

FACTSHEET

Beef cow body condition scoring

November 2022

This Factsheet summarises the Beef + Lamb New Zealand (B+LNZ) booklet, “Beef cow body condition scoring”. (To source the full booklet, refer to Resources at the foot of this Factsheet.)

Body condition scoring (BCS) to a standard scale allows consistency within and between herds over time and more objective assessment of BCS differences.

As a general guide, BCS should be between 5-7 depending on the time of the year. The Draft Code of Animal Welfare states that if the body condition score of any individual beef cow falls below 3.5 or goes above 7 (on a scale of 1-10) immediate remedial action must be taken.

Photos on pages 3 and 4 show race catwalk views of BCS 4-8.

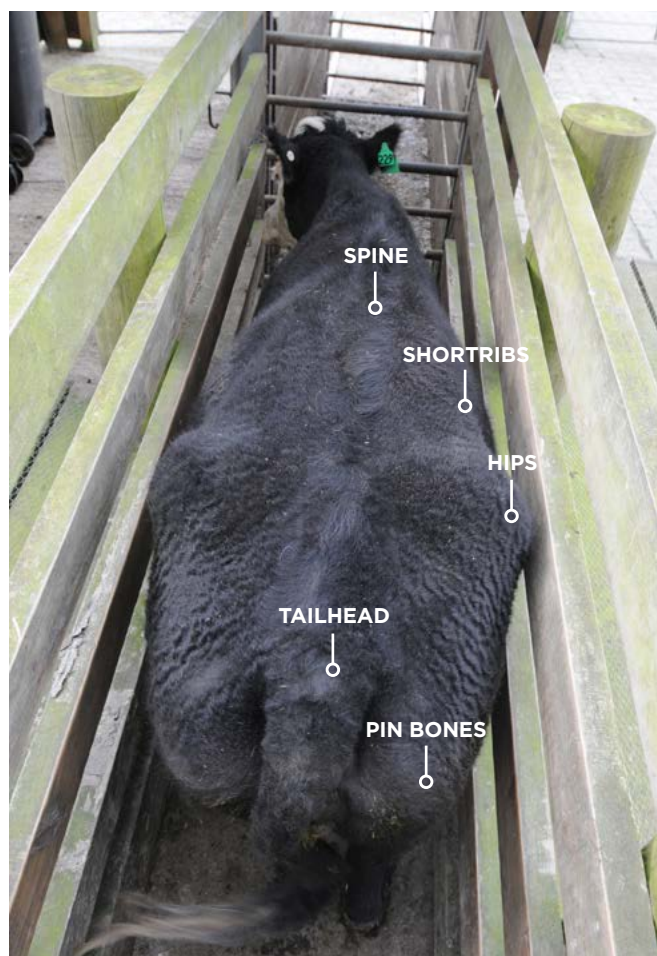
BSC vs. liveweight

BCS offers practical advantages over liveweight recording.

1. BCS is a more accurate:
 - predictor of body reserves
 - measure of change in body reserves over time.
2. BCS is not affected by fetus weight during pregnancy.
3. BCS is independent of cow frame size.
4. Scoring can be carried out in the paddock, without the need for yards.

Learning to condition score

When learning, it is useful to use your hands to touch the **spine, short ribs, rump, hips, pins and tailhead** of a few cows in the race first. This lets you get a feel for the condition carried at the different scores and is useful to calibrate your visual assessment.



Where to condition score

Scoring can be done:

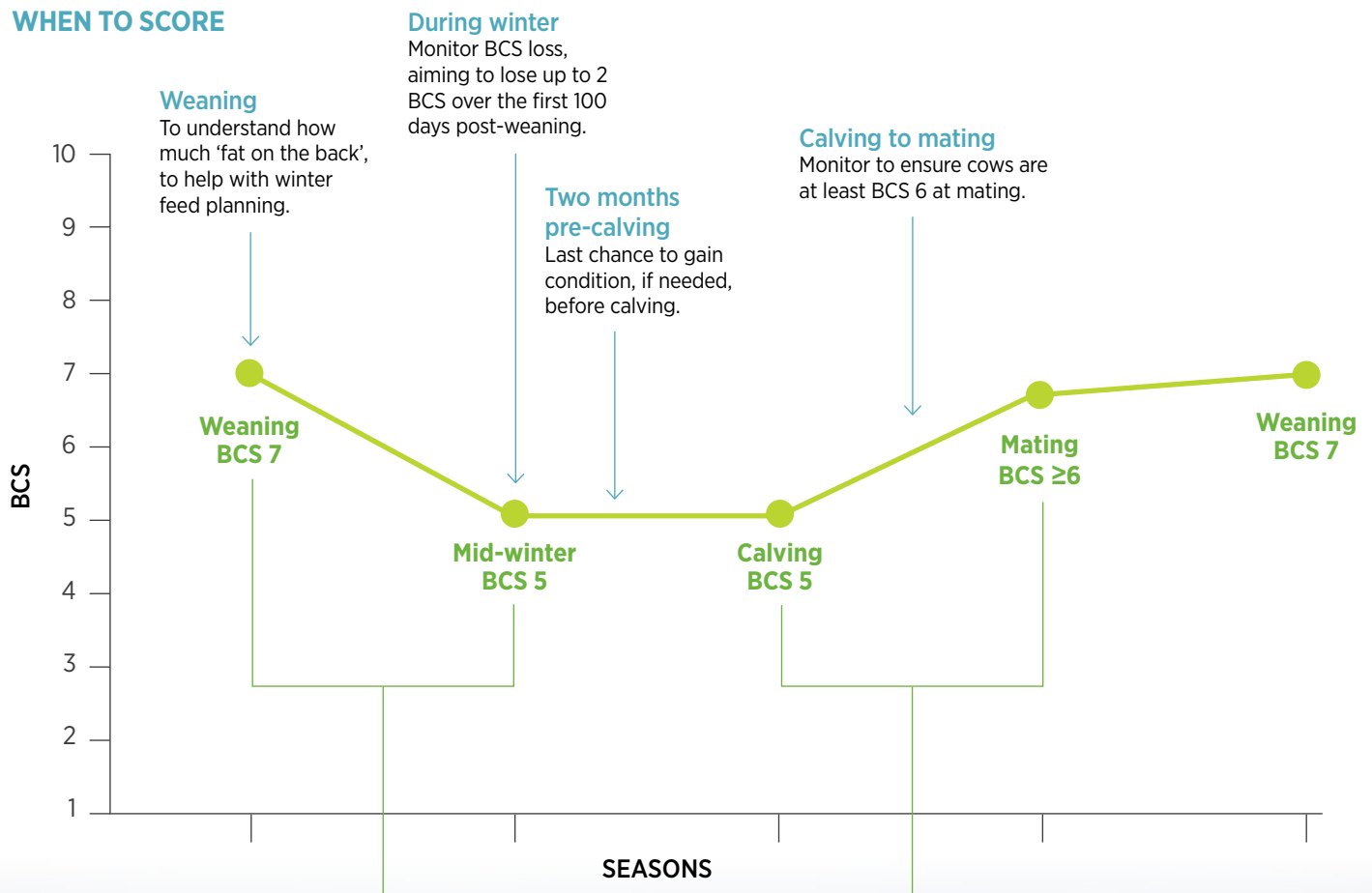
- Standing on a catwalk, as cows move through a race
- By inspecting the cows in a yard or paddock
- As you drive slowly through a paddock or as you move cows through a gateway.

The same approach should be used consistently, so you can compare between observations.



Scoring throughout the year

WHEN TO SCORE



BCS TARGETS

Weaning to mid winter

Condition at weaning should be BCS 6-8. Cows with BCS 7 at weaning can safely lose up to 2 BCS in autumn and early-mid winter. If individual cows drop to BCS 4, draft off and preferentially feed, aiming to lift them to BCS 5 by calving.

Calving to mating

Gaining body condition during this period is most important. It gets the calf off to a good start and increases the chances of early conception. Aim for BCS 5 at calving, increasing to BCS 6 at mating.



BCS images


The following images show cows of BCS 4-8, from the perspective of a race catwalk. The booklet, "Beef cow body condition scoring" (see Resources at foot of this fact sheet) also shows ground-level tail and side views.





RESOURCES

B+LNZ Knowledge Hub - www.knowledgehub.co.nz

 **Guide: Beef cow body condition scoring**
Search “cow bcs”.

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