

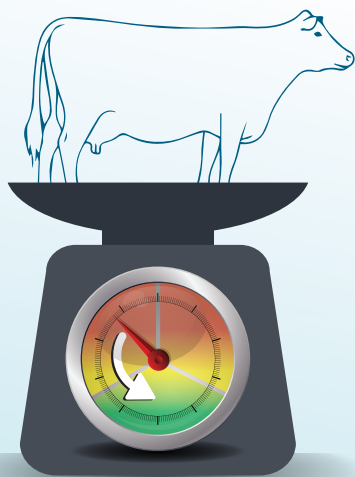
Body Condition Score

Information Document



Body Condition Scoring (BCS)

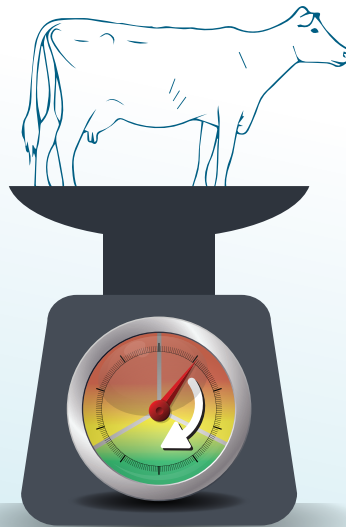
is a tool for determining if an animal is too thin, too fat, or in ideal condition. The BCS scoring scale ranges from 1 (emaciated) to 5 (fat). Importantly, the target BCS of cows will vary depending on stage of lactation, but the BCS scoring scale remains the same. However, if a herd has a significant number of thin animals, the producer should evaluate possible causes and take corrective actions.



Cows that are **too fat, or over-conditioned**

- may be more prone to reproductive and metabolic diseases.

(e.g. retained placenta, uterine infections, ketosis, displaced abomasums).



Cows that are **too thin, or under-conditioned**

- may not have sufficient body reserves to support high levels of milk production;
- may not show heat or conceive until they start to regain—or at least maintain—body weight.

Cows that lose excessive body condition in early lactation are at increased risk for sole ulcers, a significant cause of pain, lameness, and loss of production.

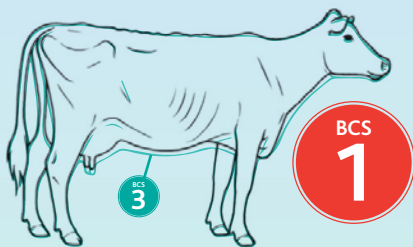
Body condition directly influences productivity, reproduction, health, welfare and longevity.

Additionally, as part of proAction, you must evaluate the milking herd for body condition score, keep records of the results, and take corrective actions if herd scores are in the yellow or red zones.

(proAction Animal Care Validation Requirement 15; Dairy Cattle Code of Practice section 2.1)

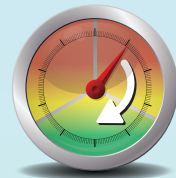
proAction

Evaluating the outcome of BCS



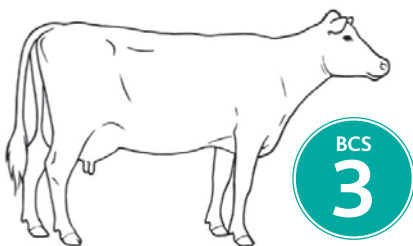
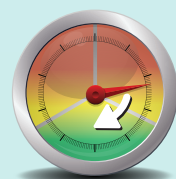
Emaciated

Ends of short ribs sharp to touch. Loins have prominent shelf-like appearance. Individual vertebrae of backbone are prominent. Hook and pin bones are sharply defined and angular in appearance. Sunken and hollow on either side of tail head, and vulva is prominent.



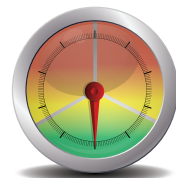
Thin

Ends of short ribs can be felt, but less prominent than BCS 1, and less of a shelf-like appearance. Hook and pin bones still prominent, but more round and smoothed over. Both sides of tail are still fairly sunken and hollow, but vulva is less prominent.



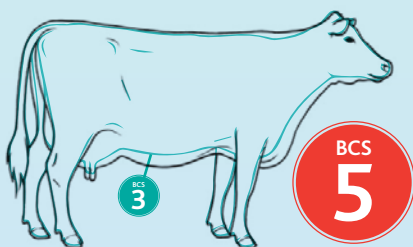
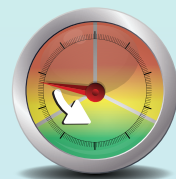
Average

Short ribs can be felt with moderate pressure. Overhanging shelf-like appearance gone. Hook and pin bones are visible, but smooth and rounded, and a fat pad is palpable. Both sides of tail are somewhat hollow, but better filled out than previous BCS, no evidence of fat deposits.



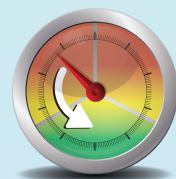
Heavy

Short ribs not visible and only felt with firm pressure and have a rounded over appearance. Ridge of the backbone flattening over loin, rump and chine areas. Area between hooks and pins almost flat. Sides of tail no longer hollow and some fat deposits are palpable.



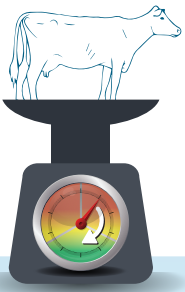
Fat

Short ribs cannot be seen or felt. Vertebrae in chine, loin and rump are not visible. Obvious fat deposits around the tailbone and over the ribs. Thighs curve out and the brisket and flanks are heavy.



The evaluation chart illustrations above are a guide for farmers (Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle). For more detailed illustrations to evaluate BCS, you can consult the following resources:

- Learn to Score Body Condition, PennState Extension website.
- The 5-point body condition scoring system, Elanco animal health.



Under-conditioning

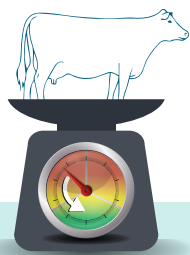
(thin cows)

A BCS score of 2 or lower may result from poor access to feed (not enough space or too much competition at the feed bunk), poor quality of feed, disease, lameness or other factors.

Monitoring the number of thin cows over time will help you to assess the appropriateness of your remedies.

As part of proAction, you must determine how many cows are too thin, keep records of the results, and take corrective actions if herd scores are in the yellow or red zones.

(proAction Animal Care Validation Requirement 15; Dairy Cattle Code of Practice section 2.1).



Over-conditioning

(fat cows)

A BCS score of 4 or higher may occur due to inappropriate nutrition and/or reproductive management, such as feeding too rich of a diet during dry periods. Improper reductions in grain and total nutrient levels in feed to follow reductions in production during the final months of lactation generally result in the onset of over-conditioning. Cows who fail to conceive until late in lactation may become over-conditioned.

You can, and should, use body condition scoring to periodically assess your herd or groups of cows to identify nutritional deficiencies, health problems and other management-related issues.

To body condition score your cows:

1. Record the ID number of the cow.
2. Score the body condition of the cow using the BCS chart on page 2.
3. Record the body condition score in your records.
4. Assess herd status by tabulating scores. In particular, cows with a BCS equal to, or less than 2, are too thin.
5. Retain these records permanently. Monitor cow and herd performance over time.

GOALS FOR BODY CONDITION SCORES BY STAGE OF LACTATION

The Dairy Cattle Code of Practice provides recommended target BCSs during various stages of lactation:

Dry off	3.25 - 3.75
Calving	3.25 - 3.75
Early lactation	2.50 - 3.25
Mid-lactation	2.75 - 3.25
Late lactation	3.00 - 3.50
Growing heifers	2.75 - 3.25
Heifers at calving	3.25 - 3.75

Evaluating the outcome of BCS's

As part of proAction, you must determine how many cows are too thin, keep records of the results, and take corrective actions if herd scores are in the yellow or red zones.

(proAction Animal Care Validation Requirement 15; Dairy Cattle Code of Practice section 2.1)

Action based on BCS results

Assess how many cows you have that are too thin. In some cases a proportion of the herd (i.e. more than 15% of cows) will be affected, indicating a change in herd management is required. In some cases, only a few individual cows (i.e. less than 15% of cows) will be affected, indicating individual cow problems need to be remedied.



Consult your veterinarian about specific health issues that may contribute to poor body condition in individual cows.

Consult your nutritionist about formulating a ration for cows with poor body condition.

Separate cows with poor body condition into a small group or sick pen for closer monitoring and separate feeding.



Consult your veterinarian about any herd health and feeding issues in your herd.

Consult your nutritionist about your feeding program. Specifically look at dry matter intake, ration ingredients and ration formulation to ensure you are feeding appropriately at each stage of lactation.

Evaluate bunk space to ensure all cows have free access to feed. Ensure feed is pushed up and available.

SEPARATE COWS BY
age to prevent social issues like competition and bullying.

SCORE YOUR COWS PERIODICALLY AT EACH STAGE OF LACTATION.
The Animal Care program requires an official assessment every 2 years, but you may want to score your own cows periodically to ensure they are at the target Body Condition Score.