



Body Condition Scoring

A common question I get on routine farm calls or even during herd work is if a cow or herd is too thin. The reason I get this question so often is because to some it's an opinion rather than something we can measure. Condition of cattle and especially breeding females is a huge factor that affects multiple events throughout the year. This month I thought it would be good to go through Body Condition Scoring and the ways it can help your herd.

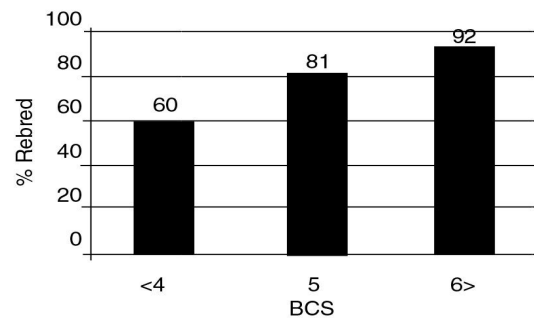
Body Condition Scoring is a tool that anyone in the beef industry can use to measure condition on an animal. This tool measures fat cover on a scale from severe emaciation to severe obesity. Both extremes on the scale are something cattlemen want to avoid when it comes to cattle condition. The following is a scale (1-9) that can be used when you are Body Condition Scoring cattle courtesy of Virginia Tech:

- **1 = Visibly weak - all ribs showing, spine and hips visible - emaciated**
- **2 = Not visibly weak - all ribs showing, spine and hips visible**
- **3 = Some cover over the first few pairs of ribs, spine and hips visible**
- **4 = Fat cover present over half the ribcage, some cover over spine**
- **5 = Last couple of ribs still visible, spine no longer visible, hips visible**
- **6 = No ribs visible, fat cover over the short ribs, hips still visible**
- **7 = No ribs visible, fat over the hip bones, full brisket, some fat around tail head**

- **8 = No bone structure visible, fat around tail head and udder**
- **9 = Extreme obesity**

The ideal Body Condition Score (BCS) for cows ranges between 5 to 6, and ideally bred heifers range between 6 to 6.5. There's a plethora of benefits for having cows and heifers within these ranges. **The following is a list of benefits of having cattle in the right condition:**

- 1. Shortened interval between calving and subsequent estrus - better chance of maintaining a 365-day calving interval**
- 2. Higher rebreeding percentage in subsequent breeding season**



- 3. Increased colostrum production and increased concentration of antibody in colostrum which produces healthier calves**
- 4. Greater calf vigor - one study according to the Iowa Beef Center reported that heifers with a BCS of 2 had calves that took 60 minutes to stand compared to heifers with a BCS of 6 had calves that took 35 minutes to stand**