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Live grading for rabbits, guinea pigs and other small mammals —
Specification



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This African Standard was prepared by ARSO Technical Committee ARSO/TC 23, *Live Animals*.

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Live grading for rabbits, guinea pigs and other small mammals — Specification

1 Scope

This Committee Draft African Standard specifies requirements for live grading of rabbits, guinea pigs and all other small mammals.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply:

3.1

buck

male rabbit

3.2

doe

female rabbit

3.3

boar

male of guinea pig

3.4

sow

male of guinea pig

3.5

Grade

defined parameters that segregate live small mammals for meat trade into homogenous groups applied by market participants based on weight, age, sex, body condition and body conformation

3.6

sex

whether a small mammal is male or female

3.7

body condition

overall body state of a small mammal assessed through visual observation taking into account fat and muscle deposition as it occurs in various places on the animal's body

3.8

body condition score

score assigned through visual appraisal of specific body parts

3.9

body conformation

symmetry, size and shape of the various body regions relative to each other or the general appearance of the small mammal according to what is considered a desirable appearance

4 Grading

Grading shall be done in accordance to age, sex, body condition and body conformation.

4.1 Age

The class category for all small mammals shall be based on age as immature, mature and old as given in Table 1.

Table 1 — Age and description

Category	Description
Very young small mammals	Small mammals can be weaned as soon as they are out of the nest box and eating the doe' s feed or eating feed from a creep feeder. Weaning time will vary between breeds but can range from 4 to 5 weeks
Young small mammal	Less than 12 weeks of age
Young mature small mammal	12 weeks to 6 months of age
Mature small mammal	More than 6 months of age

4.2 Sex, weight and age

The interaction of the grading characteristics based on sex, weight and age, shall be categorized into three grades.

Table 2 — Grading of rabbits and guinea pigs according to sex, weight and age

Grade	Sex	Weight		Age
		Rabbit, kg	Guinea pig	
1	Female/male	1.5 - 2.3	800 g - 1000 g	Young From 3 months to 4 months
	Female/male	2.3 - 3.4	900 g - 1200 g	Adult From 4 months to 1 year
2	Female/male	1 - 1.9	500 g - 700 g	Adult From 1 year to 2 years
	Female/male	3.5 - 4	1.3 kg - 1.5 kg	Adult From 1 year to 2 years
3	Female/male	< 1	< 500 g	Adult/old From 3 years to 5 years
	Female/male	> 4	> 1.5 kg	Adult/old From 3 years to 5 years

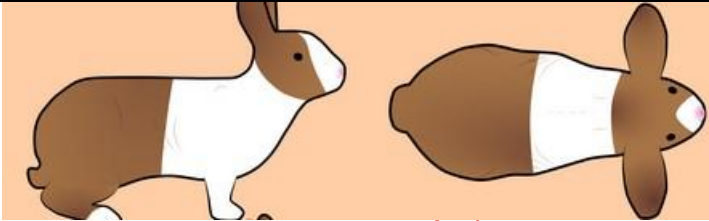
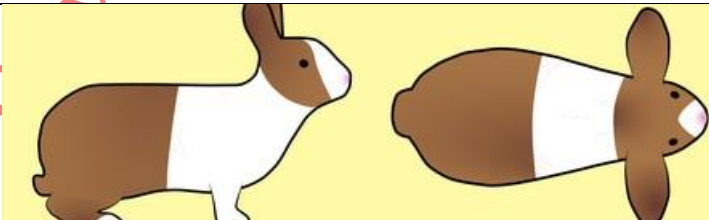
4.3 Body condition scores

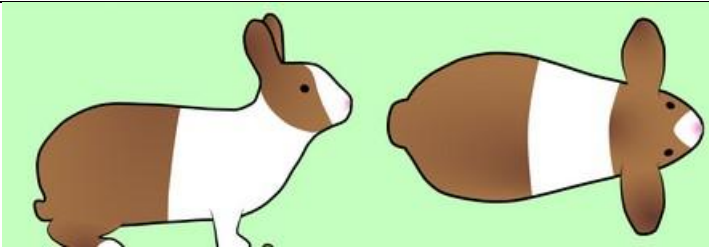
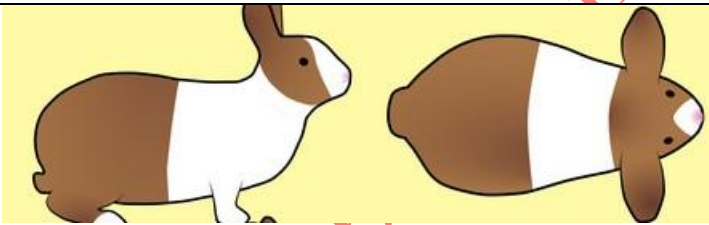
The body condition score shall be scored as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, that is, emaciated (very thin), lean (thin), ideal, overweight (fat), and obese, respectively. The body condition scoring shall be based on estimated hump fat indicated by the ribs, hips and spine as given in Table 2.

Table 2 — Descriptions for body condition scores for all small mammals

Body score		Description
1	Emaciated	Pelvis and ribs are very easily palpated and very sharp, ribs feel like a pocket full of rulers, concave rump area
2	Lean	Pelvis and ribs are easily palpated and feel sharp, rump area is flat
3	Ideal	Pelvis and ribs easily palpated but rounded edges, ribs feel like a pocket full of pens, rump area is flat
4	Fat	Firm palpation required to palpate ribs, Rump round
5	Obese	Hard to palpate ribs, ribs can't be felt, rump very convex

Table 3 — Descriptions for body condition scores for rabbits
This table is not referred to in the body of the standard

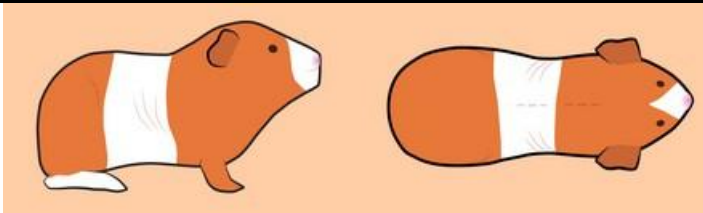
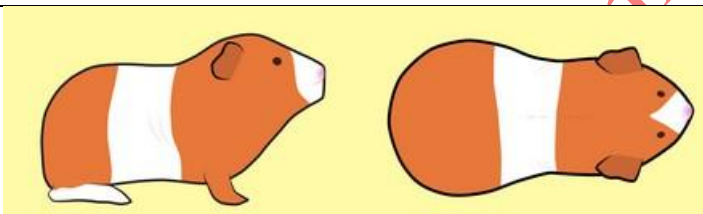
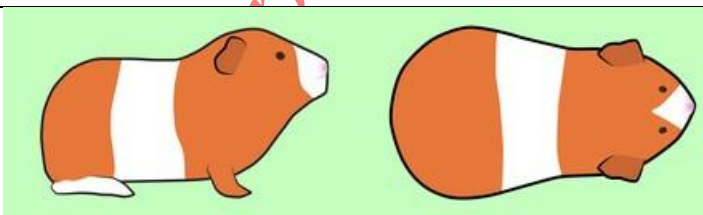
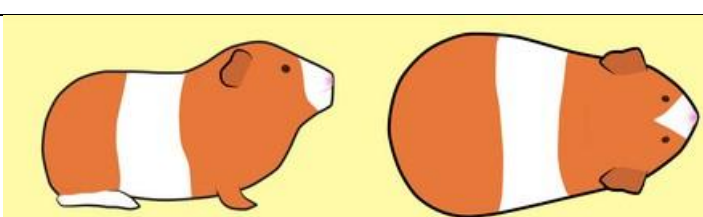
Score	Graphic	Description
1		Emaciated: • Sharpness of hip and shoulder bones as well as spine and ribs can be felt when petting and may be visible through the skin and coat; • Visible indentation around pelvis; • Palpating limbs, lack of muscle can be felt; • Lack of fat/fold under chin (dewlap); • Tummy is concave (arched).
2		Lean: • Hip and shoulder bones as well as spine and ribs are easily identifiable when petting; • When standing neutrally on all four (4) legs, back is flat; • Palpating limbs, muscle and fat layer is thin; • Little fat/fold under chin (dewlap);

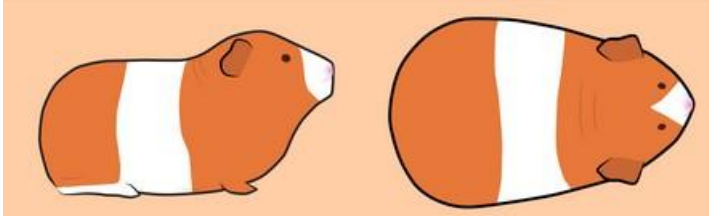
Score	Graphic	Description
3		- Tummy is concave (arched). Ideal: - Hip and shoulder bones as well as spine and ribs can be felt when petting but under a layer of fat (not sharp); - When standing neutrally on all four (4) legs, back has gentle slope from shoulders to tail; - Palpating limbs, muscle and fat layer is noticeable; - Fat/fold under chin (dewlap) is present and feels like skin fold (not full of fat); - Tummy is flat or slightly concave (gentle arch).
4		Fat: - Pressure shall be applied when petting to feel hip and shoulder bones as well as spine and ribs; - Palpating limbs, a thick fat layer is noticeable; - Fat/fold under chin (dewlap) is noticeable and has cushion (fat); - Tummy is slightly convex (sagging).
5		Obese: - Cannot feel hip and shoulder bones nor spine and ribs when petting, even when slight pressure is applied; - Palpating limbs, a thick fat layer is noticeable; - Fat/fold under chin (dewlap) is pronounced and has cushion (full of fat);

Score	Graphic	Description
		Tummy is convex (sagging).

Table 4 — Descriptions for body condition scores for guinea pigs

This table is not referred to in the body of the standard

Score	Graphic	Description
1		Emaciated: - Hips, spine and ribs are visible and can be easily felt when petting and may be visible through the skin and coat; - Tummy is concave (arched); - Chest and rump are roughly same width and narrow at ribs (aerial view).
2		Lean: - Hips, spine and ribs are not visible but can be easily felt when petting; - Tummy is slightly concave (gentle arch); - Chest is much narrower than the rump (aerial view).
3		Ideal: - Hips, spine and ribs are not visible but can be felt when petting; - Tummy is neutral (flat, no arch). - Chest is narrower than the rump (aerial view); - Feet are visible.
4		Fat: - Hips, spine and ribs are not visible and difficult to feel when petting; - Tummy is convex (sagging); - Chest is just slightly narrower than the rump, and

Score	Graphic	Description
		not much indentation at rib area (aerial view); • Feet are barely visible.
5		Obese: • Hips, spine and ribs are not visible, and pressure shall be applied to feel when petting; • Tummy is convex (sagging on floor); • Chest is about the same width as rump, and no indentation at rib area (aerial view); • Feet are barely visible or not visible.

4.4 Body conformation

The body conformation shall be based on the symmetry, size and shape of the various body regions of the small mammal relative to each other or the general appearance of the animal according to what is considered a desirable appearance. The small mammals shall be categorized as excellent, good, fair and poor as given in Table 5.

Table 5 — Body conformation classifications and descriptions for all small mammals

Scores	Description
Excellent	Hips and shoulders bone as well as spine and ribs can be felt when petting but under a layer of fat. Back has a gentle slope from shoulders to tail, palpating limbs muscle and fat layer is noticeable, flat stomach or slightly concave.
Good	Hips and shoulder bones as well as spine and ribs are easily identifiable when petting sometimes pressure may be applied to feel hip, Back is flat, palpating limbs muscles and fat layer is thin or a thick fat layer, stomach is concave or convex.
Fair	Sharpness of the hip and shoulder bones as well as spine and ribs can be felt when petting and may be visible through the skin coat. Visible indentation around the pelvis, palpating limbs, lack of muscle can be felt and stomach is concave.
Poor	Can feel hip and shoulder bones or spine or ribs when petting even when pressure is applied. Palpating limbs, a thick fat layer is noticeable and the stomach is convex.

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- [1] <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/body-condition-score/>
- [2] KS 2722:2018, *Rabbit meat – Carcasses and cuts — Specification*
- [3] <https://www.oxbowaustralia.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Rabbit-Score-Card-2025-Website-Version.pdf>

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