

Beef breeding body condition scorecard

Body condition scoring (BCS) involves feeling across the animal's backbone and ribs for coverings of fat. In the UK, a score of 1 (very thin) to 5 (obese) is most commonly used (see Table 1 overleaf). It is used to assess their nutritional status at different times of the year.

Table 1. BCS descriptors and implications

| BCS | Description | Implications |
|-----|---|--|
| 1 | Very lean | Poor fertility or downer cow if pregnant, poor calf vigour |
| 2 | Commercial working range (BCS 3 recommended at calving for young cows and heifers) | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | Very fat | Poor fertility, increased calving difficulty |
| 5 | Obese | |

How to assess BCS

Cows should be handled on the loin area, ribs and the tail head to assess the level of subcutaneous fat.

When assessing BCS, handle cows on their left side, as seen from behind, because large amounts of kidney fat on their right side can be misleading.

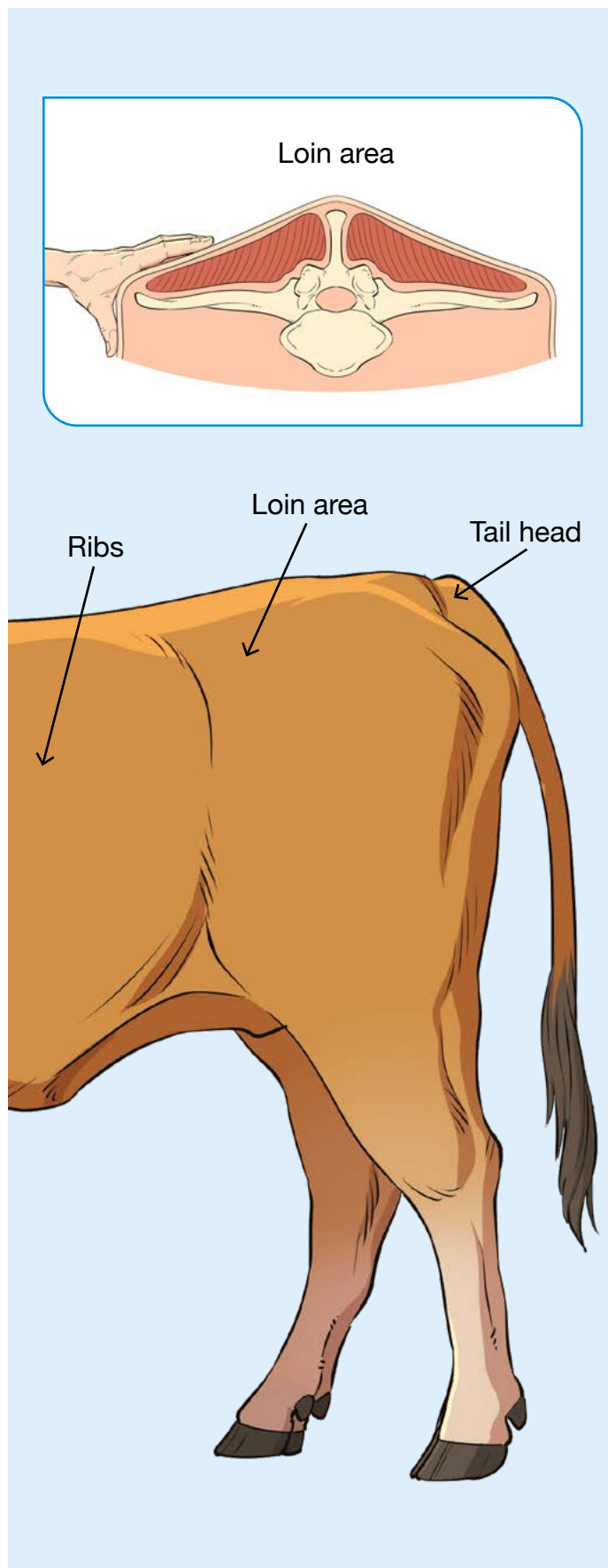
- Grip the outer edges of the loin with the thumb curled under the ledge formed by the horizontal processes of the spine. The thumb is used to feel the thickness of fat over the bone
- The ribs are scored using the flat of the hand and fingertips to feel the amount of fat over them
- Feel fat deposits around the tail head and over the pelvic bone with the fingers

Assessment should be carried out quietly and carefully. An overall visual assessment is also important.

It is advisable that the same person does the body condition scoring each time for consistency.




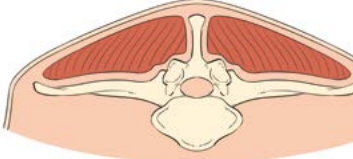
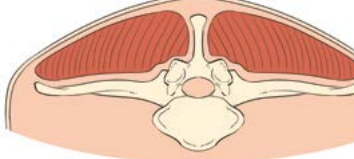
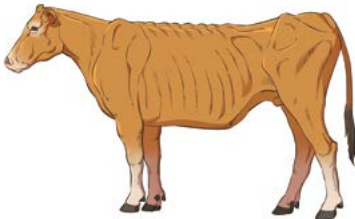
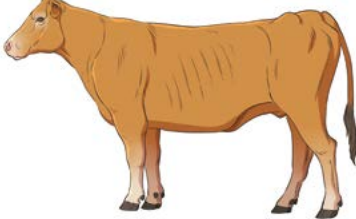
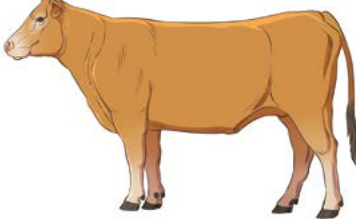
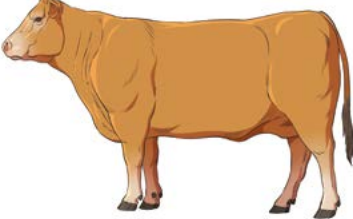
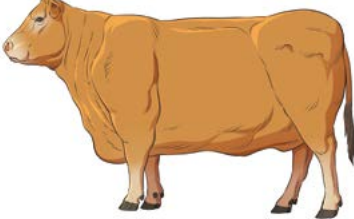
It is important to record the animal BCS throughout their yearly production cycle. Changes in BCS can be a useful management tool in maintaining an efficient, sustainable and profitable herd.

Within the herd, there will be a variation of BCS; the focus should be on managing the majority rather than the minority. If you have a significant number of animals at either end of the scale, consider speaking to your vet, nutritionist or farm adviser. Problems usually occur in the extreme.



Order AHDB's Herd notebook from ahdb.org.uk to record your BCS at the key times of the yearly production cycle.



| BCS 1 | BCS 2 | BCS 3 | BCS 4 | BCS 5 |
|--|--|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| <p>Tail head – Deep cavity with no fatty tissue under skin. Skin fairly supple, coat condition often rough</p> <p>Loin – Spine prominent and horizontal processes sharp</p> <p>Ribs – Sharp with no fat cover</p> | <p>Tail head – Shallow cavity, but pin bones prominent; some fat under skin. Skin supple</p> <p>Loin – Horizontal processes can be identified individually with ends rounded</p> <p>Ribs – Can be identified individually, but feel rounded rather than sharp</p> | <p>Tail head – Fat cover over whole area and skin smooth, but pelvis can be felt, only with firm pressure</p> <p>Loin – End of horizontal process can be felt only with pressure; only slight depression in loin</p> <p>Ribs – Individual ribs can be felt only with firm pressure</p> | <p>Tail head – Completely filled, and folds and patches of fat evident</p> <p>Loin – Cannot feel processes, and will have completely rounded appearance</p> <p>Ribs – Folds of fat developing over ribs</p> | <p>Tail head – Almost buried in fatty tissue</p> <p>Loin – Pelvis impalpable even with firm pressure</p> <p>Ribs – Covered with thick layer of fat</p> |

Further information

Other publications from AHDB

- Managing beef replacement heifers
- Herd notebook
- Optimising suckler herd fertility

AHDB online resources

- Maternal Matters: Managing heifers
- Maternal Matters: Managing suckler cows
- Artificial Insemination (AI) and Oestrus Synchronisation of Beef Cattle

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