Quick Guide to Body Condition Scoring

Body Condition Score (BCS) is a tool for determining if an animal is too thin, too fat or in ideal condition. BCS charts range from 1 (emaciated) to 5 (fat).

- Assess body condition of the animal to determine if the animal is:
  - Too thin or requires corrective action (BCS ≤ 2)
  - Acceptable (BCS > 2)

- Two resources:
  - BCS Flowchart in Figure 1. The grey cells highlight the parameter that has changed between scores
  - Body Condition Scoring Chart in Figure 2

Figure 1: BCS Flowchart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BCS</th>
<th>3.0</th>
<th>2.75</th>
<th>2.5</th>
<th>2.25</th>
<th>2.0</th>
<th>&lt; 2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pelvic area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hook bones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rounded</td>
<td>angular</td>
<td>angular</td>
<td>angular</td>
<td>angular</td>
<td>angular</td>
<td>angular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin bones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>padded</td>
<td>padded</td>
<td>angular, fat palpable</td>
<td>angular, no fat palpable</td>
<td>angular, no fat palpable</td>
<td>angular, no fat palpable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corrugations non visible</td>
<td>corrugations non visible</td>
<td>corrugations non visible</td>
<td>corrugations visible 1/2 way between tips and short ribs</td>
<td>corrugations visible 3/4 way between tips and short ribs</td>
<td>corrugations visible 3/4 way between tips and short ribs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thurl non prominent</td>
<td>thurl prominent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Body Condition Scoring Chart – only showing Scores 2 and 3

Note: for a description of all 5 Body Condition Scores, please refer to Appendix E of the Code of Practice or to Appendix I of the Animal Care Reference Manual.

Acceptable

**BCS 3**

**SHORT RIBS:**
- Ends can be felt with moderate pressure
- Ribs appear smooth without noticeable scalloping
- Overhanging shelf effect much less apparent

**BACKBONE:**
- Vertebrae in chine, loin and rump area appear rounded
- Backbone visible, but individual vertebrae not distinct

**HOOK AND PIN BONES:**
- Visible, but smooth, with rounded appearance
- Fat pad palpable

**THURL (area over pelvis):**
- Forms “U shaped” depression

**TAIL HEAD:**
- Both sides of tail head somewhat hollow, but skin folds not distinct
- Ligaments connecting pin bones to spine are rounded in appearance

Requires corrective action

**BCS 2**

**SHORT RIBS:**
- Ends not as prominent as BCS 1, but can be felt
- Edges easily felt, with slight fat cover, and slightly more rounded appearance
- Overhanging shelf effect less apparent

**BACKBONE:**
- Vertebrae in chine, loin and rump area, less visually distinct
- Easily feel individual vertebrae

**HOOK AND PIN BONES:**
- Bones still prominent, angular
- No fat pad palpable

**THURL (area over pelvis):**
- Less severe “V shaped” depression
- Little tissue cover

**TAIL HEAD:**
- Both sides of the tail head are sunken and hollow
- Sharply defined ligaments connecting pin bones to spine

**Source:** excerpt from Appendix E of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle, 2009.