



Body Condition Scoring of Beef Cattle

Lyssa Seefeldt, UW-Extension, Marquette County Agriculture Agent

Katie Pfeiffer, UW-Extension, Sauk County Agriculture Agent



Body condition scoring (BCS) is the numerical (1-9) scoring system that visually evaluates the amount of condition (subcutaneous fat) an animal is carrying. It is an evaluation of the nutritional status of an animal. Body condition scoring allows you to coordinate feed resources with animals that need supplemental feed or restrict intake in those animals that need less feed. Most Midwest cattle herds maintain BCS ranging between 4-7. Most producers use a modified system that categorizes animals as thin, moderate, or heavy.

Why should I monitor body condition?

Body condition scoring is an easy process that anyone can learn to do. Monitoring BCS can help you ensure that each animal is getting adequate nutrition. Body condition is an indicator of the nutritional status of each animal. Low BCS in cows leads to longer calving intervals, which in turn leads to decreased income per cow.

Strategic times to body condition score

60 days prior to weaning: make early weaning decisions if cows are thin

Weaning: heifers & older cows may have trouble gaining, keep watch to ensure there is condition gain

100 days prior to calving: last chance to gain condition in a reasonable manner

Calving: thin cows need to gain, but gain will be expensive at this point since nutrient demand is the highest at this stage of production

Breeding: thin cows need to gain, but gain will still be expensive; you will lengthen the breeding season by having to gain at this stage

Body Condition in Cows Affects

- Calving interval (longer post-partum interval)
- Lactation performance
- Pregnancy rate
- Health/vigor of calf
- Supplemental feed costs
- Dystocia in heifers

Strategic locations to evaluate body condition

When determining body condition, there are several areas to evaluate including the brisket, ribs, backbone, flank, hips, and tail head. As cattle lay down fat, they tend to follow a certain order. First fat is laid on the back and loin area (1), followed by the ribs (2). Next to fill in will be the tail head area (3) followed by the brisket area (4) getting filled in with fat. After the brisket, the flank (5) will fill in, then the vulva/rectal region will flesh out. Once all of these areas have filled in, fat will accumulate in the udder and mammary region. To help you distinguish

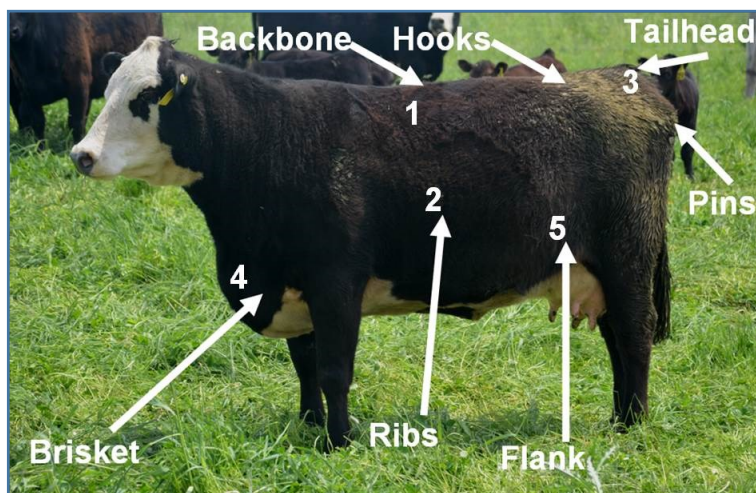


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differences between scores, refer to the chart at the right for what you should be seeing in various parts of the animal when checking for condition.

	Body Condition Score					
	3	4	5	6	7	8
Fat in brisket and flank	No	No	No	Some	Full	Full
Outline of ribs visible	All	3 to 5	1 to 2	0	0	0
Outline of spine visible	Yes	Slight	No	No	No	No
Outline of hip visible	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Slight	No
Fat udder and tailhead	No	No	No	No	No	Slight

Reference points for body condition scoring cattle.

Adapted from Momont, P.A. and R.J. Pruitt, 1998. Condition scoring of beef cattle. Cow-Calf Management Guide and Cattle Producer's Library. CL-720.

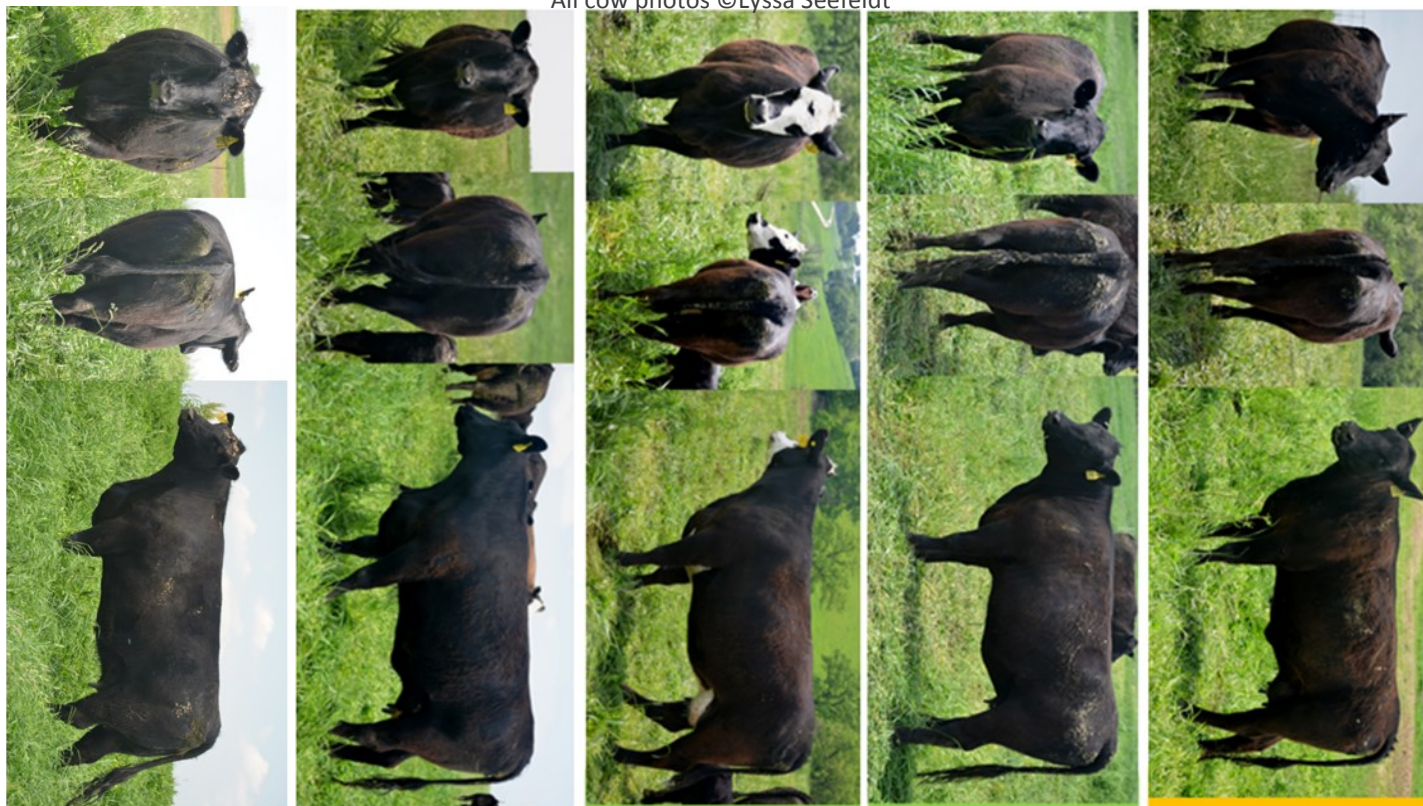
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BCS 8

BCS 7

BCS 6

BCS 5

BCS 4