

BODY CONDITION SCORE (BCS) OF ALPACAS

Keeping alpacas on a good plane of nutrition is essential for healthy reproduction as well as minimizing variations in the diameter along the length of the staple. Sudden changes in diet can result in sickness, foetal stress and tender fleece.

Overweight alpacas may be at risk with heat stress, infertility, difficult births, poor lactation and neonatal mortality. Emaciated alpacas can be susceptible to embryonic loss, still births, poor lactation and underweight neonatals.

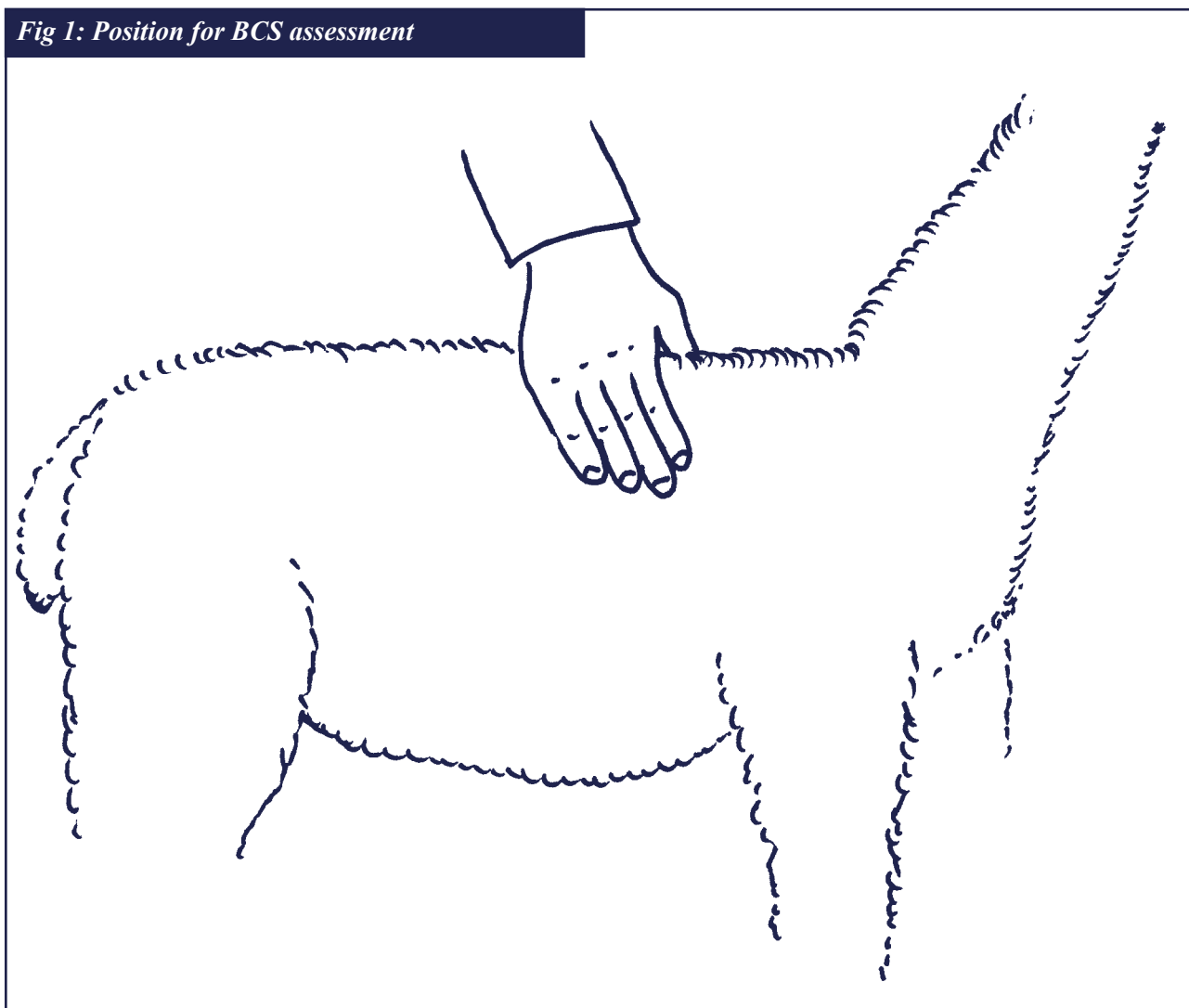
Variations in frame sizes from one alpaca to another means it is not always accurate to compare the weights between individuals. Mature females should weigh between 60-75kg and males can weigh up to 100kg. (Averages are 70kg for adult females and 85kg for adult males).

The nutritional status and condition of alpacas can be assessed without the need to purchase expensive weighing equipment. Liveweight scales will accurately tell you changes within individual alpacas but when females are in late pregnancy, or there are variations in gut-fill between weighings, body condition scoring can give a more accurate picture of a strong and healthy alpaca.

Visual assessment of the condition of alpacas is often misleading as fleece and later stages of pregnancy can hide their true status. There is no substitute for hands-on appraisal.

Body Condition Score is based on a scale of 1 to 5, with alpacas in very poor condition scoring 1 and obese alpacas scoring 5.

Fig 1: Position for BCS assessment



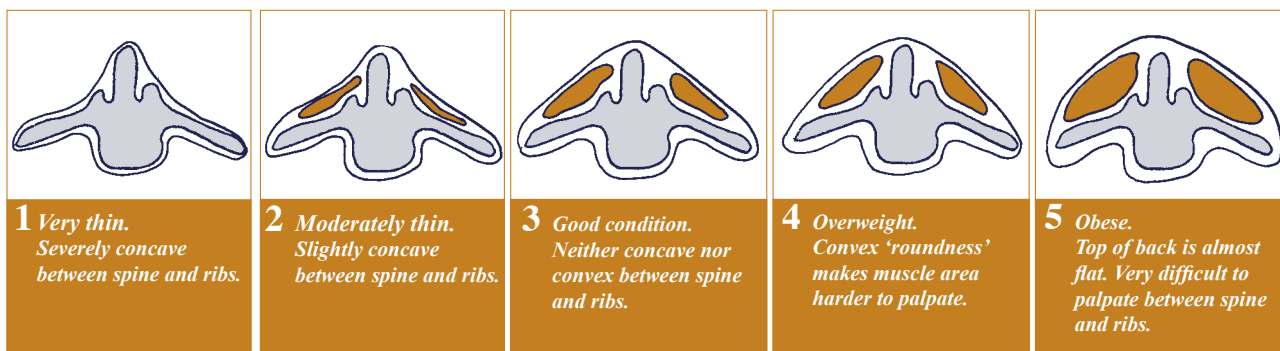


Fig 2: Cross sections for condition scores in alpacas: 1 to 5

How to Make a BCS Assessment

Do NOT make assessment over the pelvis as this area often feels boney, even with obese alpacas.

The most commonly used area is over the central backbone near the last ribs. By palpating the area with your fingers and thumb you can make an appraisal of the muscle mass. Practising the technique whenever you handle alpacas will help make your assessments more consistent. Each assessment should not take any longer than about 5 seconds.

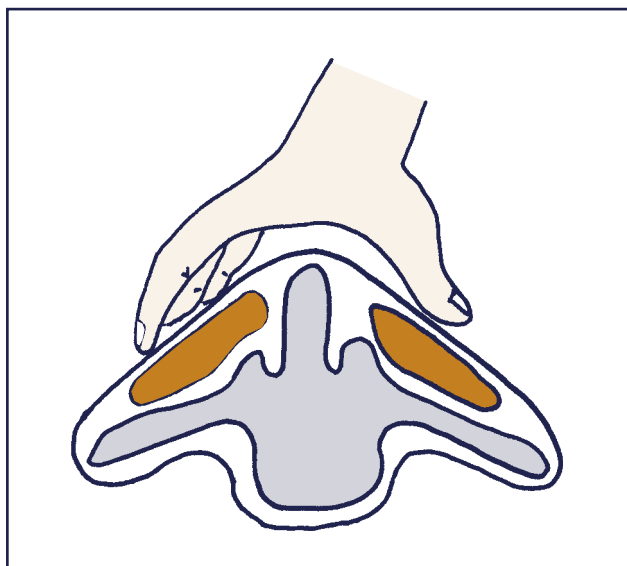


Fig 3: Palpating muscle between spine and ribs

Alpaca	Body Condition Score
Wether	2.5 - 3.5
Non-pregnant mature female	2.5 - 3.5
Mature male	2.5 - 3.5
Pregnant female	3 - 3.5
Working male	2.5 - 3.5
Growing (<15 months)	3 - 3.5

If a low BCS is only due to a shortage of feed (and is not due to other factors such as ill health) alpacas with unlimited access to good quality pasture can take 3-6 weeks to gain 1 score.

FURTHER READING

Feakes, A. (1995)
Camelids.
Proc 257 Post Graduate Foundation in Veterinary Science
University of Sydney.

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