Examples of Cows at Various Body Condition Scores

Photos demonstrate dairy cows with a range of body condition scores. Each photo includes key observations at that score.

**BCS 1.0: Severly Underconditioned**

From the side the bones of the tailhead are easy to see and the backbone has a “saw-tooth” appearance. Individual short ribs are clearly visible, and the hooks, thurl, and pins protrude sharply, with deep depressions between bones. From the rear all boney prominences are easily visible and protrude sharply. Deep cavities have formed around the tailhead and between the pin bones. The cow’s ligaments and vulva are prominent and her legs are thin with poor muscle condition.

**BCS 2.0: Severe Negative Energy Balance - Rear View**

The tailhead and backbone are prominent, with limited skin cover. Limited skin cover is seen on the short ribs, and from their tip to the spine, the short ribs are clearly visible for three-fourths of the distance. The hooks and pins are angular, with a prominent thurl joint.

**BCS 2.0: Severe Negative Energy Balance - Side View**

From the rear view, the hooks, pins, and thurl are prominent. The tailhead area is somewhat hollow, but has a modest covering of flesh.
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**BCS 2.75: Slightly Thin - Side View**

From the side, the backbone is visible and the tips of the short ribs are smooth, but visible. The hooks are angular, but the pins are padded by fat. A V-angle forms between the hooks, thurl, and pins.

**BCS 2.75: Slightly Thin - Rear View**

When standing behind this cow, the hooks are angular, but the pins are more rounded or padded with fat. Compared to a cow with BCS 3, this cow is hollow below the tailhead.

**BCS 3.0: Good Condition - Side View**

At a score of 3, more flesh covers the backbone, and its appearance is more of a rounded ridge. The tips of the short ribs are smooth. The hooks and pins are also rounded and smooth, but the angle between the hooks, thurl, and pins forms a V.

**BCS 3.0: Good Condition - Rear View**

From the rear, the hooks and pins are rounded and smooth. No deep depressions are found around the tailhead; it appears smooth, without signs of fat deposits.
Compared to the cows shown to this point, this cow has more flesh covering her backbone, the tips of the short ribs are very smooth, and both the hooks and pins are more rounded and smooth. This is also the first cow where the angle formed between the hooks, thurl, and pins is a U shape.

From the rear, this cow has rounded hooks and pins, but the sacral and tailhead ligaments remain visible.

From the side, this cow’s backbone and the tips of her short ribs are barely visible. The hooks and pins are very smooth, but the bones are still visible. However, the area between the hooks and pins is fat-filled and flat.

Viewing the cow from behind, her hooks and pins are rounded, but visible. As from the side, the area above the thurl is flat and the span between the hooks is flat as well. Neither the sacral nor the tailhead ligament is visible.
BCS 5.0: Severely Overconditioned - Side View

At the highest score, the backbone, hooks, and pins are no longer visible. The bones of the short ribs also disappear, and the entire area over the ribs and rump is flat. The tailhead area appears rounded and fat deposits are very evident.

BCS 5.0: Severely Overconditioned - Rear View

From the rear, all boney prominences are rounded and covered in fat and the tailhead appears to be buried in fat. In addition, fat deposits are readily seen on the rump and legs.

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