

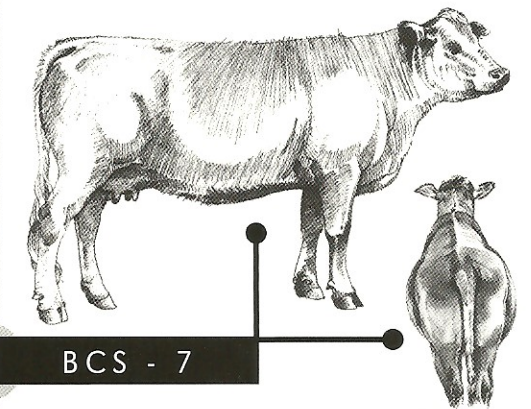
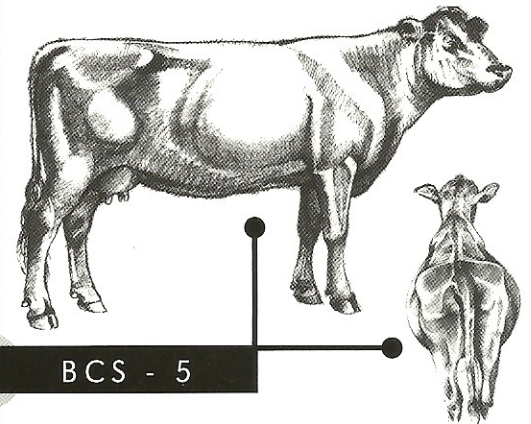
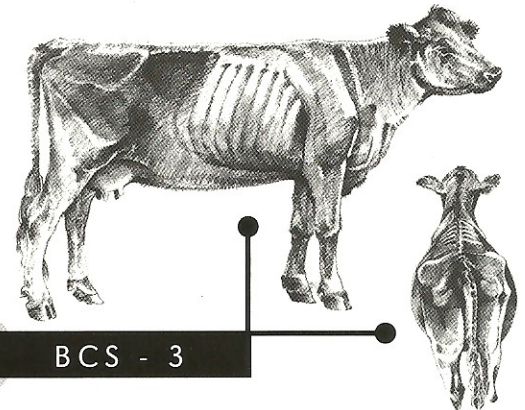
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Body Condition Scores (BCS) describe the relative fatness or body condition of a cow herd through the use of a nine point system.

## 9 Point Body Condition Scoring System

BCS	DESCRIPTION
THIN	<b>1</b> Bone structure of shoulder, ribs, back, hooks and pins are sharp to the touch and easily visible. No evidence of fat deposits or muscling.
	<b>2</b> No evidence of fat deposition and some muscle loss in the hindquarters. The spinous processes feel sharp to the touch and are easily seen with space between them.
	<b>3</b> Very little fat cover over the loin, back and foreribs. The backbone is still highly visible. Processes of the spine can be identified individually by touch and are still visible. Spaces between the processes are less pronounced.
MODERATE	<b>4</b> Foreribs are not noticeable but the 12 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> ribs are still noticeable to the eye. The transverse spinous processes can be identified by palpation (with slight pressure) and feel rounded rather than sharp.
	<b>5</b> The 12 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> ribs are not visible to the eye unless the animal has been shrunk. The transverse spinous processes can only be felt with firm pressure and feel rounded but are not noticeable to the eye. Spaces between the processes are not visible and are only distinguishable with firm pressure. Areas on each side of the tailhead are starting to fill.
	<b>6</b> Ribs are fully covered and are not noticeable to the eye. Hindquarters are plump and full. Noticeable springiness over the foreribs and on each side of the tailhead. Firm pressure is now required to feel the transverse processes. Brisket has some fat.
FLESHY	<b>7</b> Ends of the spinous processes can only be felt with very firm pressure. Spaces between processes can barely be distinguished. Abundant fat cover on either side of the tailhead with evident patchiness. Fat in the brisket.
	<b>8</b> Animal takes on smooth, blocky appearance. Bone structure disappears from sight. Fat cover is thick and spongy and patchiness is likely. Brisket is full.
	<b>9</b> Bone structure is not seen or easily felt. The tailhead is buried in fat. The animal's mobility may actually be impaired by excessive fat. Square appearance.

Manage MATURE COWS so they calve in a BCS 5 and 1<sup>st</sup>-CALF HEIFERS so they calve in a BCS 6. Feeding cows to a BCS 7 is not recommended.



Each BCS equates to 75 pounds, not including the fetus, fetal membrane and fluids. Also, each BCS is about 4% body fat. Therefore, increasing a cow from BCS 3 to BCS 5 is 150 pounds and 8% body fat. Make sure you are evaluating degree of fatness not hair coat, rumen fill, muscle, or stage of pregnancy.

Drawings Courtesy of Elanco Animal Health



Research indicates that BCS of the cow at calving influences animal productivity. The immediate effect of BCS at calving is that cows that are thin (BCS 4 or thinner) give birth to less vigorous calves that are slower to stand. In addition, calves that are born to cows that are thin at calving have lower concentrations of immunoglobulin (IgG) in the blood 24 hours after birth (Figure 1). Immunoglobulins are in the colostrum and help the calf fend off early calfhood diseases. The long-term effect of body condition at calving is its effect on subsequent rebreeding performance. Cows that calve in thin body condition have an extended interval from calving to their first heat, commonly called post-partum anestrus interval (Table 1). For a cow to maintain a 365-day calving interval, she must re-breed by day 83 after calving.

Table 1

BCS At Calving	PPI, days
BCS 3	89
BCS 4	70
BCS 5	59
BCS 6	52
BCS 7	31

Figure 1. Effect of Cow Body Condition Score at Calving on Concentration of IgG in Serum of Calves 24 Hours Old

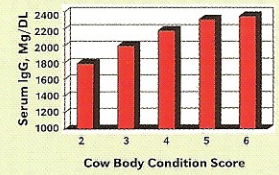


Figure 1

**Key Times to Condition Score Cows:**

Late Summer, Early Fall

This is an important time to condition score cows in drought years or in systems where females are managed almost entirely on vegetative and dormant grazed forage. For thin cows, early weaning or supplementation along with grazed forage should be considered.

Weaning Time

Pay particular attention to young cows weaning their first calves; they are most likely to be thin at this time. May need to consider early weaning calves from young cows and giving higher quality grazing.

45 Days after Weaning

Gives a good idea how fast cows are "bouncing" back after weaning. Thin cows should be gaining back condition if cow type is matched with the feed resources.

90 Days before Calving

Last opportunity to get condition back on cows economically. This would be the time to separate thin cows from cows in good condition.

Calving Time

If cows are thin, consider changing the pre-calving feeding program. It is difficult to economically improve cow condition after calving. It takes large amounts of high-quality feed.

Breeding

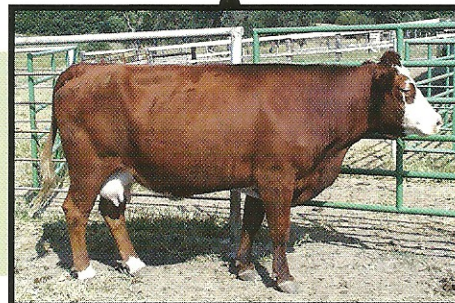
Thin cows may indicate poor match of calving season to feed resources. Maybe calving is too early in the spring.



BCS - 4



BCS - 5



BCS - 6

The period from weaning to 90 days pre-calving is the best time to get serious about body condition scoring and planning the nutrition/management program because the manager's strategy can have great impact. If mature cows are constantly thin, it may mean their genetic production level doesn't fit the feed resource.

To increase the body condition of a herd, the ration must be balanced for protein, vitamins, and minerals, but must exceed the requirements for energy (TDN).