BPEX 2TS

Action for Productivity

20

BREEDING

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.

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

Minimise variation within condition scores

Feed to body condition to maximise reproductive and productive efficiency

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, eg 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 not be placed on low protein diets to increase fatness; the diet must be balanced for protein and energy to support the re-gain of muscle mass and associated fat cover to reduce their risk of developing shoulder sores
- 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
- Score the sows on a scale of 1 – 5
- 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 4-week lactation scoring 3 to 2.5 as a minimum
- Very thin sows may not come into oestrus promptly post-weaning, or be able to maintain the pregnancy, support adequate foetal development or be able to consume enough feed 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 condition 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, eg your herd vet
- Visual and physical condition scoring is the ideal method of assessing sow condition
- 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

For more information and advice contact:

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