How to body condition score a cow

2-step “hands-off” scoring method only takes seconds

Using the scoring method described in this booklet is simple and it only takes seconds to score each cow. You only need to make two observations to determine the BCS of any cow to the nearest half score.

– The first observation is made from the back of the cow, focusing on a location where it is easiest to see that she is starting to lay down fat.
– The first observation determines which part of the cow’s body to focus on next. The second observation may be the area between the tail and pins, the backbone or the depression between the hip and pin.

This method is “hands off”. It can be done from a distance. However, to get your eye in, it is a good idea to score some cows “hands on” (see page 17).

Don’t agonise over each cow’s BCS. Make a quick assessment and move on to the next cow. If you score the recommended number of cows (see page 20), the cows you scored a little generously or harshly will balance each other and you will get a good indication of the herd’s average BCS and the range of scores within the herd.

Key points to look at

1st Observation

Look closely at area between tail and pins:
Is it deeply sunken, sunken, slightly sunken or filled in?

2nd Observation

If area between tail and pins is deeply sunken:
Look at insides of pins. Are they hollow?

If area between tail and pins is sunken:
Look at backbone. Is it flat or a bumpy sharp ridge?

If area between tail and pins is slightly sunken or filled in:
Look at depression between hip and pin. Is it U-shaped, shallow or flat?
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1st Observation
How sunken is the area between the tail and pins?

Deeply Sunken

Sunken

Slightly Sunken

Filled In

Are the insides of the pins hollow?

YES

NO

Is the backbone a bumpy sharp ridge?

YES

NO

The depression between the hip and pin is:

U-SHAPED

SHALLOW

FLAT

Condition Score 3

Condition Score 3.5

Condition Score 4

Condition Score 4.5

Condition Score 5

Condition Score 5.5

Condition Score 6
**Condition Score 3** All breeds

1st observation
Area between tail and pins is deeply sunken

2nd observation
Insides of pins are hollow

Cows in this score also have:
- Very prominent hips
- A backbone that is a very bumpy ridge

**Condition Score 3.5** All breeds

1st observation
Area between tail and pins is deeply sunken

2nd observation
Insides of pins are not hollow

Cows in this score also have:
- Prominent hips
- A backbone that is a bumpy ridge
**Condition Score 4** All breeds

1st observation
Area between tail and pins is sunken

2nd observation
Backbone is a bumpy, sharp ridge

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**Condition Score 4.5** All breeds

1st observation
Area between tail and pins is sunken

2nd observation
Backbone is not a bumpy, sharp ridge
**Condition Score 5** All breeds

1st observation
Area between tail and pins is slightly sunken

2nd observation
Depression between hip and pin is U-shaped

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**Condition Score 5.5** All breeds

1st observation
Area between tail and pins is slightly sunken to filled in

2nd observation
Depression between hip and pin is shallow
**Condition Score 6** All breeds

1st observation
Area between tail and pins is filled in

![Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)](image1.png) ![Image courtesy of DairyNZ](image2.png)

2nd observation
Depression between hip and pin is flat

![Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)](image3.png) ![Image courtesy of DairyNZ](image4.png)