



Body Condition Scoring



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Knowledge Nuggets

- Body condition scoring is a subjective, easy to learn, inexpensive, "hands on" method of determining the amount of fat an animal is carrying. Condition scoring is a better predictor of body energy content than visual "eyeballing."
- Body condition, or the amount of body fat that an animal is carrying, is one management indicator that can be used to predict herd fertility and determine feeding programs.
- The Canadian system rates animals from 1 (very thin) to 5 (grossly fat) and the American scale rates from 1 to 10. The fat cover over the tips of the short ribs is the major location on the animal's body used for condition scoring. Fat cover over the ribs and tail head is also used.
- The scoring system allows individuals to speak the same language when describing body condition. Rather than using ambiguous rating terms such as "fat", "moderate" or "thin" based on visual appraisal, condition scoring assigns a numerical rating based on the feel of your cows.
- Fat on cows acts as an insulator against cold temperatures. The ability to withstand cold increases as cows carry more fat.
- Fat levels on cows going into the winter will have a dramatic effect on the feeding options and respective costs. Cows going into the winter with extra fat will require less energy over the winter than cows going into the winter thin.
- Cows carrying extra fat will allow the cow manager to harvest some of the fat over the winter months resulting in cows in adequate condition at calving time with lower winter feed costs.
- Cows fed to lose one-half of a body condition score over the winter, will saving in winter feed costs. In contrast, cows fed to gain one-half of a body condition score over the winter, will have 20 to 30 per cent higher feed costs compared to those fed to maintain body condition.

- Use Body Condition Scoring:
 - to measure the overall level of cow condition each fall and spring,
 - to recognize individuals that are thinner than the herd average,
 - to be able to group the cows into feeding groups
 - in order to maintain productivity economically.
- Condition scoring cows in the fall allows you to estimate winter-feed requirements. Condition scoring cows in the spring allows you to evaluate the previous winters' feeding program and to make necessary adjustments next year.

Fact Sheets

[Body Condition: Implications for Managing Beef Cows.](#) - available in [PDF](#) format

[Cow Body Condition Scoring Management Tool for Monitoring Nutritional Status of Beef Cows](#) - available in PDF format only

[Feeding Your Cows by Body Condition.](#) - available in PDF format

[Managing Beef Cows by Body Condition Score](#)

[Managing Your Cow Herd Through Body Condition Scoring](#)

[Using the Net Energy \(NE\) System to Improve Body Condition Score.](#) - available in [PDF](#) format

Research Papers

[A Review of Metabolic and Endocrinological Systems Governing Cow Body Weight and Body Condition in Lactating Beef Cattle](#)

[Effect of Fall Body Condition on Winter Feed Requirements of Wintering Beef Cows](#)

[Evaluation of Condition Scoring of Feeder Calves as a Tool for Management and Nutrition.](#) - available in PDF format

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