

BCS Rankings and Your Cowherd

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Body Condition Scoring (BCS) is in the vocabulary of many cattlemen, nutritionists and veterinarians to describe the nutritional status of cows. Research has clearly correlated the influence of body condition at calving time and breeding time on the overall reproductive function.

Body Condition Scoring (BCS) is an on-the-hoof visual appraisal using numbers (1-9) to suggest the relative body fat of the beef cow. With this nine point scale, a score of 1 represents a very thin body condition and a score of 9 represents extreme obesity. For mature cows, a BCS of 5 is recommended at calving. However because heifers are still growing, their nutritional requirements are higher, so manage heifers to calve in BCS 6. It is important to remember that the single greatest factor influencing rebreeding performance of beef cows is body condition at calving.

Steps to Evaluate Body Condition

- Evaluate the animal from the front, side and rear.
- Is the skeletal structure visible or does the animal have a smooth appearance?
- Evaluate specific areas to determine the presence or absence of fat starting at the front and working to the rear.
- Visually appraise the brisket for fat and then move over the shoulder and across the ribs looking for prominence of bone structure. Observe the back for indications of the spinous process and vertebrae leading to the tailhead. Look at the tailhead itself. Observe the hooks and pin bones. Observe the skeletal structure with the animal both standing still and walking. Look for large patches of fat over the ribs, around the tailhead and below the vulva.
- Photographs can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.caes.uga.edu/commodities/fieldcrops/forages/events/GS09/notebookitems/11%20Grazing%20Herd%20Management%20Issues%20for%20beef%20cattle/Body%20Condition%20Scoring%20Beef%20Cows.pdf>
<http://msucares.com/pubs/publications/p2508.pdf>

Condition scoring cows and heifers allow us to properly plan and adjust forage and feeding programs. Key times to body condition score beef cattle are:

- Weaning
- 60-90 days prior to calving
- At calving
- The beginning of the breeding season



Adapted from ANR-1100 Alabama Beef Cattle Producers Guide