

Cattle Producer's Handbook

Management Section

775

Frame Scores and Feeder Cattle Grades

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For an efficient cow-calf operation, estimates of cow performance can help plan management strategies. Frame scores are one way that producers can predict performance of their cattle. Frame scores project mature size, indicate carcass composition, and estimate performance potential and feed requirements.

Frame scores are classifications of skeletal size. Skeletal size indicates mature proportions and subsequently cattle growth patterns. Frame scores are objective number scores that typically range from 1 to 9. Hip height measurements adjusted for age are used to calculate the numbers.

With proper age adjustment, the frame score for the animal should be the same its entire life. This should hold true no matter at what age the measurements are taken. This assumes that there will be proper nutrition and management for that animal.

In real life situations, management or nutrition may not be consistent. Because of this, sometimes animals will change frame scores (usually no more or less than 1) in their lifetime.



Fig. 1. Three different frame scores.

Cattle with low frame scores are smaller and shorter. Cattle with this type of frame usually mature earlier and at lighter body weights. They finish for slaughter earlier and at lighter weights in the feedlot. Cattle with high numbered frame scores are taller and usually later maturing. They weigh more at maturity. They finish at higher weights in the feedlot and tend to convert feed to gain more efficiently. They may not carry as much marbling, lowering carcass value.

Which frame size is more desirable depends upon environmental conditions that the cattle are in as well as management goals and objectives. Fig. 1 is an example of various frame sizes of similar body condition.

Hip height is measured at a point directly over the hook bones (Fig. 2). A specially designed device measures hip height. It has a bubble level on a sliding arm on a pole with scaled measurements. You can also use other methods. It is important, however, that the animal is standing squarely and its head held in a normal position for any measuring technique used.

Adjustments when frame scoring at 205 and 365 days of age must be made for age of calf and age of dam. For the 205-day weights, take hip height measurements

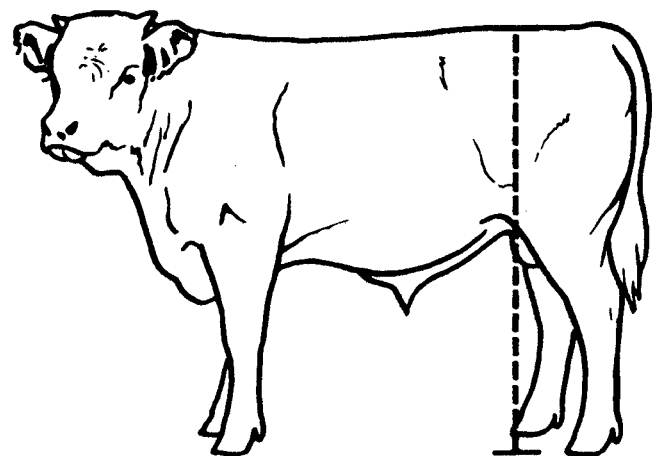


Fig. 2. Proper measurement location for hip heights.