

Guide to Body Condition Scoring in Cattle

		Physical Attribute					
	BCS	Spine	Ribs	Hooks/ Pins	Tailhead	Brisket	Muscling
Thin	1	Visible	Visible	Visible	No fat	No fat	None/atrophy
	2	Visible	Visible	Visible	No fat	No fat	None/atrophy
Borderline	3	Visible	Visible	Visible	No fat	No fat	None
	4	Slightly visible	Foreribs visible	Visible	No fat	No fat	Full
Optimum Condition	5	Not visible	1 or 2 may be visible	Visible	No fat	No fat	Full
	6	Not visible	Not visible	Visible	Some fat	Some fat	Full
Over-Conditioned	7	Not visible	Not visible	Slightly visible	Some fat	Fat	Full
	8	Not visible	Not visible	Not visible	Abundant Fat	Abundant Fat	Full
	9	Not visible	Not visible	Not visible	Extremely Fat	Extremely Fat	Full

Adapted from Herd & Sprott, 1986; BCS = body condition score

What is body condition scoring?

Body condition scoring is a tool that can be used to evaluate and monitor cow body condition, which is ultimately the best indicator of an operation's nutrition and management program. This system uses visual characteristics of the animal to assess body fat reserves and assign a numerical score based on the degree of fat deposition. Body condition scores range from 1 to 9, with a score of 1 representing a very thin cow, and 9 an extremely over-conditioned cow. A body condition score of 5 or 6 on the scale represents a cow in optimum body condition. Mature cows should calve in a body condition score of 5. First-calf heifers require additional nutrients for continued growth and should calve in a body condition score of 6.

How to use this tool

Body condition scores should be recorded throughout the year — at breeding, calving, and 30 to 45 days postweaning. *Guide to Body Condition Scoring in Cattle* is a chute-side reference to be used any time cattle are evaluated to ensure that managers, veterinarians, and nutritionists judge animals according to the same scale. It can also be used by extension professionals, nutritionists, and veterinarians to train clients and producers. To learn more about body condition scoring, contact **Justin Waggoner**, beef systems specialist, at jwaggon@ksu.edu or (620) 275-9164. This and other information about beef cattle production is available at www.ksubeef.org.

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