

WHAT'S YOUR SCORE?

A **Body Condition Score (BCS)** describes the relative amount of fat an animal is carrying based on a 5-point scale. A score of 1 is extremely thin, and 5 is very fat. Ideally, cows should be managed to have a **BCS of 3.0**.

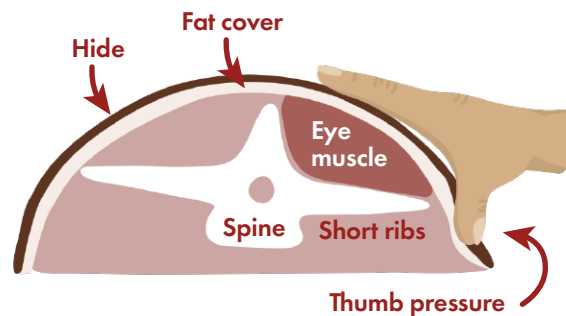


BCS ≤2.0: Underconditioned **BCS 3.0:** Ideal condition **BCS 4.0:** Overconditioned

Body condition scoring is a hands-on process and is better than assessing visually because fat cover and long winter hair coats are deceiving. The process is easy and quick. Feel for fat cover with your hands at the following locations:

- The short ribs
- Over the spine
- The hook and pins
- Either side of the tail head

An animal in optimum condition will have a thin layer of fat in these areas. It will be difficult to feel tops of vertebrae, and firm pressure will be required to feel the bones, but they should not be visibly prominent.



IT PAYS TO BODY CONDITION SCORE ROUTINELY

Explore more body condition scoring resources by scanning the QR code or visiting

www.BeefResearch.ca/BCS



BODY CONDITION SCORING REPRODUCTION DRIVES PROFIT

- ✓ Cows in ideal body condition rebreed, on average, **30 days sooner** than thin cows
- ✓ Reproduction is the most important factor affecting profitability
- ✓ Thin cows are only half as productive as those in optimum condition.
- ✓ Every missed breeding cycle can result in as much as **56lbs** of calf weaning weight lost

Growing Forward 2

Alberta Beef Producers

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CONDITION MATTERS

- The BCS of cows at the **start of the winter feeding period** is particularly important, and has a major effect on the amount and quality of feed required per animal.
- It takes a **1,400-lb cow about 200 lbs of body weight gain** to improve one body condition score point. This is much more difficult to achieve during the winter.
- To improve one BCS point in 90 days requires **20% more energy**; to do it in 60 days requires **30% more**.
- Cows in ideal body condition (3.0) rebreed **up to 30 days sooner** than thin cows.
- Increasing a cow's body condition from 2.0 to 3.0 **increases pregnancy rates by 32%**.
- Maintaining a cow at a BCS of 3.0 is the most crucial during the post-partum interval. Not only must she nurse a calf at this time, she must rebreed within **80-85 days** to calve at the same time next year.
- The earlier you start improving condition, the easier (**and cheaper**) it is to manage.



HOW BODY CONDITION SCORE AFFECTS REPRODUCTION

BCS	Pregnancy rate (%)	Calving interval (days)	Exhibiting estrus 60 days after calving (%)	Weaning weight (lbs)	Calf death loss (%)
1.5	43	414	66	375	8
2.0	61	381	92	460	3
2.5	86	364	92	515	3
3.0	93	364	100	515	3
3.5	95	-	100	-	-
4.0	75	-	-	-	-

STRATEGIES TO MANAGE COW BODY CONDITION

Group cows and match nutritional needs.

EXAMPLE

Group 1: *Mature cows in good condition and heavily pregnant cows:* average-quality forage may require supplementation in cold weather.

Group 2: *Bred replacements and second-calf heifers:* good-quality forage; may require grain supplementation.

Group 3: *Thin and old cows:* good-quality forage and grain/pellet supplementation.

If cows are thin coming off grass, they will continue to be thin unless rations are adjusted to provide more energy and protein.

A cow's nutrient requirements **increase about 30-40%** after calving, **increasing forage demand**. Cows reach peak lactation (and highest nutritional demands) six weeks post-calving. Forages alone may not be enough to meet the needs of a lactating cow.

Nutrition levels of forages can vary **25% to 30%** from year to year. Feed testing is a wise investment and necessary to correctly balance rations.

Visit www.BeefResearch.ca/BCS or consult a veterinarian, nutritionist or beef extension specialist for additional information on feed testing.



IMPORTANCE OF PRE-CALVING NUTRITION

Energy and protein requirements **increase by at least 20%** during late gestation when compared to mid-gestation, with nearly **75%** of fetal growth occurring in this phase.

Feed represents over **50%** of total production costs. While energy is usually the first limiting nutrient (especially in winter), protein may be limiting when feeding low-quality forages.

Inadequate nutrition will cause decreased birth weights and calf growth, poor milk production and colostrum quality, as well as lower calf immunity and survival.



www.BeefResearch.ca/BCS