



Agricultural Innovation Program (AIP) for Pakistan

AIP-Livestock Fact Sheet no: 09a

BODY CONDITION SCORING OF DAIRY CATTLE

Introduction

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

Body condition

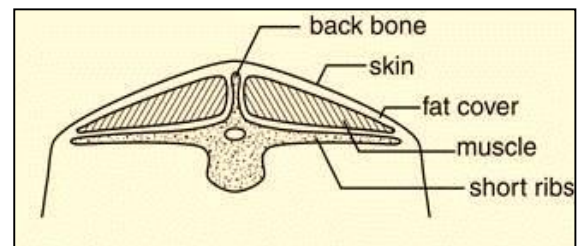
Body condition is a reflection of the **body fat reserves** carried by the animal. These reserves can be used by the cow in periods when she is unable to eat enough to satisfy her energy needs. In **high producing cows**, this normally happens **during early lactation**, but it may also happen when cows 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)

Is a **tool used to adjust feeding and management** practices in order 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.

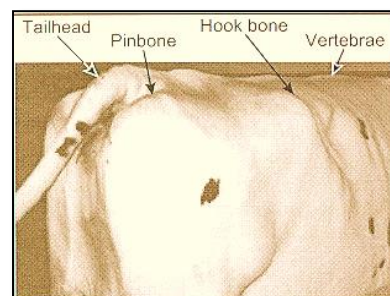
Assessing condition by handling is quite easy. Press the **fingertips** against the backbone, pin bone and hip bone. Grip the loin of the cow where the short ribs project from the backbone, just ahead of the hips, with your fingers on top of the loin and the thumb curved around the ends of the short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

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












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.**

Condition scores range from 1, a very thin cow with no fat reserves, to 5, a severely over conditioned cow. **Ideal** condition 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.

DAIRY EXTENSION MATERIAL

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