



## Body condition scoring

### Technical Note N20

Body condition targets for different stages of lactation have been set for Australian dairy herds. Regular use of body condition scoring (BCS), which visually assesses body fat cover around the tail, pin and hip area, can provide a picture of the body condition profile of the herd.

### Importance of body condition

Body fat is mobilised and used as an energy source for milk yield and composition when feed intake is insufficient to meet energy demands, particularly in early lactation.

Cows calving in ideal condition have sufficient energy reserves to reach potential peak yield, and their body condition is less likely to fall to a level that affects cow health and fertility.

Overfat cows at calving can suffer from ketosis and calving difficulty. Refer to Technical Note N10: Dry cow feeding and Technical Note N11: Transition/springer management.

### BCS system

The most common BCS system in Australia is based on a 1–8 scale, where a score of 1 is emaciated and a score of 8 is obese. Refer to The condition magician booklet.

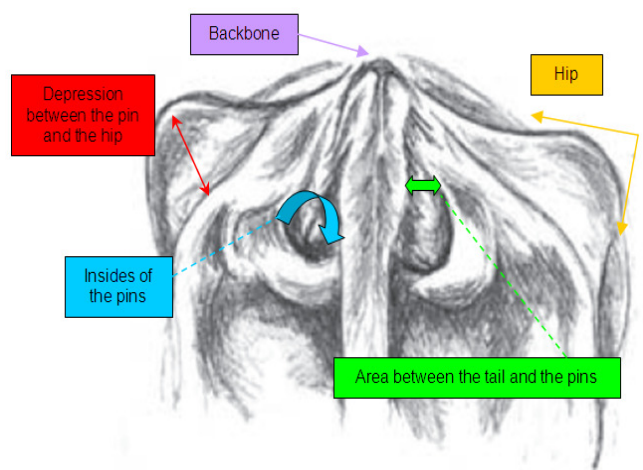
#### Five key body areas are assessed

1. Area between the tail and the pin bones
2. Deepness inside the pins (hollow, slightly hollow, full)
3. Backbone (ridgely, bumpy, flat)
4. Hip (protruding, sharp, rounded)
5. Depression between the hip and pin bones (over the rump – deep, flat).

#### Recommendations when scoring

- Stand 5–10 m away from the rear of the cow.
- Record individual cow id and condition score.

- Use a consistent method; preferably have more than one person condition scoring for a more accurate result.



*The five key areas to assess when body condition scoring dairy cattle.*

#### Frequency of scoring

Monitor seasonally calved herds for body condition 8–10 weeks before drying off, just before calving, and two weeks before mating.

Monitor year-round calving herds monthly, and record days-in-milk (DIM) or stage of lactation. An ideal time to record would be at herd recording time, including cows due to calve (zero DIM).

#### BCS targets (out of 8)

- Calved cows at a score of 5–5.5.
- In the first two months of lactation, don't allow cows to lose more than 0.75 of a condition score.
- At peak lactation, body condition should not drop below 4–4.5.
- Dry cows off at the condition you require at calving (5–5.5); maintain this condition through the dry period; dry cows should neither lose condition nor increase condition by more than 0.25–0.5 BCS scores.

Stage of lactation	BCS		
	<4.5	5.0–5.5	>6
<b>Immediately after calving</b>	<b>Too thin</b> ; risk of metabolic diseases such as ketosis and milk fever plus retained membranes.	<b>Ideal condition</b> ; should produce to potential if other management OK.	<b>Too fat</b> ; risk of ketosis and other metabolic diseases such as fatty liver syndrome.
<b>100 DIM</b>	Cows may lose up to 0.75 of a condition score after calving, but score <b>should remain above 4</b> .	<b>Too fat</b> for this stage of lactation and peak milk yield; ration may be too high energy/too low protein.	<b>Too fat</b> ; ration may be too high energy and/or low in protein.
<b>200 DIM</b>	<b>Too thin</b> ; cow not performing to potential.	<b>Score 5–5.25 ideal</b> ; but score 5.5 may be too fat at this stage of lactation.	<b>Too fat</b> ; ration may be too high energy and/or low in protein.
<b>300 DIM – dry off</b>	<b>Too thin</b> for next lactation; ideally only increase condition by 0.25–0.5 during the dry period.	<b>Ideal condition</b> ; maintain this through dry period.	<b>Too fat</b> , but best to maintain condition until calving; will be risk of ketosis at calving.

## Analysing body condition scores

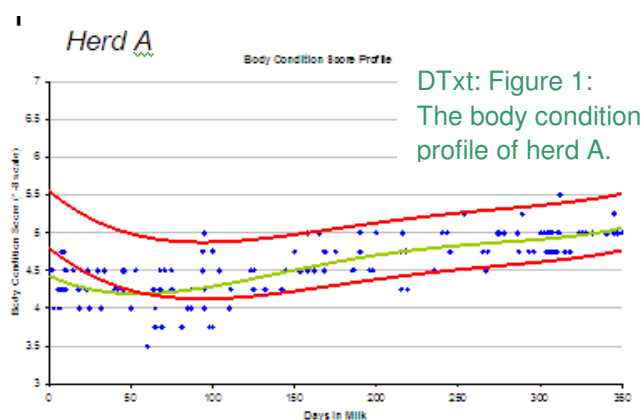
After recording cow ID and condition score, use calving date to calculate DIM or look at individual DIM records from herd recording.

To analyse body condition data on a herd bases, the most effective way is to use the BCS profile tool available on [www.dairyinfo.biz](http://www.dairyinfo.biz).

Input the cow number, DIM and BCS of individual cows into the 'Data Input' spreadsheet then assess the herds BCS profile from the BCS profile graph (examples below).

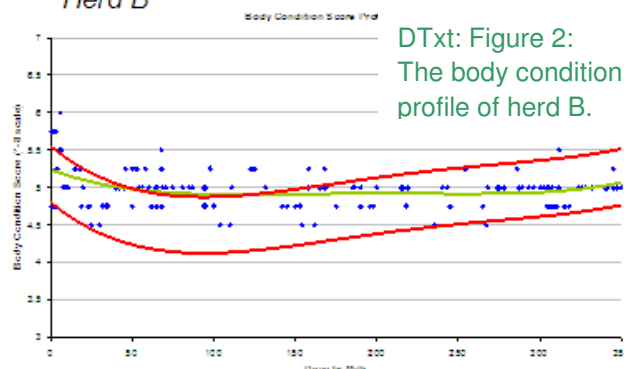
Cow No	Days in Milk	BCS
55	120	4.5
21	15	3.5
961	68	4

Ideally, 80% of the herd should remain between the target red lines throughout the lactation.



Herd A dry off in good condition (average 5), but calve at average 4.5; cows are losing 0.25–0.5 of a score through the dry period; dry cow feeding needs to improve; after 100 DIM, body condition remains consistent and within target.

Herd B



Herd B body condition is ideal at drying off and in early lactation; lack of condition decline after calving indicates cows not milking to potential peak; check the energy and protein balance in the diet.

## Further information

Contact the DAFF Customer Service Centre by Phone 13 25 23, or Email [callweb@daff.qld.gov.au](mailto:callweb@daff.qld.gov.au)

More technical notes can be found at: [www.dairyinfo.biz](http://www.dairyinfo.biz)

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