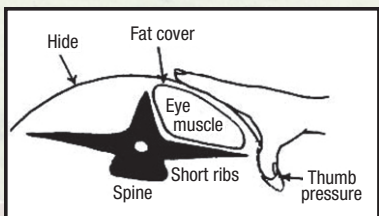


## WHAT'S YOUR SCORE?

A Body Condition Score (BCS) describes the relative amount of fat an animal is carrying based on a 5-point scale. 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.



A score of 1 is extremely thin, and 5 is very fat. Ideally, cows should be managed to have a BCS of 2.5 to 3. Feel for fat cover with your hands at:

- 1) the short ribs,
- 2) over the spine,
- 3) the hook and pins, and
- 4) either side of the tail head.

An animal in optimum condition will have a thin layer of fat in these areas, so it will take some pressure to feel the bones.



**IT PAYS TO MAKE  
BODY CONDITION SCORING A  
PART OF ROUTINE MANAGEMENT.**



For more information about Body Condition Scoring, explore the training materials and interactive web tools at [www.bodyconditionscoring.ca](http://www.bodyconditionscoring.ca), talk to your veterinarian or consult a beef extension specialist. If Internet access is an issue call 403-275-8558 ext. 302 to receive all the information and interactive tools on a free USB data stick that plugs into your computer.



**REPRODUCTION  
DRIVES PROFIT**

## Did you know?

- **Reproduction** is the most important factor affecting profitability
- **Reproduction** is **5X** more important than growth rate, and **10X** more important than carcass quality when it comes to profit
- **Body condition** has the greatest impact on **reproduction\*\***
- **Thin cows** are only **half** as productive in those in optimum condition. Thin cows at calving negatively affect:
  - Calf health **up to** and **beyond** weaning
  - Weaning weights
  - Breeding potential
  - Overall herd performance
  - Profit
- Every missed breeding cycle represents a 42 lb loss in weaning weight



Growing Forward 2  
A federal-provincial-territorial initiative

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Alberta  
Government

Government  
of  
Saskatchewan

Canada

[www.bodyconditionscoring.ca](http://www.bodyconditionscoring.ca)

## 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.
- To improve one condition score, it takes a 1400 lb cow about 200 lbs of body weight gain. This is much more difficult to achieve during winter.
- To improve one BCS in 90 days requires 20% more energy; to do it in 60 days requires 30% more.
- Nutrient requirements increase 30 to 40% at calving.
- 82 days after calving is the **most crucial period** in the beef cow's year. Not only must she nurse a calf, she must rebreed within 80 to 85 days to calve at the same time next year.
- The earlier you start improving condition, the easier (and cheaper!) it is to manage.



2.5 - 3 is ideal

### \*\*How body condition score affects production

BCS	Pregnancy rate (%)	Calving interval (days)	Exhibiting estrus 60 days after calving (%)	Weaning weight (lb)	Calf death loss (%)
1.5	43	414	66	375	8
2	61	381	92	460	3
2.5	86	364	92	515	3
3	93	364	100	515	3
3.5	95	—	100	—	—
4	75	—	—	—	—

## STRATEGIES

Group cows and match nutritional needs.

Example:

**Group 1 – Mature cows in good condition and heavily pregnant cows:** average quality forage; supplementation with grain may be necessary 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 will increase about 30-40% with calving. Forage intake will increase about 30%. Cows reach peak lactation around six weeks post-calving. All of these factors mean increased energy requirements.

Nutrition levels of stored forages can vary 25 to 30% from year to year. Feed testing is a wise investment, and necessary to correctly balance rations. Visit [www.bodyconditionscoring.ca](http://www.bodyconditionscoring.ca) or consult a veterinarian or beef extension specialist for additional information on feed testing.



Everything depends on Mom

Protein supplementation may be effective if forage crude protein is less than 7%. While energy is usually the first limiting nutrient (especially in winter), protein may be limiting when feeding low quality forages.

Inadequate nutrition during the 90-day pre-calving period will cause lighter birth weights, poor colostrum quality, lower calf immunity and survival, decreased milk production and calf growth.

Feed represents 59-70% of production costs and nutrition has a major impact on reproduction—both essential to your bottom line.

