

COW BODY CONDITION SCORE

A cow's current body condition is determined by her maintenance requirement, her past nutrient intake, and her past production. Current body condition influences subsequent growth, reproduction, milk production, and life span. The relationships between body condition and these economically important traits brought about interest in a subjective scoring system for estimating cow condition.

Body condition scores (BCS) are numerical values that reflect fatness or condition of the beef cow. Scores are subjectively assigned, ranging from 1 = Severely emaciated to 9 = Very obese, with a BCS of 5 considered optimum. BCS is generally assigned by visual appraisal, but palpation of the animal's condition may be beneficial when it has a thick hair coat. Areas generally considered include the last half of the ribs, edge of the loin, spinous processes, and the hooks and pins, as well as tail-head, brisket, and shoulder area.

It is generally accepted that a change of one BCS on this system equates to 75 to 80 lb. change in body weight on a 1050 to 1100 lb. cow.

Body Condition Scoring (BCS) System for Beef Cattle

(Richards et al., 1986. J. Anim. Sci. 62:300.)

BCS	Description
1	Emaciated – Cow is extremely emaciated with no palpable fat detectable over spinous processes, transverse processes, hip bones, or ribs. Tail-head and ribs project quite prominently.
2	Poor – Cow still appears somewhat emaciated but tail-head and ribs are less prominent. Individual spinous processes are still rather sharp to the touch, but some tissue cover over dorsal portion of ribs.
3	Thin – Ribs are still individually identifiable but not quite as sharp to the touch. There is obvious palpable fat along spine and over tail-head with some tissue cover over dorsal portion of ribs.
4	Borderline – Individual ribs are no longer visually obvious. The spinous processes can be identified individually on palpation but feel rounded rather than sharp. Some fat cover over ribs, transverse processes, and hip bones.
5	Moderate – Cow has generally good overall appearance. On palpation, fat cover over ribs feels spongy and areas on either side of tail-head now have palpable fat cover.
6	High moderate – Firm pressure now needs to be applied to feel spinous processes. A high degree of fat is palpable over ribs and around tail-head.
7	Good – Cow appears fleshy and obviously carries considerable fat. Very spongy fat cover over ribs and around tail-head. In fact, “rounds” or “pones” beginning to be obvious. Some fat around vulva and in crotch.
8	Fat – Cow very fleshy and over-conditioned. Spinous processes almost impossible to palpate. Cow has large fat deposits over ribs and around tail-head, and below vulva. “Rounds” or “pones” are obvious.
9	Extremely fat – Cow obviously extremely wasty and patchy and looks blocky. Tail-head and hips buried in fatty tissue and “rounds” or “pones” of fat are protruding. Bone structure is no longer visible and barely palpable. Animal’s mobility might even be impaired by large fatty deposits.