



# Cattle Producer's Handbook

Management Section

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## Condition Scoring of Beef Cattle

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The nutritional requirements of the animal must be met to attain high levels of cow performance and efficient use of feed resources. Precise feeding of beef cows is complicated, however, under diverse range and pasture environments. Monitoring body condition during the production cycle is an effective means of evaluating the cow herd's nutritional program.

### Body Condition Scoring

Cow body condition scoring is a method of categorizing breeding animals by their degree of body reserves. Numerical values, derived through subjective visual appraisal and (or) manual palpation, are assigned to each cow according to apparent external fat cover, muscle appearance, and apparent skeletal features.

While several numbering systems for assessing condition scores are in use, they all are based on the

same range of cow body condition, and all serve the same function. A system using the relative rankings of 1 through 9, which is commonly used throughout the United States, is described in Table 1. Key anatomical reference points for evaluating cow body condition are shown in Fig. 7.

Researchers have reported strong positive correlations between condition scores and the percent body fat of cows. In fact, condition scores are more indicative of an animal's relative body fatness than other objective linear measurements such as weight to height ratios and backfat probes. Research shows visual appraisal alone can accurately evaluate body condition, which is beneficial considering that palpating all cows may not be practical under certain circumstances. A simplified reference guide containing key points and backfat estimates for each condition score is shown in Table 2.

**Table 1. Body condition scoring system for beef cows.**

Score	Condition	Description
1	Severely emaciated	Individual spinous processes, shoulder, rib, and hip bones are obvious. No apparent fat cover. Shoulder, loin, and rear quarter muscle has marked atrophied appearance. Physically weak (Fig. 1).
2	Extremely thin	Same as 1 but not weakened (Fig. 2).
3	Very thin	Individual spinous processes, shoulder, rib, and hip bones are obvious. No apparent fat cover. Only slight muscle atrophy (Fig. 3).
4	Slightly thin	Individual spinous processes no longer apparent. Rear ribs, hip, and pin bones evident. Slight fat cover over shoulder and foreribs only. No visible muscle atrophy (Fig. 4).
5	Moderate	Last two ribs noticeable. Small amount of fat over shoulder, foreribs, and loin. Slight or no fat on brisket or over hip and pin bones (Fig. 5).
6	Slightly fleshy	Individual ribs are not evident. Moderate fat covering over shoulder, loin, and foreribs. Some fat in brisket and over last ribs and hip bones (Fig. 6).
7	Fleshy	Very smooth profile due to fat deposits. Considerable fat covering over shoulder, rib, loin, and hip. Fat fills out brisket, flanks, and tailhead.
8	Obese	When viewed from behind, back and hips have square appearance, and tailhead is full due to excessive fat deposits. Flanks appear deep, and brisket is full and distended with fat.
9	Very obese	Excessive fat deposits cause a rippled appearance over loin, hip, and tailhead. Neck appears short due to fullness of brisket. Heavy deposition of udder fat noticeable in dry cows.