



## Body condition scoring of dairy cattle

### Introduction

Failure to recognize and take action about cows that are too fat or too thin for their stage of lactation costs dearly for disease treatments, lost milk production, and decreased fertility.

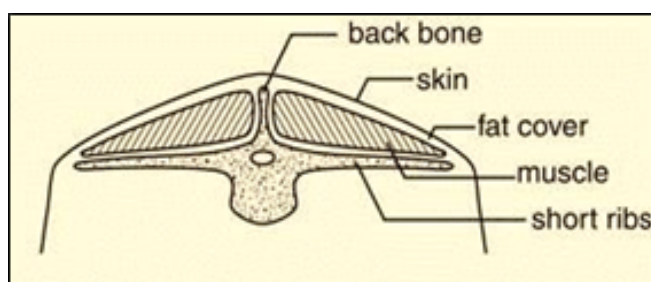
Body condition reflects the body fat reserves carried by the animal. These reserves are used by the cow when she is unable to eat enough to satisfy her energy needs. In high-producing cows, this normally happens during early lactation, but it may also happen when cows get sick, are fed poor quality feeds, or feed intake is restricted. After a period of weight loss, cows should be fed more than their requirements to restore normal body condition.

### Body condition score (BSC)

BSC is used to adjust feeding and management practices to maximise potential for milk production and minimise reproductive disorders. Cows should be scored both by looking at and handling the backbone, loin and rump areas. Since the pin bone, hip bone, the top of the backbone and ends of the short ribs do not have muscle tissue covering them, any covering you see or feel is the combination of skin and fat deposits.

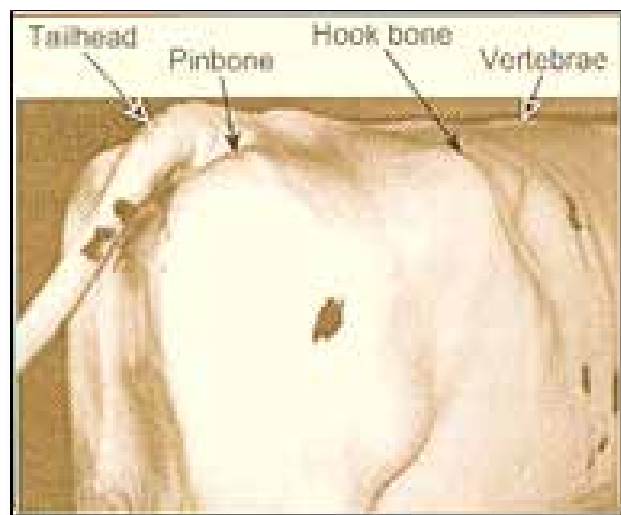
Assessing condition by handling is quite easy. Press the fingertips against the backbone, pin bone and hip bone. Grip the loin of the cow where the short ribs project from the backbone, just ahead of the hips, with your fingers on top of the loin and the thumb curved around the ends of the short ribs. Fingertip pressure will provide a good indication of the amount of fat cover.

Condition scoring should be done by the person responsible for feeding the herd. Cows should be scored regularly to reflect changes in fat reserves in each stage of lactation. Ideally all cows should be scored at the beginning and end of their dry period and at least 4 or 5 times during lactation.













Only skin and fat cover the backbone and ends of the short ribs, making these ideal locations to assess body condition.

Condition scores range from 1, a very thin cow with no fat reserves, to 5, a severely over-conditioned cow. Ideal scores fall in the range of 3.0-4.0 at dry off and calving, and 2.5-3.5, at peak lactation. Cows should not change by more than 1 condition score class over any lactation period.



With practice, scoring of your cows takes only 10-15 seconds per cow and provides a wealth of information.

To monitor the results of your feeding and management program put a regular body condition scoring routine for your herd.

Score	Condition	Tail head	Loin
1	Poor	<p>deep cavity with no fatty tissue under skin. Skin fairly flexible but coat condition often rough.</p> 	<p>Spine prominent and horizontal processes sharp.</p> 
2	Moderate	<p>Shallow cavity but pin bones prominent; some fat under skin. Skin flexible.</p> 	<p>Horizontal processes can be identified individually with ends rounded.</p> 
3	Good	<p>Fat cover over whole area and skin smooth but pelvis can be felt.</p> 	<p>End of horizontal process can only be felt with pressure; only slight depression in loin.</p> 
4	Fat	<p>Completely filled and folds and patches of fat evident.</p> 	<p>Cannot feel processes and will have completely rounded appearance.</p> 
5	Too fat	<p>Buried in fatty tissue, pelvis impalpable even with firm pressure.</p> 	<p>The bone structure of the top line, hook and pin bones and the short ribs is not visible.</p> 

An initial version of this factsheet was developed through the Agricultural Innovation Program for Pakistan. It was made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of ILRI and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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July 2015