What is body condition scoring?

Body condition scoring (BCS) is a management tool used to evaluate the nutritional needs of cows based on observed differences in body fat. Ultimately, it is the best indicator of an operation’s ability to meet herd requirements with available resources. A scoring system of 1 (extremely thin) to 9 (obese) has been developed for U.S. beef cows. A body condition score of 5 to 6 represents optimum body condition.

Research shows a link between cow body condition and reproductive performance. To rebreed in a timely manner, mature cows should calve in a body condition of 5 or greater. The target BCS at calving for first-calf heifers is 6 because additional nutrients are required for growth.

You can judge a cow’s body condition by feeling the fat cover over the ribs and spine. Learning to evaluate animals visually, without handling, allows you to score body condition anytime.
How to use this tool

Keep this booklet handy to record body condition scores throughout the year. Referring to the scoring guidelines on page 20, place a mark for each animal in the appropriate category as shown. Include the date the score was taken.

When you’re done, count the marks and follow these steps to determine the average. If you prefer, you can transfer the BCS totals to the group summary sheets on pages 16-18 to help perform the calculation.

Key times to evaluate body condition are at weaning, 90 days before calving, calving, and breeding. Note changes during summer grazing to determine the best time to wean.
Date  
Oct. 15

BCS  

Group ID  
South Pasture

\[ \leq 3 \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{5 x 3 = 15}
\end{array} \]

\[ 4 \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{40 x 4 = 160}
\end{array} \]

\[ 5 \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{35 x 5 = 175}
\end{array} \]

\[ 6 \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{15 x 6 = 90}
\end{array} \]

\[ \geq 7 \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{5 x 7 = 35}
\end{array} \]

\[ 15 + 160 + 175 + 90 + 35 = 475 \]

\[ \frac{475}{100 \text{ cows}} = 4.75 \text{ average BCS} \]
Date____________________

Group ID________________

≤ 3 _______________________

4 _________________________

5 _________________________

6 _________________________

≥ 7 _________________________
Date_____________________

Group ID__________________

≤ 3 _______________________

4 ________________________

5 _______________________

6 ________________________

≥ 7 ________________________
Date________________________

Group ID____________________

≤ 3 __________________________

4 ____________________________

5 ____________________________

6 ____________________________

≥ 7 ____________________________
Date________________________

Group ID____________________

≤ 3 __________________________

4 ____________________________

5 ____________________________

6 ____________________________

≥ 7 ____________________________
Date_______________________

Group ID____________________

≤ 3 __________________________

4 ____________________________

5 ____________________________

6 ____________________________

≥ 7 ___________________________
Date ______________________

Group ID ________________

≤ 3 ______________________

4 ______________________

5 ______________________

6 ______________________

≥ 7 ______________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Group ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤ 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Date__________________________

Group ID_____________________

≤ 3 ____________________________

4 _____________________________

5 _____________________________

6 _____________________________

≥ 7 ____________________________
Date____________________

Group ID__________________

\[ \leq 3 \________________________ \\

\[ 4 \________________________

\[ 5 \________________________

\[ \geq 7 \________________________

13
Date________________________

Group ID_____________________

\leq 3 _________________________

4 _____________________________

5 _____________________________

6 _____________________________

\geq 7 _________________________
Date__________________________

Group ID_______________________

≤ 3 _____________________________

4 ______________________________

5 ______________________________

6 ______________________________

≥ 7 ______________________________
Calculating the Average

Referring to the tally sheets, multiply the number of animals you counted in each category by the BCS. Enter results in the group summary as shown below. Add these figures and divide the sum by the total head count. This is the average BCS for the group.

Group Summary Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group ID</th>
<th>South Pasture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BCS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>≤3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count x BCS</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## Group Summary

### Group ID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>≤3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>≥7</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Avg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Group ID

<table>
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<th>≤3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>≥7</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Avg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Group Summary

## Group ID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>≤3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>≥7</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Avg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## Group ID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>≤3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>≥7</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Avg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
# Body Condition Scoring Guidelines for Cattle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BCS</th>
<th>Spine</th>
<th>Ribs</th>
<th>Hooks/Pins</th>
<th>Tailhead</th>
<th>Brisket</th>
<th>Muscling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>None/atrophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>None/atrophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Borderline</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Slightly visible</td>
<td>Foreribs</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optimum Condition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>1 or 2 may be visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>No fat</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Some fat</td>
<td>Some fat</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Over-Conditioned</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Slightly visible</td>
<td>Some fat</td>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Abundant fat</td>
<td>Abundant fat</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Not visible</td>
<td>Extremely fat</td>
<td>Extremely fat</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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