

What is body condition scoring?

Body condition scoring is a visual assessment of the amount of fat and muscle covering the bones of a cow, regardless of body size. It is not affected by gut fill or pregnancy as liveweight is. It involves assessing specific locations on the cow to determine how thin or fat the cow is.

The 1 to 8 body condition scale

Different systems are used to body condition score dairy cattle and beef cattle. In Australia, an 8 point scale is most commonly used for dairy cattle:

- A cow with a BCS of 1 is considered extremely thin, the result either of severe under-feeding or disease.
- A cow with a BCS of 8 is considered extremely fat and is at risk of several metabolic diseases after calving.

Body condition scoring using this 8 point scale provides a quick, easy, consistent way to assess body condition in dairy cattle. Only cows with a BCS of 3 to 6 are shown in this booklet as healthy, productive cows in commercial dairy herds should always be within this range.

The scoring method is the same for all dairy breeds despite their differences.

Holstein-Friesians	Angular body shape, appear thinner, carry more body fat over ribs
Cross-breeds	More even distribution of fat over body
Jerseys	Narrow body with prominent hip bones and higher set tail

Note: Other dairy body condition scoring systems use different scales eg. 5 point (US and Ireland), 10 point (New Zealand).