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For more information,
contact: Wendie Powell
Livestock Production Agent, Wildcat Extension District
wendiepowell@ksu.edu, (620) 784-5337

Scoring Meat Goats on Body Condition

Every goat producer has animals that are either too thin or too fat. Failure to recognize these animals and take corrective actions will cost dearly in terms of decreased fertility, increased disease or internal parasite incidence, decreased milk production, and increased operating costs. Meat goats need to be maintained with a moderate amount of body condition.

When overall body condition starts to decrease in the herd, it is a sign that intervention is needed such as supplemental feeding, deworming and pasture rotation. Conversely, when overall body condition starts to increase in the herd, it is a sign that the producer should reduce supplemental feeding. Ignoring an animal's body condition and waiting to intervene until goats become either too thin or too fat may result in production and/or animal losses or decreased profits from overfeeding. Therefore, producers need to develop skills in assessing body condition of their goats so that a desired moderate body condition can be maintained.

The body condition score (BCS) has been shown to be an important practical tool in assessing the body condition of cattle, sheep and goats, because BCS is the best simple indicator of available fat reserves which can be used by the animal in periods of high energy demand, stress or suboptimal nutrition.

Scoring is performed in goats using a BCS ranging from 1.0 to 5.0, with 0.5 increments. A BCS of 1.0 is an extremely thin goat with no fat reserves, and a BCS of 5.0 is a very over-conditioned, or obese, goat. In most cases, healthy goats should have a BCS of 2.5 to 4.0. A BCS of 2 or below indicates a management or health problem. A BCS of 4.5 or 5 is almost never observed in goats under normal management conditions; however, these scores can sometimes be observed in show goats.

It is important to note that BCS cannot be assigned by simply looking at an animal. Instead, the animal must be touched and felt. The first body area to feel is the lumbar area, which is the area of the back, behind the ribs, containing the loin. Scoring in this area is based on determining the amount of muscle and fat over and around the vertebrae. Lumbar vertebrae have a vertical protrusion (spinous process) and two horizontal protrusions (transverse process). Both processes are used in determining BCS. Run one

hand over this area and try to grasp these processes with fingertips and hand. The second body area to feel is the fat covering on the sternum (breastbone). Scoring in this area is based upon the amount of fat that can be pinched. A third area is the rib cage and fat cover on and in between the ribs.

With practice, evaluating the BCS of an animal will only take about 10-15 seconds. The addition of body condition scoring as a regular part of the management program leads to more effective monitoring of feeding and herd health for a healthy and productive herd.

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