

Body Condition Scoring for Dairy Cattle

Identifying cows that are too fat or too thin and taking immediate action helps with disease treatment, milk production, and fertility. It is critical for producers to identify cows with poor body condition scores early to make important treatment or culling decisions in a timely and responsible manner.

The Body Condition Scoring (BCS) system scores animals 1 to 5, from emaciated to fat. Body condition reflects the body fat reserves of the animal. Score dairy cows at the beginning and end of their dry period and 4 or 5 times during lactation.

Cows should be scored both by looking at and handling the backbone, loin and rump areas.

Body Condition Score 1: Emaciated

Ends of short ribs sharp to the touch, prominent shelf-like appearance to the loin. Individual vertebrae of the backbone are prominent. Hook and pin bones sharply defined. Anal area receded, vulva prominent.



Body Condition Score 2: Thin

Ends of short ribs can be felt, less visibly prominent. Short ribs do not form as obvious of a shelf effect. Hook, pin bones prominent, but depression of the region less severe. Anal area less sunken, vulva less prominent.



Body Condition Score 3: Average

Short ribs can be felt by applying slight pressure. Overhanging shelf-like appearance gone. Backbone is a rounded ridge. Hook, pin bones are round, smoothed over. Anal area filled out, but no evidence of fat deposit.



Body Condition Score 4: Heavy

Short ribs can be felt when firm pressure applied, rounded over with no shelf effect. Ridge of the backbone flattening over the loin, rump, chine areas. Hook bones smoothed over, span between hook bones and backbone is flat. Fat deposit around pin bones beginning to show.



Body Condition Score 5: Fat

Bone structure of topline, hook and pin bones and short ribs not visible. Obvious fat deposits around tailbone and over ribs. Thighs curve out, brisket and flanks heavy.



Adapted from the OMAFRA Factsheet, "Body Condition Scoring of Dairy Cattle".

Body Condition Scoring for Beef Cattle

Body condition scoring (BCS) can be used to assist producers with balancing feed requirements for beef cattle. It is critical to identify cows with poor body condition scores early to make important treatment or culling decisions in a timely and responsible manner.

The Body Condition Scoring (BCS) system scores animals 1 to 5, from emaciated to fat. Producers should regularly body condition score, cows should score at least 2.5 - 3. Steers should be a BCS of 3 or better during backgrounding, 4 or better during finishing.

Cows should be scored both by observing and palpating the backbone, loin and rump areas.

Body Condition Score 1: Emaciated

Ends of short ribs sharp to the touch, prominent shelf-like appearance to the loin. Individual vertebrae of the backbone are prominent. Hook and pin bones sharply defined. Anal area receded, vulva prominent.



Body Condition Score 2: Thin

Ends of short ribs can be felt, less visibly prominent. Short ribs do not form as obvious of a shelf effect. Hook, pin bones prominent, but depression of the region less severe. Anal area less sunken, vulva less prominent.



Body Condition Score 3: Average

Short ribs can be felt by applying slight pressure. Overhanging shelf-like appearance gone. Backbone is a rounded ridge. Hook, pin bones are round, smoothed over. Anal area filled out, but no evidence of fat deposit.



Body Condition Score 4: Heavy

Short ribs can be felt when firm pressure applied, rounded over with no shelf effect. Ridge of the backbone flattening over the loin, rump, chine areas. Hook bones smoothed over, span between hook bones and backbone is flat. Fat deposit around pin bones beginning to show.



Body Condition Score 5: Fat

Bone structure of topline, hook and pin bones and short ribs not visible. Obvious fat deposits around tailbone and over ribs. Thighs curve out, brisket and flanks heavy.



Adapted from the OMAFRA Factsheet, "Body Condition Scoring of Beef Cattle".