

Elanco

Body Condition Scoring in Dairy Cattle



BOOST ENERGY

Fat cows at calving (BCS \geq 3.5) tend to have reduced feed intake and increased health problems around calving.¹

Thin cows at calving (BCS<2.5) often have lower peak yield and reduced yield over the lactation.

Excessive loss of body condition (>1.0 point) in early lactation reduces reproduction efficiency.

Target body condition scores:¹

- **At calving:** 2.5-3.0
- **3 to 4 weeks pre calving:** 2.5-3.0
- **60 days post calving:** 2.5-3.0
- **At dry off:** 2.5-3.0



Aim to have $>85\%$ of the herd within the target range

Description of body condition score

The scoring system concentrates its accuracy towards the mid-range scores (2.0 to 4.0), which includes most cows. This mid-range is the most critical for making management decisions. Exact scoring of extremes in BCS is less critical.

While the majority of cows conform to the described criteria, a few cows may not fit exactly. The final BCS may need to be adjusted based upon consideration of observations from all designated areas. Using the quarter-point system may cause many cows to fall between two scores (e.g. between 2.75 and 3.00). Under those circumstances, the scorer will need to make a judgement to the closest score.

Quarter-point differences in scores are not significant under most circumstances.



Body condition scoring (BCS)

Why

Body condition scoring is an important management tool to help achieve a balance between economic feeding, milk production and good welfare.

Cows with the correct condition score have a lower chance of developing ketosis, displaced abomasums and fatty liver around calving.¹

What

Body condition scoring provides a “hands on” objective measure of the amount of fat cover on the cow. Since fat is an energy reserve, condition scoring helps to provide an indication of the cow’s energy status.

Most scoring systems use a 1-5 point scale, with increments of 0.25.

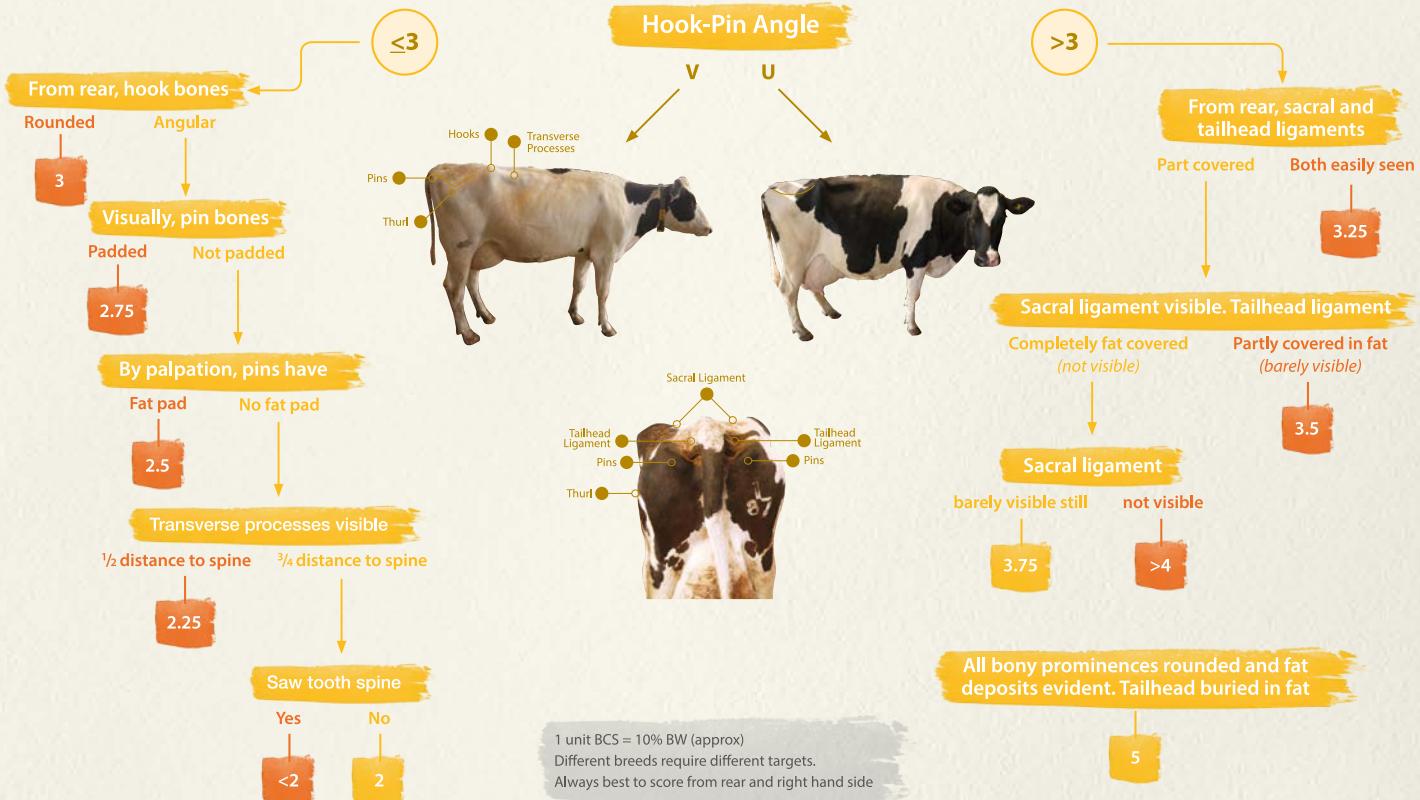
When

Body condition scoring should be carried out regularly throughout the cow’s production cycle.

Especially at:

- Dry off
- 3 to 4 weeks pre calving
- Calving
- 60 days post calving

Body condition scoring flow chart (Penn State University method)



1.0

- Deep cavity around tailhead.
- Bones of pelvis and short ribs sharp and easily felt.
- No fatty tissue in pelvic or loin area.
- Deep depression in loin.



2.0

- Shallow cavity around tailhead with some fatty tissue lining it and covering the pins.
- Pelvis easily felt.
- Ends of short ribs feel rounded and upper surfaces can be felt with slight pressure.
- Depression visible in loin area.



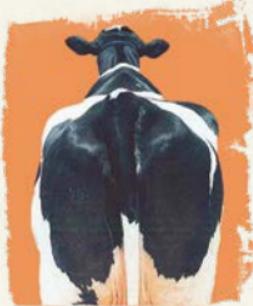
3.0

- No cavity around tailhead and fatty tissue easily felt over whole area.
- Pelvis can be felt with slight pressure.
- Thick layer of tissue covering top of short ribs, which can still be felt with pressure.
- Slight depression in loin area.



4.0

- Folds of fatty tissue are seen around tailhead with patches of fat covering pin bones.
- Pelvis can be felt with firm pressure.
- Short ribs can no longer be felt.
- No depression in loin area.



5.0

- Tailhead is buried in thick layer of fatty tissue.
- Pelvic bones cannot be felt even with firm pressure.
- Short ribs covered with thick layer of fatty tissue.



For further information on body condition scoring in dairy cattle, speak to your Elanco representative or visit farmanimalhealth.co.uk/ketosis

1. Roche **et al.** 2009. Invited review: Body condition score and its association with dairy cow productivity, health, and welfare. *J. Dairy Sci.* 92:5769-5801.

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