

Moderate Fat Equals BC Score Of 5

BLUE SPRINGS, MO.

Most spring-born beef calves either have been weaned or will be weaned soon. Weaning is the time to start managing beef cows so that they are at the optimum body-condition score (BCS) before the start of the next calving season, said a University of Missouri Extension livestock specialist.

The optimum BCS for cows to become pregnant is 5, said Patrick Davis. Their BCS will likely drop by 1 point from calving to breeding, so they should have a BCS of 6 before the next calving season. Identifying your cows' BCS lets you determine how much they need to gain to reach a BCS of 6.

When identifying the body-condition score of your cows, areas to look at are brisket, ribs, backbone and tailhead. If little or no fat is palpated or visually identified in these areas, the cows have a BCS of 3 or 4.

If a moderate amount of fat is palpated or visually identified in these areas, the cows have a BCS of 5.

If the cow has ribs covered with fat, a back that appears rounded, has some fat in the tailhead and brisket and has a smooth look throughout, the cow has a BCS of 6, which is optimum for calving.

"One helpful idea is to identify BCS 6 cows in the herd and mold the rest of the herd through management to look like them," Davis said.

Another management strategy is to separate BCS 3 and 4 cows from BCS 5 and 6 cows. The thin cows will need larger feed inputs to reach BCS 6 before the next calving season.

Once you know the BCS of the cattle, it's helpful to identify the nutrient value of the feed resources you are using this winter.

"I would recommend a hay test because that will identify if the hay is deficient in energy or protein and if supplementation is needed to

meet the target body-condition score," Davis said. "If supplementation is needed, then corn with corn or soybean byproducts may be useful feedstuffs."

Some suggested supplements are:

- 1/3 corn, 1/3 soybean hulls and 1/3 corn gluten feed.
- 1/2 corn and 1/2 dried distillers grains and solubles.
- 1/2 corn and 1/2 corn gluten feed.
- 2/5 corn, 2/5 soybean hulls and 1/5 dried distillers grains and solubles.

These supplement mixes are similar in protein and energy. "I would recommend feeding these supplements at 6 pounds per head per day on cows that are in BCS 3 and 4," he said. "Cattle in condition score 5 can be fed 6 pounds per head every other day."

The mix of corn and dried distillers grains and solubles has a little more protein and energy than the other mixes, so the feeding level may be decreased by 1 pound in each of the respective feeding strategies. "However, visually appraise the cattle frequently. If the cattle reach their target condition score, cut back on level of supplement."

These supplementation strategies will depend on hay quality, Davis notes. Also, make sure an adequate mineral and vitamin supplement is available for the cattle to ensure they are not deficient in those areas.

For more information about BCS, see the MU Extension publication "Body Condition Scoring of Beef and Dairy Animals" (G2230), available for free download at www.extension.missouri.edu/G2230.

For more information about feeding and supplementation strategies for your cattle, contact your local MU Extension Center or go to www.extension.missouri.edu and enter "feeding beef cattle" in the search box. Δ