UNIT : THE BEEF COW – BODY CONDITION AND CONDITION SCORING

INTRODUCTION

Body condition score is assessed by handling the animal over 3 key areas on the body :

➢ Tail head

➢ Loin

➢ Ribs

Illustration HCC Making the Most of your Suckler Cows p14

BODY CONDITION SCORES

Body Condition Score	Tail head	Loin	Ribs
2	• Shallow cavity but pin bones prominent • Some fat under skin • Skin supple	• Transverse processes can be felt individually (ends rounded not sharp)	• Identifiable individually (rounded not sharp)
3	• Fat cover over whole area • Skin smooth but pelvis can be felt (with firm pressure)	• End of transverse processes can only be felt with slight pressure • Slight depression in the loin	• Individual ribs can only be felt with firm pressure
4	• Completely filled with folds and patches of fat but soft to	• Cannot feel processes (completely rounded appearance)	• Fold of fat developeing over ribs

	touch		

KEY REASONS FOR MANAGING BODY CONDITION

The aim is to ensure that cows :

- are not too fat at calving

- produce as much milk as possible

- are fit enough to start the breeding cycle as soon after calving as possible and get back in calf quickly

Cow body condition score	% Conception to first service
1	35
2	55
3	70
4	60
5	50

- put on weight and condition when the cheapest feed is available (usually grazed grass)

- use body condition to reduce expensive feeding costs (especially in winter)

TARGET BODY CONDITION SCORES FOR COWS AND HEIFERS

	Autumn Calving	Spring Calving	Summer Calving
Calving	2.5-3.0	2.0-2.5	2.0-2.5
Service	2.5-3.0	2.5	2.5-3.0
Turnout	2.0	2.0	2.0
Housing	2.5-3.0	3.0	2.5

Illustration – HCC Practical Beef Cattle Nutrition p4 and / or (preferable) EBLEX Beef Action for Profit 18 p2

INFORMATION SOURCES

Defra (2001) Condition Scoring of Beef Suckler Cows and Heifers

HCC (2007) Making the Most of your Suckler Cows

Activity based on illustration above