

# BODY CONDITION SCORE REFERENCE SHEET

## WHEN SHOULD I BODY CONDITION SCORE MY HERD?



Body condition scoring is an effective management tool for monitoring the nutritional status of the cowherd. Condition scoring can be an effective tool in matching nutrition to the needs of the herd and allows for proper supplementation program design to maintain or increase a desired level of condition. Timely monitoring of cowherd condition is important.

Failure to monitor body condition several times throughout the year can be detrimental to herd productivity and cost prohibitive.

**Breeding season:** Thin cows may need additional supplementation to achieve optimum reproductive performance. An early weaning strategy may be necessary to provide a window of opportunity to improve cow condition.

**Calving:** Cow nutrient requirements are highest just after calving. Thin cows at calving may have dystocia problems which may result in less vigorous calves. It is expensive to improve condition of thin cows at the time of calving.

**Late gestation:** Two thirds of fetal growth occurs during the last one third of pregnancy. Late gestation is the last opportunity to improve condition prior to calving. Sorting thin cows may be needed to utilize feedstuffs and supplement appropriately to improve cow condition.

**Weaning:** Closely monitoring condition of young and old cows at weaning is warranted. They are likely to be in poorer condition. Supplementation may be necessary to improve condition.

**Mid to late lactation:** Lactation draws significant maternal nutrient demands. An early weaning strategy and a supplementation program may be necessary if cows appear to be in thin condition.



## FACTORS AFFECTING BODY CONDITION SCORE

- Nutrition
- Environment conditions
- Stage of production
- Age
- Genetics
- Forage quality & quantity
- Calving & weaning management



## DESCRIPTION OF BODY CONDITION SCORING <sup>1,2,3</sup>

Use of condition scoring is simple, requires no equipment, and cattle do not need to be restrained.

- 1 EMACIATED:** All ribs and one structure easily visible; physically weak. Animal has difficulty standing or walking. No external fat detectable by sight or touch.
- 2 POOR:** Similar to 1, but not weakened.
- 3 THIN:** No visible fat on the ribs or brisket. Individual muscles in the hindquarters are easily visible and spinous processes are very apparent.
- 4 BOARDERLINE:** Ribs and pin bones are easily visible, and fat is not apparent by palpation of ribs or pin bones. Individual muscles in the hindquarters are apparent.
- 5 MODERATE:** Ribs are less apparent than 4 and there is less than 0.2 inches of fat over the ribeye. Last two of three ribs can be felt easily. No fat in the brisket. At least 0.4 inches of fat can be palpated over pin bones. Individual muscles in the hindquarters are not apparent.
- 6 GOOD:** Smooth appearance throughout. Some fat deposition in the brisket. Individual ribs are not visible. About 0.4 inches of fat on the pin bones and on the last two or three ribs.
- 7 VERY GOOD:** Brisket is full. Tailhead and pin bones have protruding fat deposits on them. Back appear square due to fat. Indentation over the spine due to fat on each side. Between 0.4 and 0.8 inches of fat on the last two to three ribs.
- 8 OBESE:** Back is very square. Brisket is distended with fat. Large protruding deposits of fat on tailhead and pin bones. Neck is thick. Between 1.2 and 1.8 inches of fat on the last three ribs. Large indentation over the spine.
- 9 VERY OBESE:** Description similar to 8, but more extreme.



**Cows with a body condition score of 5 or higher at calving will:**

- Better withstand adverse environmental conditions
- Have higher calf survival rates
- Have an improved likelihood of conceiving 90 days or less after calving

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## ADEQUATE NUTRITION IS NEEDED TO IMPROVE COW CONDITION

Improving cow condition takes time. A change in one body condition score is approximately equal to an 8% change in body weight (Table 1). Advanced nutritional planning is necessary to best utilize forage and supplement resources to improve cow condition economically.

**Table 1. Estimated body weight gain needed to improve cow condition prior to calving**

1,300 lb cow- 150 days from calving to weaning				
BCS at Weaning	BCS Goal at Calving	Needed BCS Change	Needed Weighth Gain (lb)	ADG (lb/hd/d)
3	6	3	315	2.1
4	6	2	210	1.4
5	6	1	105	0.70
6	6	0	0	0

## REPRODUCTIVE EFFICIENCY OF THE COWHERD IS LINKED TO BODY CONDITION SCORE

Data would suggest that cows calving in a body condition score of a 4 or less will have fewer cows rebred, longer post-partum interval and wean a lighter, less uniform calf crop (Table 2).

**Table 2. Effect of BCS at calving on postpartum interval, pregnancy rate and weaning weight**

BCS at Calving	Percent Bred				Days Open			Weaning Weight
	Kunkle, et al., 1998	Selk, et al., 1986	Cherni, et al., 1993	Whitman, et al., 1975	Kunkle, et al., 1998	Houghton et al., 1990	Selk et al., 1986	Kunkle, et al., 1998
3	43		74	66	131	89	100	374
4	61	50	83	66	98	70	100	460
5	86	80	93	92	81	59	89	514
6	93	88	96	92	81	52	89	514
7		90	96	100		31	89	

### Citations

<sup>1</sup> Mathis C., Sawyer J., and Parker R. 2002. Managing and feeding beef cows using body condition scores. NMSU Cooperative Extension Service Circular 575.

<sup>2</sup> Richards M., Spitzer J., and Warner M. 1986. Effect of varying levels of postpartum nutrition and body condition at calving on subsequent reproductive performance in beef cattle. J. Anim. Sci. 62:300.

<sup>3</sup> Herd D. and Sprott L. 1986. Body condition, nutrition and reoduction of beef cows. Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Texas A & M Univ. B-1526.



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