

FACT SHEET

4-H Youth Development



Body Condition Scoring of Beef Cattle for Youth Producers What It Is and How to Use It

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Body Condition Scoring (BCS) is a tool beef producers can use to visually evaluate the effectiveness of the nutritional and animal health management programs of their cattle. Decisions can be made on how to adjust feeding and health management practices as a result of visual body condition scores. The U.S. Beef BCS assigns a score based on animals that are thin (BCS = 1) or fat (BCS = 9). Other species have similar evaluation tools with acceptable BCS based on stages of production. Horses, like beef cattle are scored on a 9-point scale. Dairy cattle, sheep, swine, and goats (dairy and meat) are scored on a 5-point scale. An ideal body condition score for beef cattle ranges from 5 to 7 across many stages of production.

How can this information help a beef producer? By evaluating the condition of their beef cattle a producer can improve on the management (health, nutrition, welfare, etc.) of their animals. To be more specific, the condition of the cow herd can affect:

- conception rates

- time between birth and when the cow will rebreed
- calf survival and vigor
- milk production which affects weaning weights

When raising market beef, a BCS can assist in determining the best condition for the animal as harvest approaches. Changes may be needed in the current ration and the amount of feed being fed.

Two animals with the same body condition score can vary greatly in weight. Likewise, two animals weighing the same can vary in body condition score. Also, the BCS changes depending upon factors such as breed, fill (how much feed they've consumed prior to scoring) or stage of the production cycle.

Table 1. The amount of weight change required for an animal to increase by one BCS.

Table 1. Weight changes needed to increase one beef cattle body condition score.

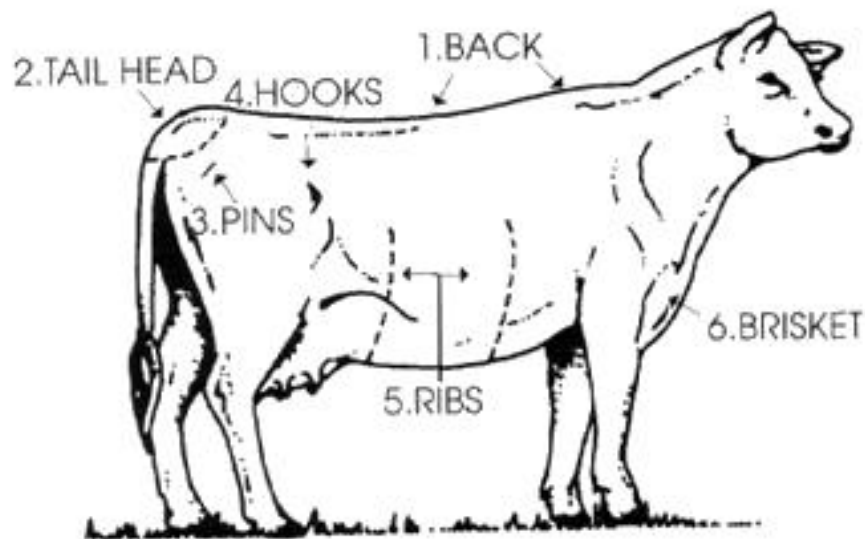
Body Condition Score (BCS)	Animal Weight, pounds	Weight Change Needed to Increase 1 BCS, pounds
1	770	40
	924	48
	1,078	56
2	810	60
	972	72
	1,134	84
3	870	60
	1,044	72
	1,218	84
4	930	70
	1,116	84
	1,302	98
5	1,000	80
	1,200	96
	1,400	112
6	1,080	100
	1,296	120
	1,512	140
7	1,180	120
	1,416	144
	1,652	168
8	1,300	140
	1,560	168
	1,820	196
9	1,440	
	1,728	
	2,016	

Source: NRC, 2000. Adapted from NRC Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle, 7th revised edition.

HOW TO BODY CONDITION SCORE

Body scoring is a subjective assessment tool that can be done visually or by palpating the animal. You will become more accurate in scoring as you gain experience. It is important to have proper guidance when learning, and takes practice to become consistent. Choose one or both methods and be consistent each time you score. You are evaluating the animal for amount of muscle,

skeletal features, and fat cover (deposition) in several places on the animal's body. Begin at the front of the animal with the brisket and shoulder, then move to the ribs and back, and finally to the hooks, pins and tail head. View the animal from the front, side and rear. If you choose to palpate, use just the areas where fat is the only tissue between the skin and bone (ribs, back, hip, and pin bones).



The following factors may cause you to incorrectly body score an animal: if it (1) has just eaten, (2) is pregnant, or (3) has a lot of hair or wool. At these times it is best to use manual palpation to get a better picture of the animal's body condition.

WHEN TO BODY CONDITION SCORE

The most critical body condition scoring should be done during pre-breeding, mid-gestation, post-parturition and weaning. Females that are too thin or are overly conditioned at these critical points may have trouble conceiving, sustaining a growing fetus, calving, and/or milking. However,

females nursing a calf may normally experience a loss of body condition.

Youth producers should strive to maintain cattle within the 5-7 BCS range. Only healthy animals in this BCS range should be brought for exhibition. Practice in proper scoring will help you monitor your animal's health and nutritional status, and allow you to make needed changes to your feeding and management programs. Questions about your animal's wellness program can be directed to your fair veterinarian and your feed company representative.

SCORE	BRISKET, BACK	RIBS, HOOKS, PINS, TAIL HEAD
1	No detectable fat Emaciated	These areas project prominently
2	No detectable fat Poor condition	Tail head and ribs prominent
3	Thin condition Very little detectable fat	All ribs visible
4	Borderline condition Spine slightly visible	Outline of 3-5 ribs visible Some fat over ribs and hips/hooks
5	Moderate condition No outline of spine Good overall appearance	Outline of 1-2 ribs visible Fat over hips but still visible
6	High moderate condition Some fat in brisket and flank	Ribs no longer visible Must use hand pressure to feel bone
7	Good, fleshy appearance Fat in brisket and flank	Hips slightly visible, ribs not visible Slight udder and tail head fat
8	Fat, fleshy and over-conditioned Bone structure not visible Large fat deposit in brisket	Large patchy fat deposits over ribs and around tail head
9	Extremely fat, wasty and patchy Bone structure not visible Extreme fat deposit in brisket	Extreme fat deposits over ribs and around tail head Mobility possibly impaired



1 – Emaciated – Little muscle left, no fat detectable



6 – High Moderate – Ribs or spine no longer visible, brisket has some fat



9 – Extremely fat – Extreme fat over ribs, tail head, brisket

References:

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