

Body Condition Scoring, An Important Dairy Farm Tool

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This article will be devoted to body condition scoring cows and how this tool, although simple, may be one of the most effective that we have developed over the last few years.

Why is body condition so important? Research has shown that dry matter intake or the total amount of feed that a cow consumes does not reach its maximum until 90 days after calving.

Of course, peak milk production comes at day 60 or 70 so we have an approximate three-month time interval when the high producing cow is not consuming as much energy as what she is using to produce milk. Thus, she either has to cut back in milk production or go to the reserve of energy and this is her body fat. We have in the past given body fat a bad name and thought that we had to have really thin cows in order to have healthy cows. However, there is some good research out now that suggests that thin cows do not reproduce well and they don't peak as high. Nor do they peak at the right time during lactation. Thin cows

have a tendency to peak on first test date and then start down the back side of the lactation curve instead of peaking around day 60 or 70. For every kg of peak not obtained, we lose approximately 200-220 kg of milk during that lactation. Thus, you can see that monitoring peaks is very important if we wish to attain high production.

When we body score cows, we do it on a scale of 1-5 and it consists of both visually looking along the top line of the cow and over the rump of the cow. I also like to feel these areas in order to determine how much fat cover is underneath the skin. The follow-

ing description of each category is taken from the article in the **Hoard's Dairyman** and I think it serves as a very useful tool in order to learn how to condition score cows. Basically, I break them down into scores of 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 2.7, 3.0, 3.2, etc. It is not important that two people come up with the same score, although they should be relatively close, but it is important that the person doing the scoring is consistent so that when they score the animals, they can tell if they have lost or gained weight.

Condition Score 1:

The ends of the short ribs are prominent, with limited flesh cover, are sharp to the touch and provide a distinctive shelf-like appearance. Hips and pin bones are sharp, with limited flesh covering. There are severe depressions between hips and pins and between hooks. The area below the tailhead and between the pin bones is severely depressed with a deep "V-shaped" cavity under the tail.

Condition Score 2:

Short ribs can be seen. There is some flesh covering over the topline, but an overhanging shelf remains prominent. The individual vertebrae of the chin, loin and rump regions are not distinct to the eye. Hips and pin bones are prominent with some depression

between them. There is limited depression around the tailhead (U-shaped) and between the pin bones.

Condition Score 3:

The short ribs appear smooth and an overhanging shelf effect is not noticeable. The backbone appears as a rounded ridge with firm pressure being necessary in order to feel individual bones. The hip and pin bones are rounded and smooth. The area between the pin bones is only slightly depressed while the area around the tailhead appears smooth without signs of fat deposit.

Condition Score 4:

The short ribs appear smooth or rounded with no overhanging shelf effects. The ridge formed by the backbone in the chin region is rounded and the span between the hips is flat. The area around the tailhead and the pin bone is rounded with evidence of fat deposit.

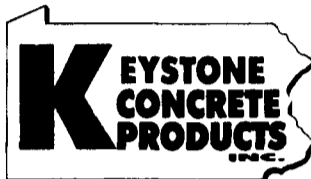
Condition Score 5:

The backbone is covered by a thick layer of fat. Short ribs are covered by fat. The hips and pins are not apparent and the areas between them are rounded. The tailhead is surrounded by fat.

We generally like to body score cows the day they calve and continue to body score them during our routine monthly visits to the farm until the time when they are

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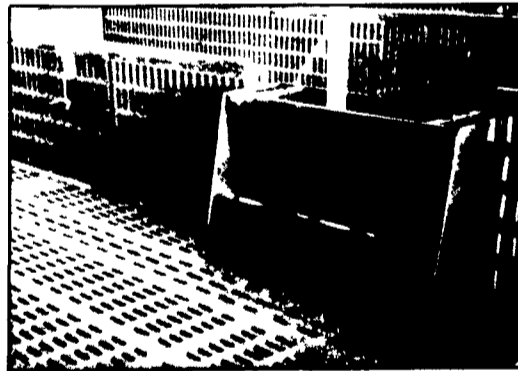


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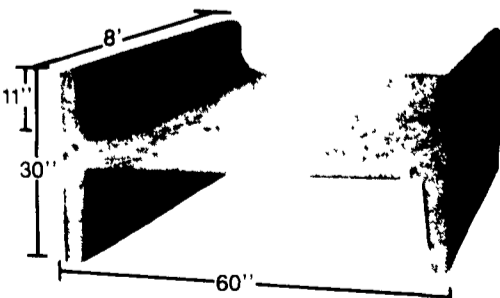


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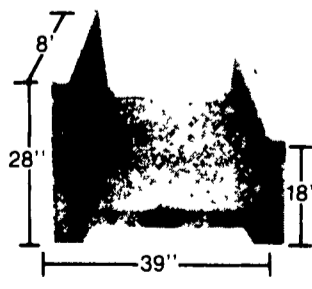
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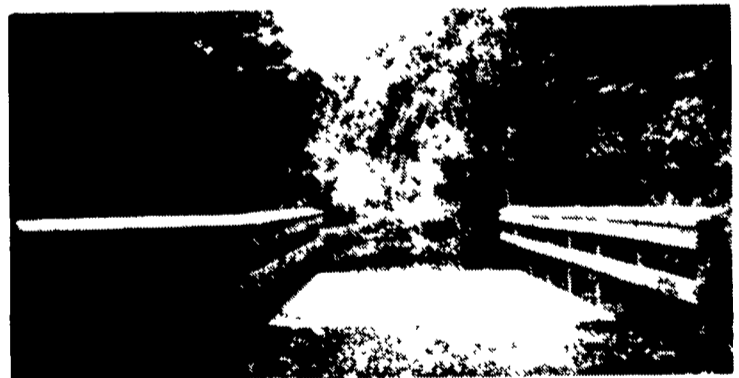
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