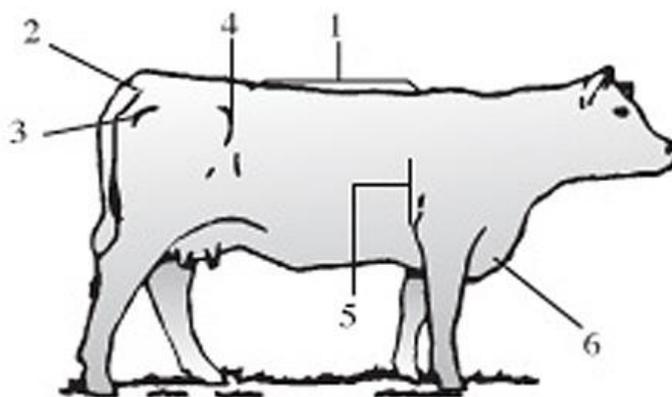


Body Condition Scoring System

Body condition scores are numbers used to estimate energy reserves in the form of fat and muscle of beef cows. BCS ranges from 1 to 9, with a score of 1 being extremely thin and 9 being very obese. Areas such as the back, tail head, pins, hooks, ribs, and brisket of beef cattle can be used to determine BCS.

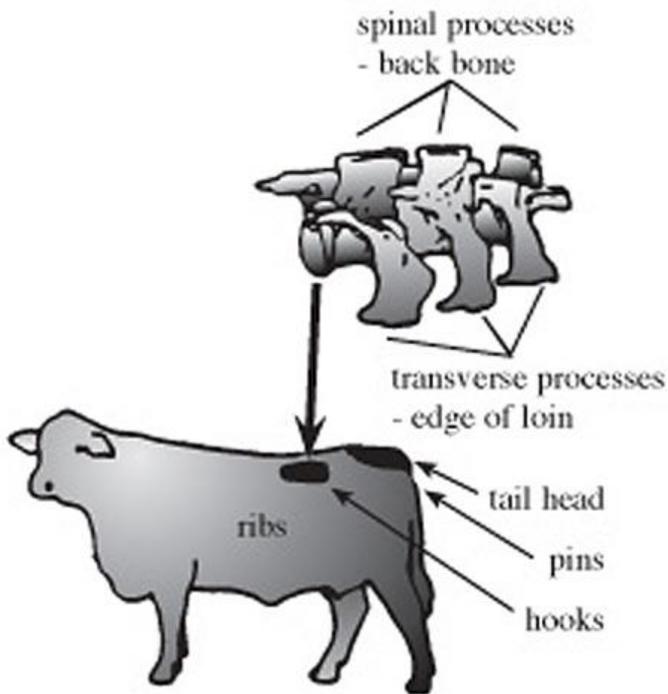


1. Back 3. Pins 5. Ribs
2. Tail Head 4. Hooks 6. Brisket

A cow in 'thin' condition (BCS 1-4) is angular and bony with minimal fat over the backbone, ribs, hooks, and pins. There is no visible fat around the tail head or brisket. A cow in 'ideal' condition (BCS 5-7) has a good overall

appearance. A cow with a BCS of 5 has visible hips, although there is some fat over the hooks and pins and the backbone is no longer visible. Cows with BCS of 6 or 7 become fleshy and the ribs are no longer visible. There is also fat around the tail head and in the brisket. An over-conditioned cow (BCS 8-9) is smooth and boxy with bone structure hidden from sight or touch. She may have large protruding fat deposits (pones) around the tail head and on the pin bones. Be aware that gut fill due to rumen contents or pregnancy can change the appearance of moderately fleshy cows, especially over the ribs or in front of the hooks. Visual indicators of each BCS are listed in Table 1, and example photos of BCS 1-9 are illustrated in photos 1 through 9.

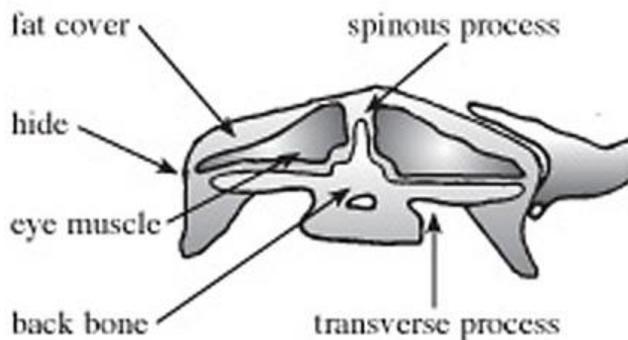
Table 1. Reference table for body condition scores.									
Reference point	Body Condition Scores								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Physically weak	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Muscle atrophy	yes	yes	slight	no	no	no	no	no	no
Outline of spine visible	yes	yes	yes	slight	no	no	no	no	no
Outline of ribs visible	all	all	all	3-5	1-2	0	0	0	0
Outline of hip & pin bones visible	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	slight	no	no
Fat in brisket and flanks	no	no	no	no	no	some	full	full	extreme
Fat udder & patchy fat around tail head	no	no	no	No	no	no	slight	yes	extreme



Long hair can often make it difficult to correctly evaluate the body condition score of a beef cow or heifer. When the hair on the cow is long, palpating the specific areas of fat deposition is particularly important. Cows should be palpated over the back, ribs, and over the horizontal processes of the backbone (edge of loin). 'Thin' cows will have a sharper feel in these areas than cows with moderate or fat body conditions.

Guidelines for Body Condition Scores

A cow is expected to be in optimal body condition (BCS 5-7) before calving. She may lose condition after calving and possibly into the breeding season. She may gain condition and weight as weaning approaches (assuming there is adequate forage) and continue gaining foetal weight and any needed body condition in late gestation. A finished beef cow should be BCS 6-7.



Importance of Body Condition

When cows are extremely thin (BCS < 4), they are not only reproductively inefficient, but they are more susceptible to health problems. Cows at BCS 1 are in a life-threatening situation and need immediate attention.

Stocking Rates and Pasture Quality

Producers need to pay attention to stocking rates and pasture quality. Overstocking and poor forage quality can lead to 'thin' cows.



Photo

1: BCS 1. Emaciated with muscle atrophy and no detectable fat. Tail head and ribs project predominantly. Animal physically weak.



Photo

2: BCS 2. Poor condition with muscle atrophy and no detectable fat. Tail head and ribs prominent.



Photo

3: BCS 3. Thin condition. Slight muscle atrophy. All ribs visible. Very little detectable fat.



Photo

4: BCS 4. Borderline condition. Outline of spine slightly visible. Outline of 3 to 5 ribs visible. Some fat over ribs and hips.



Photo

5: BCS 5. Moderate, good overall appearance. Outline of spine no longer visible. Outline of 1-2 ribs visible. Fat over hips but still visible.



Photo

6: BCS 6. High moderate condition. Ribs and spine no longer visible. Pressure applied to feel bone structure. Some fat in brisket and flanks.



Photo

7: BCS 7. Good, fleshy appearance. Hips slightly visible but ribs and spine not visible. Fat in brisket and flanks with slight udder and tail head fat.



Photo

8: BCS 8. Fat, fleshy and overconditioned. Bone structure not visible. Large patchy fat deposits over ribs, around tail head and brisket.



Photo9: BCS 9. Extremely fat, wasty and patchy. Mobility possibly impaired. Bone structure not visible. Extreme fat deposits over ribs, around tail head and brisket.