

Basics of Body Condition Scoring (BCS)

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Body condition score (BCS) evaluates the energy balance and reserves of cattle. It is based off of a 9 point scale with 1 being emaciated and 9 being obese.

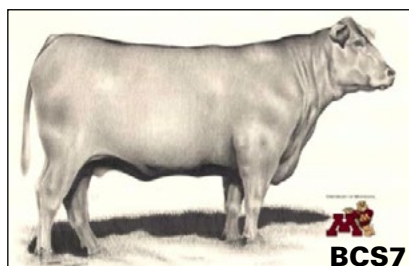
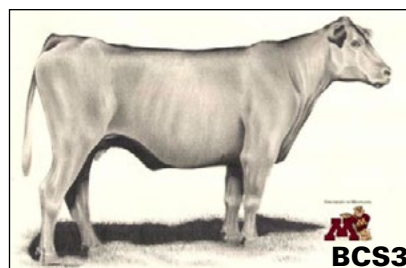
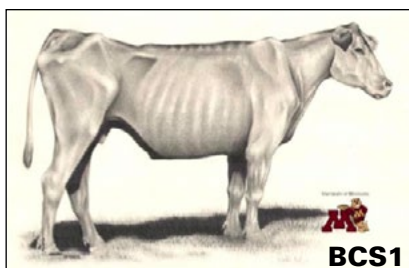
Through the use of BCS, producers can visually estimate the percent body fat of an animal, a critical component of overall performance, especially reproductive performance. Research has revealed that cattle are most efficiency and fertile at a BCS of 5 to 5.5. Typically one BCS is the equivalent of 75 to 100 pounds of body weight, depending on age and frame size.

In the mature cow herd the most economical time to improve BCS is following weaning, during mid-gestation. This is the time when the cows nutrient requirements are the lowest throughout the annual production cycle.

Key points to implementing BCS in your cow herd:

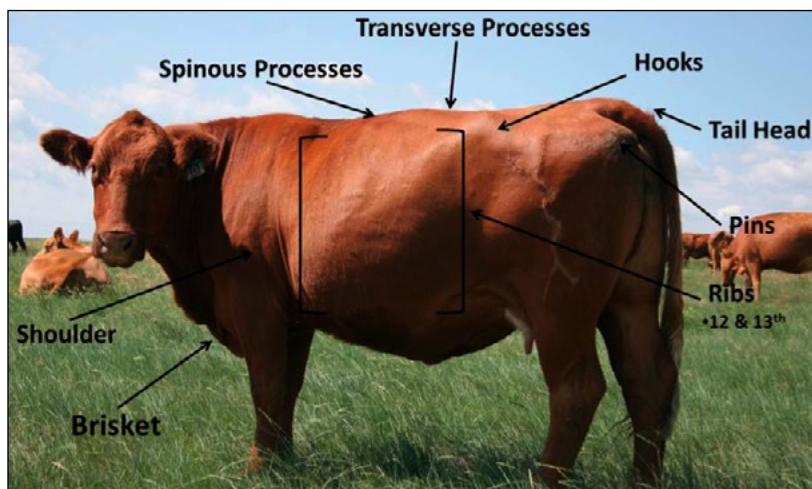
- Be consistent in your scoring
- BCS throughout the year
- Keep good records of BCS
- Adjust for frame size, age, and breed
- Do not BCS cattle in a working chute, it is hard to be accurate

BCS	% Body Fat
1	3.77%
3	11.30%
5	18.89%
7	26.38%
9	33.91%



Images courtesy of University of Minnesota

Body Condition Score	Description
BCS 1 = Emaciated	No palpable fat is detectable over the spinous processes, transverse processes, ribs, or hooks. The tail head and ribs appear very prominent.
BCS 2 = Poor	Animal is still somewhat emaciated but the tail head and ribs are less prominent. Individual spinous processes are still sharp to the touch. Some tissue cover is present over the ribs toward the top of the back.
BCS 3 = Thin	Individual ribs including fore ribs are easily identified but are not quite as sharp to the touch. Some fat can be felt along the spine and over the tail head. Some tissue cover is present over the ribs toward the top of the back.
BCS 4 = Borderline	Individual ribs may not be visually obvious. Individual spinous processes can be felt when palpated but feel rounded rather than sharp. Some fat cover is present over the ribs, transverse processes, and hooks.
BCS 5 = Moderate	Overall appearance is generally good. Fat cover over ribs feels spongy. Palpable fat cover is present on either side of the tail head.
BCS 6 = High moderate	A high degree of palpable fat exists over the ribs and around the tail head. Firm pressure is needed to feel the spinous processes.
BCS 7 = Good	Considerable fat cover is present with a fleshy overall appearance. Fat cover over the ribs and around the tail head is very spongy. Fat "pones" or "rounds" may be starting to form along the tail head.
BCS 8 = Fat	The animal is very fleshy and appears over conditioned. Palpation of the spinous processes is near impossible. Large fat deposits are present over the ribs and around the tail head. Fat pones around the tail head are obvious.
BCS 9 = Extremely fat	The overall appearance is blocky with extremely wasty and patchy fat cover. The tail head and hooks are buried in fatty tissue with fat pones protruding. Bone structure is no longer visible and barely palpable. Large fatty deposits may even impair animal mobility.



For more information on BCS your cowherd visit extension.sdstate.edu.