



# Body Condition Scoring Guide

Body condition or the relative fatness rather than weight of beef cows is the best indication of their nutritional status. Cows and heifers with a body condition score (BCS) of 5 to 6 are more reproductively efficient and generate more income per cow exposed\* than those with a BCS of 3 to 4. **Body condition at calving is the single most important factor determining when cattle will resume cycling after calving.** Assigning a BCS to cows at regular intervals, especially 60 days prior to calving and at weaning, will help you manage the nutritional status of your herd. To change one BCS, a cow will need to gain or lose 60 to 80 pounds of body weight. Use this guide to help determine the relative BCS of your cattle.

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## Optimal BCS Body Condition Score **6**



Ribs are fully covered and are not noticeable to the eye. Hindquarters are plump and full. Noticeable sponginess over the foreribs and on each side of the tail head. Firm pressure is now required to feel the transverse processes.

## Body Condition Score **7**



Ends of the spinous processes can only be felt with firm pressure. Spaces between processes can barely be distinguished. Abundant fat cover on either side of the tail head with evident patchiness.

## Body Condition Score **8**



Animal takes on a smooth, blocky appearance. Bone structure disappears from sight. Fat cover is thick and spongy and patchiness is likely.

## Body Condition Score **9**



Bone structure is not seen or easily felt. The tail head is buried in fat. The animal's mobility may actually be impaired by excessive fat.



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**Work conducted by Dr. Richard Whitman at Colorado State University showed the following:**

- 66% of cows calving with a BCS of 4 or below showed signs of estrus 90 days post-calving.
- 92% of cows calving with a BCS of 5-6 showed signs of estrus during the same time period.
- Managing cows to calve with a BCS of between 5-6 will increase conception rate, reduce breeding season length, and increase calf-weaning weight.

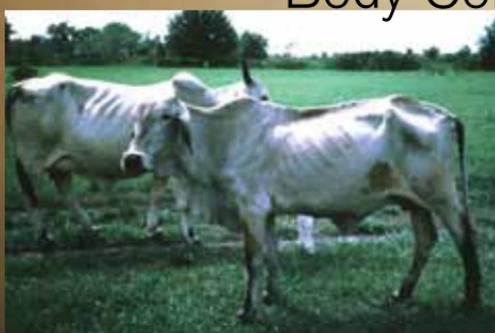
**The following may occur in cow herds with an average BCS of less than 5:**

- Incur higher feed costs in an attempt to increase weight to reach needed BCS
- Lower conception rates
- Fewer calves born
- Weak calves
- Lighter calves at weaning
- Higher medicine costs
- Increased cow cull rates

Body Condition Score description is adapted from Feeding Your Cows by Body Condition by Larry R. Corah, Patricia L. Houghton, Ronald P. Lemenager, Dale A. Blasi; Kansas State University, November 1991. BCS 4 and BCS 6 photos courtesy of R.W. Whitman. All other BCS photos are courtesy of the University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service.  
\* Rick Funston, University of Nebraska. Nutrition and Reproduction Interactions. Proceedings, Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle.

## Body Condition Score

# 1



Bone structure of shoulder, ribs, back, and pins is sharp to the touch and easily visible. Little evidence of fat deposits or muscling.

## Body Condition Score

# 2



Little evidence of fat deposition, but some muscling in the hindquarters. The spinous processes feel sharp to the touch and are easily seen with space between them.

## Body Condition Score

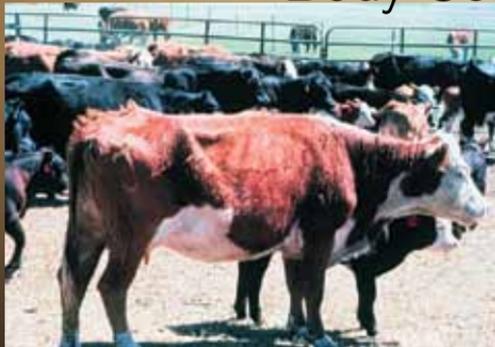
# 3



Beginning of fat cover over the loin, back, and foreribs. The backbone is still highly visible. Processes of the spine can be identified individually by touch and may still be visible. Spaces between the processes are less pronounced.

## Body Condition Score

# 4



Foreribs are not noticeable but the 12th and 13th ribs are still noticeable to the eye, particularly in cattle with a big spring of rib and width between ribs. The transverse spinous processes can be identified only by palpation and feel rounded rather than sharp. Full, but straight, muscling in the hindquarters.

## Optimal BCS

## Body Condition Score

# 5



The 12th and 13th ribs are not visible to the eye unless the animal has been shrunk. The transverse spinous processes can only be felt with firm pressure and feel rounded, but are not noticeable to the eye. Spaces between the processes are not visible and are only distinguishable with firm pressure. Areas on each side of the tail head are well filled, but not mounded.