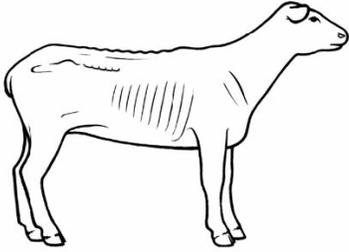
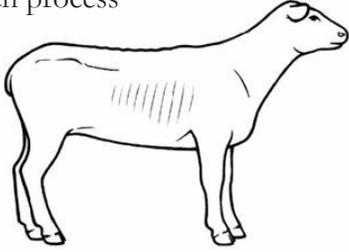
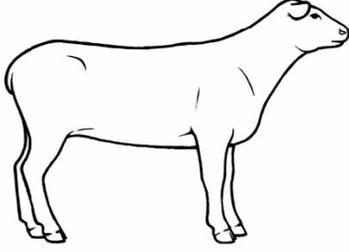
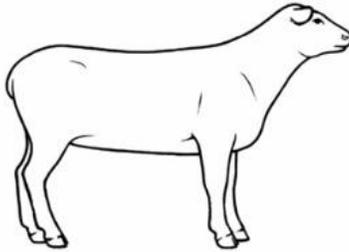
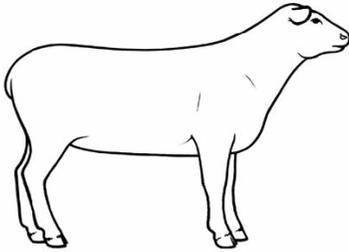
Feel for fullness of muscle and fat cover.



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.

Source: *What's the Score: Sheep. Body Condition Scoring (BCS) Guide*, from Agdex CD 400/40-1. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. www.agriculture.alberta.ca.

This material also appears in the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep*. www.nfacc.ca

Body Condition Score	Whole Body	Spine	Loin	Transverse Processes (short ribs)
1	Emaciated Boney processes easily felt 	Dorsal spinous processes are sharp and prominent Easily felt through skin	No fat cover Loin muscles very shallow	Transverse processes sharp Easy to pass fingers underneath them
2	Thin More difficult to feel between each process 	Dorsal spinous processes still prominent, but not as sharp	Loin eye muscle fuller Virtually no fat cover	Transverse processes rounder on edges Slight pressure needed to push underneath them
3	Average 	Spinous processes smoother and less prominent Some pressure required to feel between them	Loin muscle full, some fat cover	Transverse processes smooth Firm pressure needed to push fingers under edge
4	Fat Fat accumulations over tail head 	Considerable pressure needed to feel dorsal spinous	Loin eye muscle full with discernible fat cover	Transverse processes can't be felt
5	Obese Fat pad over tail head 	Dorsal spinous processes can't be felt Depression often present where they would normally be felt	Loin eye muscle very full Thick covering of fat	Transverse processes can't be felt