Body Condition Scoring System

By Maggie Leman

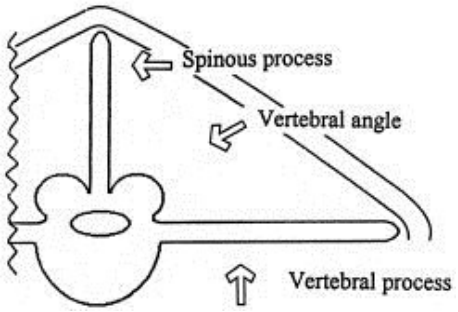
The best way to judge the overall body condition of your goats is by using a body condition scoring system such as the one outlined on the next page. It was developed for the National Pygmy Goat Association in 1995 to address the problems caused by obesity and its relationship to kidding problems. While it was developed for use with pygmy goats it can be used for all goats.

Body condition changes during different stages of life and health. A doe that has been feeding kids for 3 months is likely to be thin, or score 2 on this scale. A doe that missed getting pregnant last season can rapidly progress to having a score of 4 or even 5. Fast growing healthy kids are nearly always perfect 3's. A score of 1 is cause for alarm and a close examination of the animal and your husbandry practices is in order. Check the parasite load, feeding regimen, and be sure the goat is actually eating.

A score of 5 may actually be harder to remedy than a score of 1 or 2, it seems goats have just as much trouble reducing their weight by dieting as we humans do. Animals are not inclined to exercise unnecessarily. But you can promote good exercise by placing feed, water and hay stations a good distance from each other. The goats will have to walk to get to what they want. A hilly pasture promotes good health; put the barn on top of the hill, a hay station nearly at the bottom. Provide your goats with toys to climb on, especially if they are kept in dry lot pens. Many goat keepers build rather elaborate "Jungle Gyms" for their goats and watching them play king of the hill can give one hours of pleasure. Using a sturdy picnic table, wire spools with the center hole covered, cinder blocks and landscaping timbers, you can have a deluxe playground. A pile of big rocks is goaty heaven.

Now back to our scoring system. You will be feeling the bones and muscles of the back in the area of the loin, the region between the last ribs and hips. The illustrations below and on the chart show loin structure. Descriptions are what you feel on the loin with firm fingertip pressure. Also discussed are the pin bones, or tuber ischii, part of the pelvis and located at either side of the vulva in does and the same location in bucks. They feel like rearward pointing knobs. Each of the five categories has a descriptive title and a score number. Padding over the ribs is never used to accurately judge body condition. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to keep your goats at a level 3 or just a bit higher.

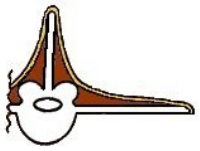
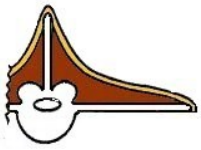
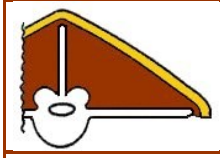
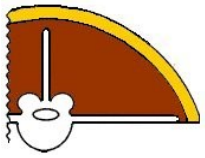
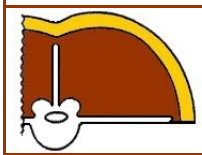
Parts of the Loin



The diagram shows a cross section of the vertebra, the bones of the spine. Spinous processes are the bones felt on top of the back. Vertebral processes are the long bones horizontal to the spine. The vertebral angle is the triangle between the top of the spinous process, the edge of the vertebral process and the skin. The muscle inside this angle is the longissimus, or eye muscle, a roast or part of a T-bone steak.

Diagrams and chart from Maxine Kinne.

Body Condition Scoring Chart

1 POOR		
	**Loin** **Rump** **Pins**	No muscle on edges of transverse process, bones very sharp, thin skin Vertebral angle has little muscle and is very concave Spinous processes very prominent with no muscle in between Sharp outline visible; no muscle between skin and bones Very sharp, no padding
Features Skeleton has little or no muscle. Hollows in the flanks below the loin are very concave. **Causes** Poor diet, disease, parasitism, lactation, or any combination of these. **Problems** Slow growth rate in kids; stunting in growing animals, conception failure, abortion, weak or dead newborns, metabolic disease during pregnancy, very susceptible to disease. **Solutions** Better nutrition, management and herd health program. Evaluate disease status.		
2 THIN		
	**Loin** **Rump** **Pins**	Muscle extends to the edges of transverse process, spacing can be felt between the vertebral processes, thin skin Outline slightly contoured; light padding but bones still somewhat prominent and very easy to feel. Sharp, little padding
Features Skeleton has some muscle. Hollows in the flanks below the loin are somewhat concave. **Causes** Poor diet, disease, parasitism, lactation or any combination of these. **Problems** Slow growth rate in kids and growing animals, metabolic disease, weak or dead newborns, susceptible to disease. **Solutions** Better nutrition, management and herd health program. Evaluate disease status.		
3 GOOD		
	**Loin** **Rump** **Pins**	Muscle and subcutaneous fat covers edges of vertebral process; individual bones are somewhat distinct Smooth, without signs of fat; pelvic bones and spine are distinct Slight pressure needed to feel the pin bones
Features Muscle over skeleton felt with gentle pressure. Firm pressure is not needed to feel bones. Hollows in the flanks are barely concave or level with the surrounding area of the sides. **Problems** None. Maintain condition at 3 or slightly higher, depending on age and production status.		
Scores 1-3 represent muscle growth. Muscle does not grow after score 3. Scores 4 and 5 represent fat accumulation		
4 FAT		
	**Loin** **Rump** **Pins**	Vertebral processes indistinct and firm pressure needed to feel them. Vertebral angle rounded but not yet bulging over spinous processes. Spinous process spacing difficult to detect; spine felt as a hard line Heavily padded with fat; bones can only be felt with firm pressure Heavily padded with fat, and firm pressure needed to feel them
Features Very firm pressure needed to feel all bony structures. **Causes** Feeding in excess, limited exercise. **Problems** Inhibited locomotion, easily tired, orthopedic abnormalities, dystocia, metabolic disease. **Solutions** Reduce plane of nutrition, provide exercise.		
5 OBESE		
	**Loin** **Rump** **Pins**	Edge of vertebral processes and spacing between too fat to feel bones. Vertebral angle bulges over the level of the spinous processes. Spine lies in the center of a groove of fat Buried in fat, bones very indistinct Buried in fat, hard to locate
Features Bones covered with a thick layer of fat over the muscle are very hard to feel. **Causes** Feeding in excess, limited exercise. **Problems** Inhibited locomotion, easily tired, orthopedic abnormalities, infertility, dystocia, and metabolic disease. **Solutions** Reduce plane of nutrition, provide exercise.		