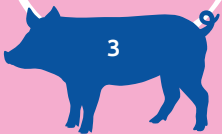


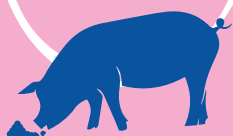
Key Targets

- 1 Achieve an optimal average condition score of 3 throughout the breeding herd



- 2 Minimise variation within condition scores

- 3 Feed to body condition to maximise reproductive and productive efficiency



Condition scoring of sows

Sow body condition is a critical factor affecting health, welfare, productivity and longevity. Maintaining optimum condition within the breeding herd throughout the sow's lifetime, with minimal fluctuations, will help reproductive performance, production efficiency, strategic culling decisions and mortality rates. Ideally a sow's body condition should be individually assessed and managed on a continuous basis to maximise her lifetime productivity.

It is important to be able to accurately evaluate sow body condition and to ensure appropriate nutrition is provided to every sow for maintenance, growth, reproduction and lactation, preventing sows becoming either too thin, through having to utilise body reserves, or too fat with excessive weight gain.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Visual and manual assessment of body condition

- Assessing body condition is not purely an assessment of backfat; in modern lean genotypes body condition score is an indication of the animal's overall muscularity and in fact is a poor indicator of fat cover or fatness
- Score sows at key times throughout the reproductive cycle, (e.g. at weaning and service, mid-way through gestation and pre-farrowing), as well as on an ongoing basis during lactation
- Ensure feeding levels are appropriate and adjust them if necessary
- Sows which have lost body condition during lactation should be placed on a feeding regime that will return the sow to BCS 3 by week five of gestation; a nutritionist will be able to advise on the most appropriate ration
- Assess sows by considering the shoulders, ribs, backbone and hips, not just one location. Score the sows by touch, using the palm of the hand, and by eye where this is not possible, but remember you cannot condition score with your eyes alone
- Score the sows on a scale of 1 – 5
- Aim for 90% of your herd to be at optimum condition relative to its place in the production cycle

- A visual assessment is relatively subjective but the descriptors overleaf should help you to be more objective



Condition scoring of a sow by touch



Figure 1: Descriptors to help with your condition scoring

1 EMACIATED

Shoulders, individual ribs, hips and backbone are visually apparent

2 THIN

Shoulders, ribs, hips and backbone are quite easily felt when pressure is applied with the palm of the hand

3 ACCEPTABLE/OPTIMAL

Shoulders, ribs, hips and backbone can only be felt when pressure is applied

4 FAT

Shoulders, ribs, hips and backbone cannot be felt even when pressure is applied

5 GROSSLY FAT

Fat deposits are clearly visible



Condition score 2.5



Condition score 3.5

Note

- Half scores may be used for mid-ranges
- Avoid variation and extremes. Ideally sows should enter farrowing with a body condition score of **3 to 3.5** and complete a four-week lactation scoring **3 to 2.5** as a minimum
- Very thin sows may not come into oestrus promptly
- Very thin sows may be unable to maintain pregnancy and support adequate foetal development
- Very thin sows may struggle to consume enough food for a good lactational yield
- Excessively fat sows may have farrowing and leg problems, produce small litters, have low feed intakes during lactation and wean lighter litters
- If there is a wide range of body conditions within the breeding herd or significant numbers of sows in either of the extreme categories, a whole-herd review of the nutrition, management and health programmes is required.

Remember

- Routinely check your own assessment with your colleagues and also with that of an experienced third party, e.g. your herd vet
- Visual and physical condition scoring is the ideal method of assessing sow condition, it is also worth considering other methods such as BCS measuring tapes
- Diets should be formulated to meet protein and energy requirements, taking into account requirements to support body lean gain in gilts and young sows to maintain them in good body condition at all times
- Speak to your nutritionist for advice on feed levels for each stage of production and condition score.

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