Transcript

3 Baron-Hay Court, South Perth Western Australia 6151
Telephone: +61 (0)8 9368 3333 Fax: +61 (0)8 9474 2405
Email: enquiries@agric.wa.gov.au

# In the video are:

**Tom Plaisted**, Technical Officer, Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia

# Transcript

**Tom:** Condition scoring of sheep is a simple, fast and accurate way to assess a sheep’s nutrition or production potential. It has the advantage of being able to be done whatever the animal’s frame size, in full wool or freshly shorn. It is suitable for any strain or breed of sheep and can be used on weaners and adult sheep.

This video will describe the process of scoring the sheep using the universally accepted scoring system of one to five, one being skinny and five being over fat and how to use the information to quickly work out an average score for the mob.

It is important to assess at least 25 sheep from the middle of the mob or from a random draft as poorer sheep will normally be at the tail and heavy sheep at the front of the mob.

So where we’re actually feeling on the sheep is right behind the long ribs, thumb on the spine of the animal and our fingers spread out across the ends of the short ribs.

When condition scoring, we place our thumb on the spine of the sheep, fingers over and around the ends of the short ribs, making sure that thumb and fingers are right through the wool and sitting on the skin so you can clearly feel the spine and the ribs.

Condition score one is going to have very little coverage so are you going to be feeling a really prominent spine, sharp corners on the ends of the ribs and a gap where you can actually fit your fingers in between the short ribs. So by thumb, fingers, everything is sharp, everything is pronounced, very little muscle fill and what is there is a really concave curve.

Condition score two, you'll have a little bit more covering, a bit more fill in the spine, more covering over the ribs. The ends will not be quite as sharp so they’re started to become rounded and the sharp edges dissolve away a bit. The fill is starting to come up the ridge of the spine, you can still clearly feel the ridge, you can still clearly feel the ends of the ribs and you can still get your fingers between the ribs but the sharp corners are taken out and the ridge of the spine is not as high.

Condition score three, we’re now starting to get reasonable muscle fill in this area, good covering over the ribs, the ends are now becoming nice and rounded so all the sharp corners have gone away. The fill between the ribs is becoming much more so you can’t get your fingers in between, you can get them just around the ends but the ends will feel nice and rounded. The fill in here, the muscle is now starting to become more convex rather than concave. The ridge of the spine is less, you can still feel it but not as prominent as it was in score one and score two.

Score four, we’re now starting to get this area really filled in with muscle and a bit of a covering of fat as well. The space between the ribs is filling in. The ends of the ribs are now becoming totally covered muscle and fat. You can't get your fingers in between them at all. You can still discern the ends of the ribs but you can’t get in between them. No sharp edges, you can still just discern the top of the spine but that’s all. There’s no actual ridge itself so everything feels nice and smooth.

For a score five, everything is full. We’ve got a full covering of muscle in here with a covering of fat over it. Ends of the short ribs are fully covered. Ribs themselves are totally covered so that you are not actually feeling the ridge at all on the spine. You can no longer discern the ends of the short ribs. If you put your hand across there it just feels nice, smooth and round.

It is important to record each score so that a mob average can be made. This mob average can then be compared to the next time the mob is scored. An easy way to do this is to use the blue scorecard from Lifetimewool. It has a description of the scores on one side of the card and a recording chart on the other.

Mark an x on the chart in the column for that score. For example, a sheep in score two would be marked with a x in the score two column. A score of three marked in the score three column. As the sheep are scored, the crosses build a histogram which allows a quick estimate of the average of the mob and the likely proportion of sheep below or above the optimum.

Knowing the average of the mob and scoring them at key times throughout the year, gives good information for feed budgeting, managing lambing ewes and keeping weaners growing.

Information on how to use the scores to set feeding levels or to manage pregnant and lambing ewes, can be found on the department’s website: agric.wa.gov.au

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