



## **BODY CONDITION SCORING (BCS) OF MINK USING A FIVE-POINT SCALE**

Body condition scoring is a subjective assessment of the amount of fat (condition) on a mink and is a useful tool for managing the feeding program. However, it requires skill and experience, and must be done on a regular basis. When scoring the animals, keep the following points in mind:

- There are various ways of assessing body condition, including visual appraisal and the use of fingertip or hand pressure to assess how difficult it is to feel the ribs, backbone, etc. Visual appraisal is the quickest and most convenient method, since it requires little or no handling of the mink. Using non-visual criteria can help improve your assessment of the mink's body condition, but will take more time and requires handling of the mink.
- Body condition scoring is very subjective and should be done using the same criteria, and if possible by the same person each time. This provides increased consistency over time
- Some animals that appear to be fat may in fact be well muscled and in quite good condition. Individual body condition scores will also be affected by the amount of fur that the animal is carrying, and particularly by the amount of underfur. Account for the effects of muscling and fur density by using the nonvisual criteria listed.
- Visual evaluation of body condition should be an integral part of daily feeding chores. Detailed information on body condition should be collected for the entire herd at least once before the winter breeding period begins. Because body condition fluctuates naturally throughout the year this should be done at the same time or times each year.
- Approximately 90% of the herd should be in "ideal" body condition at breeding. As the season approaches you will need to rely on a visual appraisal for the females, as handling at this time can disturb breeding performance. The males can be scored during the testicle check in January - February, to ensure they are in good condition for the breeding season.
- If you select and separate possible breeders in late August or early September this is the best time to score the keepers. Approximately 90% of the mink's frame growth will be completed at this point so the feeding regime can be adjusted before the animals start accumulating body fat.
- Scoring can also be done during live grading (mid-to-late November). At this time the animals will have already accumulated winter fat so the scores will be higher than if they are scored in August-September. The feeding regime will need to be adjusted so the mink are in the desired condition prior to the start of the breeding season.
- The body condition for each mink should be recorded so that problem animals or groups of animals can be identified and monitored.
- Having a written summary of individual scores can also give you an idea of the variation within your herd. If there is a lot of variation within the herd, identify problem animals or groups of animals and make appropriate adjustments for these animals or groups. If variation in body condition is a problem you will need to consult your veterinarian or nutritionist.
- Nursing females may at times exhibit BCS 1. These animals should be identified immediately and the feeding regimen should be adjusted to counter any extreme weight loss.



Score 1 – Very Thin

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- The mink has an emaciated appearance with decreased muscle mass.
- The animal has a thin neck and a clearly V-shaped body.
- There is no body fat and the stomach is sunk in.
- Shoulder and hip bones can be seen and the ribs are easily felt.\*

SCORE 2 – THIN

- The mink has a thin neck and a V-shaped waistline.
- There is no subcutaneous body fat layer
- The shoulder and hip bones and ribs can be easily felt\*



Score 3 - Ideal

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- The mink has a slender neck and a straight body shape
- There is a slight amount of subcutaneous body fat
- The shoulder and hip bones and ribs can be easily felt.\*



**SCORE 4 – HEAVY**

- The mink has a thicker neck and a pear shaped body.
- The ribs are difficult to feel\*
- The shoulder and hip bones are covered by a moderate layer of fat.
- An abdominal fat pad is present.



Score 5 - Obese

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- The mink has a thick neck with a slight brisket and a full body shape.
- The ribs are very difficult to feel.\*
- The shoulder and hip bones are covered by a moderate to thick fat layer.
- A fat pad is present on the abdomen and the tail.
- Fat deposits can be seen in the limbs and face.

**\* Non-visual criteria**