

Condition Score Cows To Prepare For Winter



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Many areas of the state experienced a lack of rainfall during July, August and September. This has reduced both the amount and quality of feed available to and the condition of the spring calving cows. When body condition drops, it occurs so slowly that many producers will not realize until it is severe.

Why should a producer be concerned about BCS? Because it relates directly to reproductive performance. Using the BCS system of 1 to 9 with 1 being extremely thin and 9 being extremely fat, the mature cow should be a BCS of 5 at calving and heifer should be a BCS of 6. Research has shown the females with a BCS lower than 5 will be much slower to breed back.

We know the importance of BCS, now what should be done? The cows in the herd should be body condition scored. Should every cow be evaluated? The answer is yes only if you have plenty of time to do it or you want to monitor the progress of individual cows. Since cow herds are managed as a group, all that is needed is to

look at enough animals to determine the average. Feeding programs can be developed from this information. It would be desirable to sort out the cows far away from the average. For example, if the average BCS is 4 and there are a few that are 3 and a few that are 5, then the 3 and 5 condition score cows will need to be fed differently. The "3s" will need more and higher quality feed and the "5s" will need less and a lower quality feed than the average cow. Also take a close look at the "3" cows. Is it going to be economical to bring them back to the point where they should be? Marketing these animals may be the best option. Just remember that it takes an 80 to 100 pound increase in weight to move up just one body condition score, and it will require a lot of feed.

As the feeding program is developed, remember that energy is the most important nutrient. Adequate protein is required, but energy is the nutrient that will add weight. Be sure to monitor the BCS as the feeding program progresses.

In summary, beef producers need to BCS their cows to be sure they are in the proper condition for optimum reproductive performance. Δ

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