



Body Condition Score For Beef Cows

The Body Condition Score (BCS) system is a 9 point system that evaluates the nutrient status and energy reserves of the body condition (flesh) of your cows. Proper nutrition can impact cow performance and longevity.

Body condition should be checked four times a year: calving, breeding, weaning, & 60 days pre-calving.

Cows with a BCS of 1 will be extremely thin, and weak, while cows with a BCS of 9 are obese, with no visible signs of ribs, spine, hips and pins. Most cows should fall into BCS range of 3-7.

While there are detailed explanations for each BCS score, cattle can simply be evaluated by observing the ribs, spine, and tailhead. If you can barely see the ribs and spine, and the tailhead is full, your cows are likely in good condition. The ideal condition for cows would be a BCS of 5 – 5.5. Typically, we recommend heifers to be in a BCS of 6-6.5 due to their increased demands for growth, reproduction and lactation.

Proper BCS during pregnancy can impact calf birth weight, calving ease, and calf vigor. Cows that have a BCS of a 5-5.5 entering early lactation will likely wean a heavier calf, have shortened calving interval, will rebreed sooner, and have improved pregnancy rates.

The nutritional needs of cows increase significantly during early lactation. It is important to maintain or increase condition to meet their reproductive and lactation potential. Supplementation may be necessary to optimize forage quality to achieve and maintain desired BCS.

If cows lose condition during lactation, it is best to gain back condition during mid gestation when cow requirements are lowest. For many spring calving herds, this time frame coincides with warm weather so you can feed cows to gain condition effectively without having to maintain body temperature during cold weather.

Research Summary on Pregnancy Rates on BCS					
	Body Condition Score at Calving				
	3	4	5	6	7
Oklahoma, 1986		50	80	88	90
Wyoming, 1993	73.9	83.4	93.4	95.5	95.6
Florida, 1998	43	61	86	93	

Improving the average body condition score at calving to 5 or higher can increase annual average income per cow through having more calves to sell and heavier calves to sell.

Cows that have a BCS of 6-7 at calving will have more condition than what they need to benefit cow performance. Given the historical data set above, it has been illustrated that this added condition may not negatively impact reproductive performance, however there is an added feed cost to over-conditioning cows.

Cows with a BCS of 7 or higher are at risk of too much fat deposition in the udder and around the reproductive organs – both of these can negatively impact reproduction and reduce the pounds of calf produced in a cow's lifetime.

Cows that need added body condition need more energy in their diet. This does not necessarily mean they need grain. By making the forage they eat more digestible we can increase the calories available to them to maintain or add body condition.

Quality Liquid Feeds and Ignite tubs provide excellent, convenient, and cost effective nutrition to improve the digestibility of available forages to maintain or gain BCS effectively.

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