

Using Body Condition Scores in Beef Cattle Management

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Nutrient Requirements in Priority

1. Body Maintenance
2. Lactation
3. Growth
4. Breeding
5. Fetal Development

Is this list always in this order?

NO, it changes based on the physiological status of the female

What is a Body Condition Score?

- Body condition Scoring or (BCS) is a numerical score assigned to cattle based on the amount of fat or condition each animal has.
- BCS can be evaluated using two separate systems.
 - The system used often in the Dairy industry ranks cattle on a scale 1 – 5.
 - The system used most often when evaluating Beef Cattle ranks cattle on a scale of 1 – 9, with one being extremely thin, and 9 being extremely overweight.

Body Condition Score (BCS)

- To begin scoring, it might be easier to rank cattle Thin, Moderate and Heavy.
 - Thin would include scores between 1 – 3.
 - Moderate would include scores 4 – 6.
 - Heavy would include scores between 7 – 9.
- After becoming consistent in placing within these groups, we can begin assigning exact scores to cattle

BCS of 1 to 3

- Cattle are
 - Thin
 - Upper skeleton is prominent (vertebrae, hips, pin bones).
 - Body fat is not obvious
 - If BCS is a 3, weight gain to reach a 5 is 140lbs



BCS 3



BCS – 2.5



BCS - 2.5



BCS – 2.5



BCS – 3.75

BCS of 4

- BCS of 4 is
 - Marginal,
 - Ribcage and backbone junction less visible,
 - Hooks and pins becoming less obvious,
 - Muscle tissue is abundant,
 - Fat is beginning to cover ribs,
 - Weight gain to BCS of 5 is 73 lbs.





BCS - 4.25

BCS of 5

- Cattle are:
 - Medium flesh for calving,
 - Ideal flesh at weaning,
 - Muscle tissue is nearing maximum,
 - Hooks and pins visible but not obvious,
 - Ribcage slightly visible,
 - Ribs covered Slightly



BCS of 5



BCS of 5



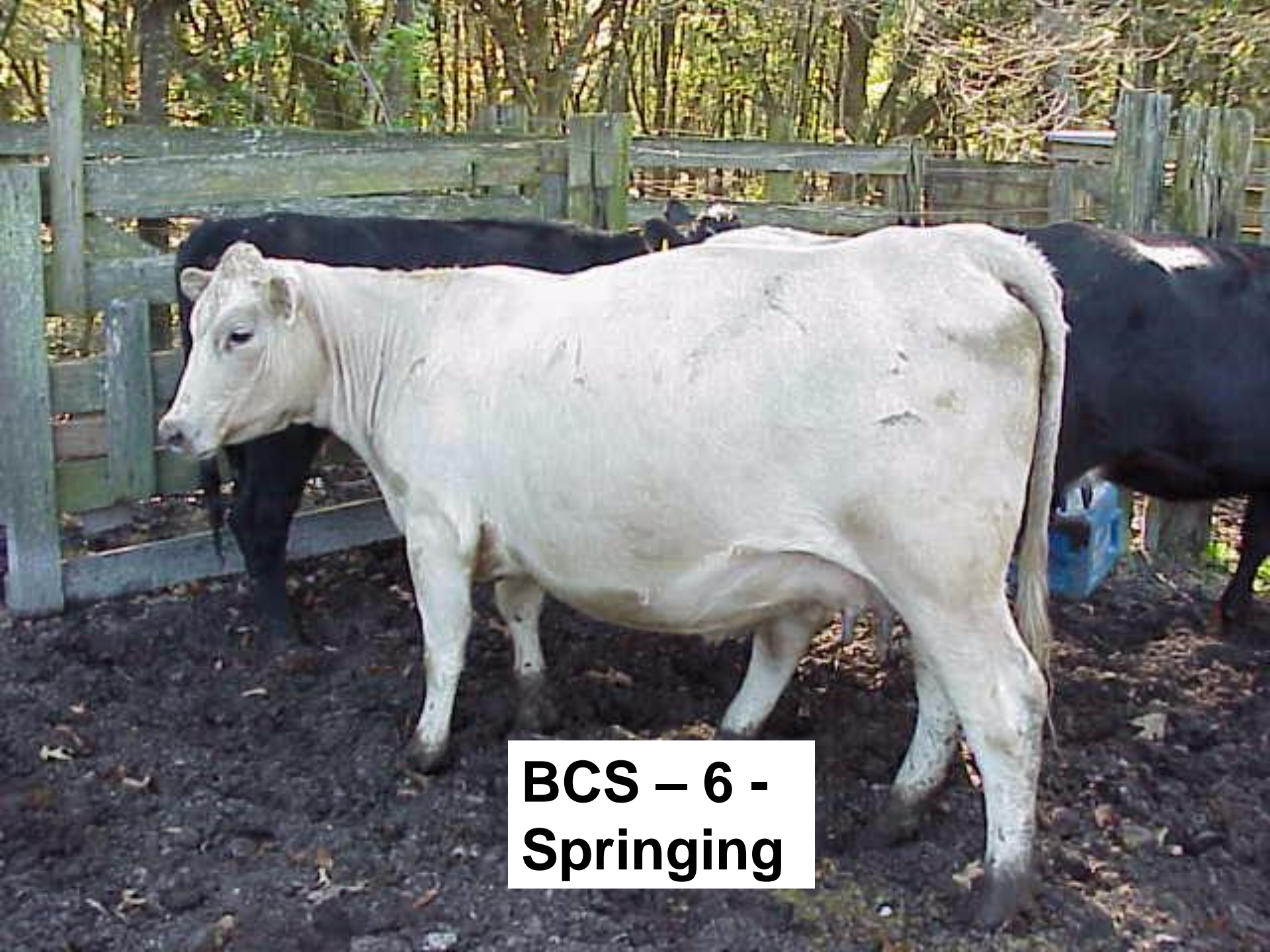
BCS of 6

- Cattle are:
 - Ideal fleshing at calving,
 - Ribcage barely visible,
 - Hooks and pins become less prominent,
 - Muscle tissue volume is at a maximum,
 - Fat Deposit behind shoulder is obvious
 - Ribs are covered completely with fat beginning to cover rump,
 - Weight loss to BCS of 5 = 80lbs





BCS - 6



**BCS – 6 -
Springing**

BCS of 7

- Cattle are:
 - Slightly over conditioned
 - Skeletal structures are difficult to identify
 - Fat behind shoulder and tailhead are obvious
 - Fat appearance is beginning to dominate topline
 - Weight loss to BCS 5 = 167 lbs





BCS – 7

Body Condition Score

- The most difficult time to add body condition is from calving to weaning.
- Most producers raise cattle to thin, rather than to fat. Problems rebreeding can arise if cattle are too thin.
- Ideally we want our cattle to have an optimum BCS before and after calving. What is the optimum BCS for this time frame? 5 6 7 ???

Management Tips-Nutritional

Relationship of Parity and BCS to Pregnancy Rate (%)

Parity	Body Condition Score at Calving			
	≤ 3	4	≥ 5	All
1	20	53	90	84
2	28	50	84	71
3	23	60	90	85
4-7	48	72	92	87
>8	37	67	89	74
All	31	60	89	82

Adapted from Rae et al., 1993

Summary

- Body condition scores vary from 1 – 9 with 5 being optimum for breeding
- Nutrition should be adjusted to allow animals the greatest opportunity to reach optimum BCS prior to breeding
- Cattle in poor body condition have a lower pregnancy rate.



Body Condition Score Pop Quiz



Photos by Dr. Pat Momont – University of Idaho



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