

Body Condition Scoring for Whitetail and Mule Deer

Body Condition Scoring (BCS) is a numerical guideline that expresses the amount of fat an animal is carrying. Animals which are too fat or too thin are an economic hindrance to producers and also to processors. When animals are not in optimum condition there can be health and reproductive concerns.

BCS is a useful tool for producers, veterinarians and processors. The practice can aid in determining feeding programs, selecting animals for breeding, assessing disease concerns, and also in the processing industry for evaluating an animal prior to slaughter. It is also an easy and economical way for a producer to evaluate an animal without access to a scale. Most studies demonstrate that body condition decreases at a faster rate than weight loss.

Deer, as in all animals, have nutrient requirements that significantly contribute to factors such as body maintenance, fetal development, lactations, growth, and antler growth in males. Energy fed in excess of maintenance and production will be stored as body fat. Proper nutrient absorption is dependant on overall body fat and body condition.

Visually assessing an animal's body condition score is difficult especially in the winter months when longer, heavier coats are present. The longer hair can easily hide the visual signs associated with BCS. It is in these months that in order to get an accurate read of the condition, producers will need to feel the pelvis, spine and ribs.

Using the following pictures and descriptions can help producers ensure their animals are in optimum health throughout the year. An animal with a BCS of 3 is optimum throughout the year but especially critical during breeding season and prior to fawning. Bucks will naturally lose condition during rut and therefore a condition of 3- 4 is important when entering rut. Too fat or too thin will have an effect on reproduction, antler growth, lactation and birthing. Several producers have reported that does which are too fat will not do as well in an artificial insemination program, nor will they do as well in fawning.

This Body Condition Scoring system follows the standards Canadian system of a 1-5 rating and has been adapted to work for the deer industry.



BCS: 1

- **Ribs, vertebrae, pelvic bones and all body prominences are visible from a distance.**
- **No discernable body fat**
- **Obvious absence of muscle.**



BCS: 2

- **Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat.**
- **Tops of lumbar vertebrae visible**
- **Pelvic bones less prominent**
- **Obvious waist and abdomen**



BCS: 3

- **Ribs palpable without excess fat covering**
- **Abdomen tucked up when viewed from side**
- **Pelvic area nicely rounded and flesh covered**



BCS 4:

- **General fleshy appearance**
- **Ribs palpable with difficulty**
- **Noticeable fat deposits over lumbar spine and tail base**
- **Abdominal tuck may be slightly present**



BCS 5:

- **Large fat deposits over chest, spine and tail base**
- **Waist and abdominal tuck absent or distended**
- **Fat deposits on neck and top of limbs**