

## **Feeding breeding stock**

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In livestock projects, you can view your **breeding stock** as your chief **capital investment**. These are the animals that mate to give you offspring or young ones that you sell to make a profit. Needless to say, the profitability of your enterprise depends on the efficiency of your breeding. And efficiency of breeding depends on the way you manage your breeding stock.

Today we want to talk about techniques that you can use to increase the likelihood or chance of your animals to mate, conceive and deliver viable young ones.

**Body condition:**-The body condition of your breeding animal should be the most important indicator that you should monitor. Body condition refers to degree of **fleshing** or **fat cover** on the animal. This can range from very thin (emaciated) to very fat (over-conditioned). However, for purposes of uniformity or objectivity, we can make use of body condition scoring.

Body condition scoring is a method that a manager can use to judge the degree of flesh cover over the protruding/prominent bones of the body. These are the **pin bones** on either side of the tail; the ischium wings (big jutting bone of the hips), the ribs and bones of the spine. By eye-sight and touch, body condition score can be judged on a scale from 1-5, ranging from very thin to very fat.

**Condition 1** -Very thin: - Female animals in this condition do not cycle. This means they do not come on heat or they have silent heat. This is a body defence mechanism to prevent pregnancy when the body does not have the nutrients reserve to carry the young to full term. Animals that conceive in poor condition can have dystocias, or they may abort. But the most common thing is that they do not breed at all.

**Condition 2** - Little fat cover, slightly better than condition 1 but still not adequate. Similar problems as for condition 1.

**Condition 3** -Animals in this condition are neither fat nor thin. They can be said to be fit. For breeding male animals, this is an acceptable condition. For females who are not breeding (weaned mothers), this is a good condition.

**Condition 4** - This is well-fleshed animal, but not fat. This is the condition that you would expect your pregnant animals to be in. Male animals at the beginning of the mating season should be in this condition, and then they get to condition 3 as they actively mate with females.

**Condition 5** Very fat/Gross- You do not want breeding animals in this condition. Females in this condition can have fatty deposits in the reproductive organs, interfering with both egg (oocyte) production and giving birth. You can end up with dystocia or difficult births due to narrowing of birth canal. In animals that give multiple young, you get very few but heavy young ones.

Male animals in condition 5 are lazy, have reduced libido and less viable sperms. This condition is absolutely unadvised, except for show animals.

### **Techniques for ensuring optimal breeding condition**

**Flushing:** This is a feeding technique where you give more feed to breeding females about 1-2 weeks before breeding. Flushing ensures that female animals gain weight from condition 2/3 towards condition 4. But more importantly, flushing stimulates the production of eggs in the ovaries, ensuring higher chances conceiving and production of many offspring. It also helps to build up body reserves in preparation for pregnancy.

These are universal principles that apply to all animals: rabbits, sheep and goats, cattle, pigs etc. Next time you are observing your animals, make a mental note of their body condition score. With practice, you become good at it, and be able to judge the health of your breeding stock.

Till next time, happy farming and remember to give us some feedback. Follow the blog for automatic updates.