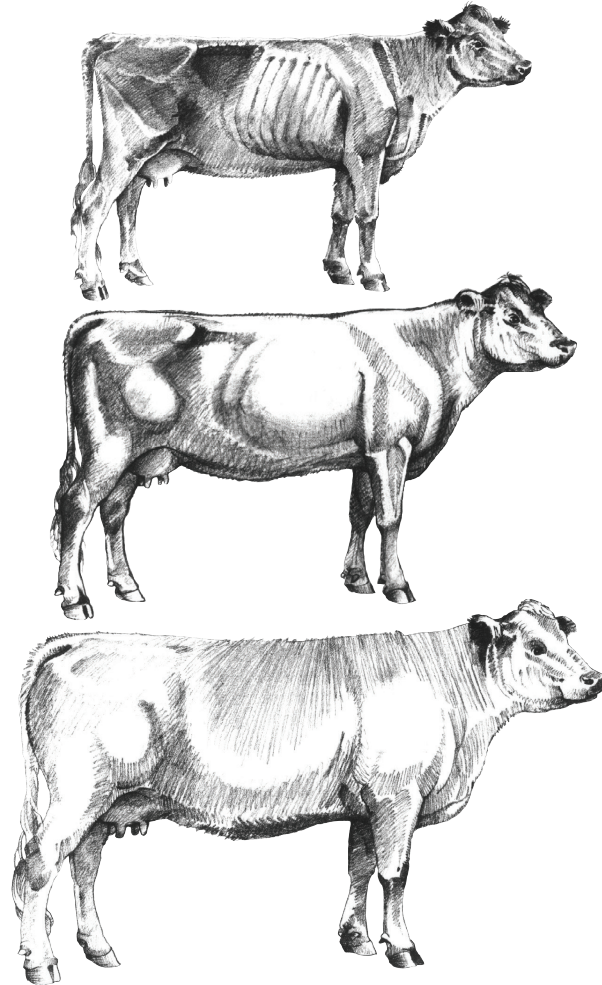


# INVEST *IN NUTRITION!*



**BCS = ROI**

**Beef Cattle  
Body Condition Scores**

## What is a Body Condition Score (BCS)?

Body condition scores (BCS) describe the relative fatness of a cow through a multipoint scale. This scoring system allows a beef producer to visually assess their cow herd and make decisions based on the scoring system. Incorporating body condition scoring as a management tool can help to increase the profit potential of a cow/calf operation.

## Why are Body Condition Scores important?

Cow body condition score is closely related to reproductive efficiency and is a more reliable indicator of nutritional status than cow body weight. A beef cow will store energy in the form of fat when energy intake surpasses her nutrient requirements. When cows are in good condition (5's and 6's on a standard 9-point scale), we assume there are adequate nutrients available to support the needs of fetal development, colostrum and milk production, and normal responses to disease challenges and other stressors.

When cows are thin, these activities may be negatively affected and a producer will have reductions in performance. Thin cows can result in fewer calves, lighter calves,

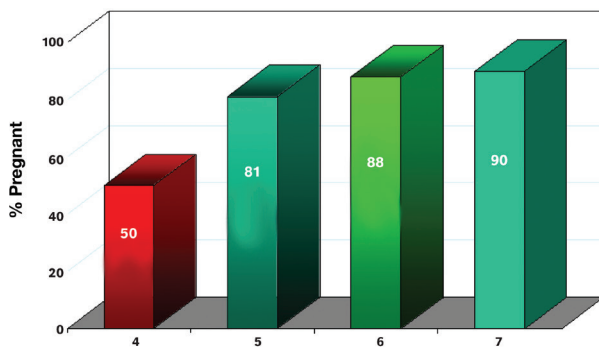
weaned calves that don't do as well on feed or as breeding replacements and increased herd health problems.

## The long-term effect of Body Condition Scores... Fetal Programming & Later Calving

A cow being in poor body condition can affect her and her progeny in subsequent years. Cows that are thin at calving can have produce lighter, less healthy calves and their calves may exhibit greater death loss. Next, thinner cows are less apt to rebreed and those that do will settle later in the season. Then in turn the subsequent calf crop will produce fewer, younger (and therefore lighter), and less uniform calves to market.

Research tells us that when a cow's nutritional needs are not met in early trimesters of pregnancy, her resulting calf can again wean lighter, have reduced performance before and after weaning and even lower marbling scores. Additionally, daughters of these cows have been shown to be later maturing, breed later and often wean lighter calves themselves.

All of this tells us that maintaining proper nutrition levels for adequate cow body condition scores has long term economic benefit for a beef producer.



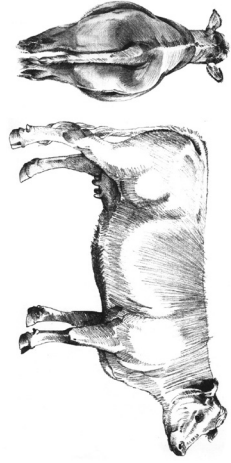
Cow Body Condition Score (90 day breeding season)

Selk et. al, 1986 Oklahoma State University.

## When should you measure and how can you improve Body Condition Scores?

- Access BCS at 90 days prior to calving, at calving, at on set of breeding season, at weaning and at a mid-year (summer) point
- Group cows by body condition scores so additional feed resources can be provided for thinner cows

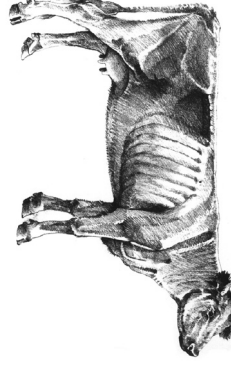
Drawings courtesy of Elanco.



**BCS = 7**  
26% Body Fat



**BCS = 5**  
19% Body Fat



**BCS = 3**  
11% Body Fat

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## The Body Condition Scoring System

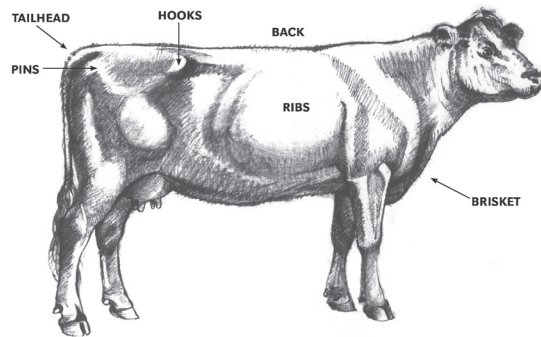
Table 2. Visual Description of Key Body Locations Associated With Each Condition Score

Reference Point	Body Condition Score								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Physical weak	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Muscle atrophy <sup>a</sup>	yes	yes	yes	slight	no	no	no	no	no
Outline of spine visible	yes	yes	yes	slight	no	no	no	no	no
Outline of ribs visible	all	all	all	3-5	1-2	0	0	0	0
Fat in brisket and flanks	no	no	no	yes	slight	some	full	full	extreme
Outline of hip and bones visible	yes	yes	yes	yes	slight	no	no	no	no
Patchy fat around tailhead	no	no	no	no	no	slight	yes	yes	yes

<sup>a</sup>Muscles of loin, rump, and hindquarter are concave, indicating loss of muscle tissue. Adapted from Pruitt and Momont, South Dakota State University, 1988.

### Important Facts to Know:

- Young cows require about one BCS higher to achieve the same reproductive performance as mature cows
- It is easier to increase condition before calving rather than after calving
- Acceptable BCS prior to calving is 6
- BCS contributes to pregnancy rate, calving interval, calf weaning weight, health immunity of calves and daughter's future productivity
- Good reproductive performance requires BCS of 5 or higher



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