

BODY CONDITION SCORING BEEF CATTLE

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The most widely used Body Condition Scoring system is a one-to-nine scale, with "one" being extremely thin and "nine" being obese (Table 1). In general, we consider one to four to be thin, five to seven to be the normal range and eights and nines to be fat. If cows are too thin (condition score four or less) they are likely to have trouble rebreeding and probably need improved forage or supplementation with concentrates. This is especially important with first-calf cows and bulls. Cows showing little evidence of rib and uniform healthy body condition (score "6" or "7") may need minimal fall adjustment in management. Fat cows (score "8" or "9") are often too fat because they are not pregnant or "skipped" calving last year. Overly fat cows are worthy of a careful look to see what kind of calf they wean. If it is a good calf, and she is pregnant, keep her, but if she skipped last year or has a poor calf, consider selling. Body condition scoring may be done at any time, but is most useful at critical periods such as prior to breeding, weaning time or near calving.

Table 1. Body Condition Scoring Guidelines

Condition Score Trait	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Visible Ribs	all	all	most	3-5	1-2	0	0	0	0
Visible Spine	++++	+++	++	+	No	No	No	No	No
Brisket Fat	No	No	No	No	No	+	++	+++	++++
Tail Head Fat (Pones)	No	No	No	No	No	No	+	++	+++
Muscle Loss	+++	++	+	No	No	No	No	No	No

Adapted from National Research Council (NRC) Guidelines

Cow No.	Cond. Score	Comments

_____ Herd Average Body Condition Score

Additional information on beef cattle nutrition can be obtained by contacting your local Agricultural Extension Service office or from the Extension-Beef, Sheep & Horse home page: www.utextension.utk.edu/ansci