



## Why should I assess the body condition of my Dexters?

A Dexter's body condition is important because it is an indication of the animal's nutrition level, general health, metabolic efficiency, and body energy reserves. Dexter breeders that have animals with optimal body conditions have herds that can produce milk, beef, and breeding stock at an optimal level.

The body condition of a Dexter throughout the breeding season and calendar year affects their performance in several ways:

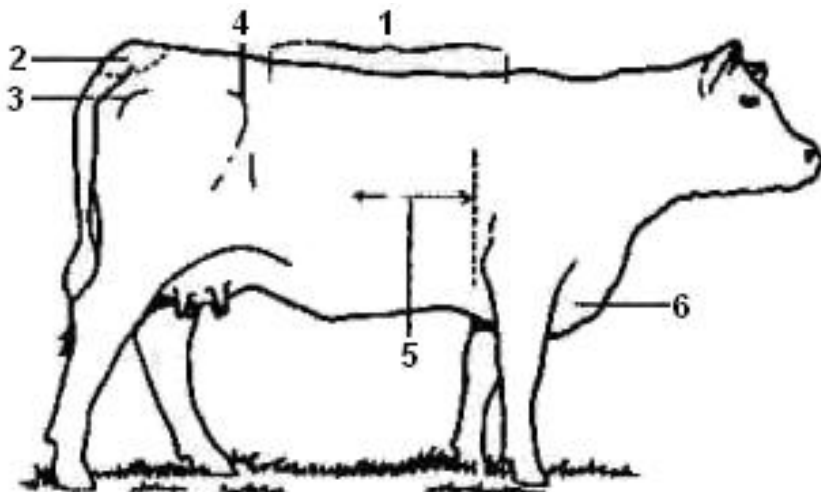
- Reproductive performance of the bull and cow
  - Number of services per conception
  - Calving interval
  - Percentage of open cows
- Overall health of cows and their calves
  - Length of postpartum recovery
  - Lactation performance
  - Calf health and vigor
  - Incidence of calving difficulties
- Efficient growth of beef steers
  - Weaning weights
  - Metabolic maturity for optimum muscle growth

## How do I assess the body condition of my Dexters?

Body Condition Scores (BCS) are numbers used to indicate the relative fatness or body composition of a Dexter. Here's how it's done.

- 6 different body areas of a Dexter are examined
- A scale of 1 to 9 is assigned to the animal, depending upon the combined conditions of each body area
  - A score of 1 represents a very thin body condition
  - A score of 5 represents an average body condition
  - A score of 9 represents extreme obesity
- The optimum BCS (body condition score) of a Dexter is between 5-7, regardless of the time of year or where you are in the calving season

## What are the 6 different body areas that are assessed?



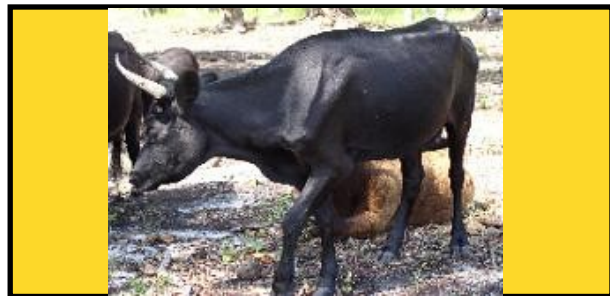
1. Back with vertebrae
2. Tail Head
3. Pin
4. Hooks
5. Ribs
6. Brisket

## What are the labels and some examples of each overall BCS number?

### BCS 1

#### Emaciated

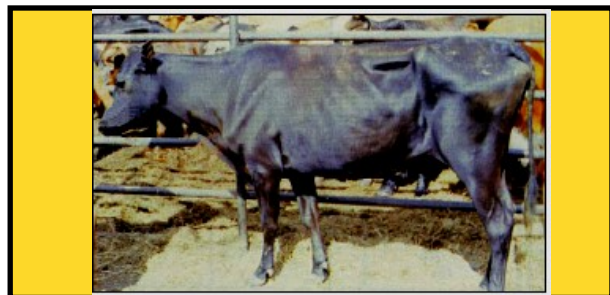
Bone structure of shoulder, ribs, back, hooks and pins are sharp to touch and clearly visible. Little or no evidence of fat deposits or muscling.



### BCS 2

#### Very Thin

Little or no evidence of fat deposits, but some muscling still visible in the hindquarters. The backbone feels sharp to the touch and vertebrae are clearly visible.



### BCS 3

#### Thin

Beginnings of fat cover over the loin, back, and fore ribs. While there is very little visible fat, there is still visible muscling in both the forequarters and hindquarters. The backbone is highly prominent and visible. Spinous processes can be identified individually by touch and may also be visible. Spaces between processes are less pronounced.



### BCS 4

#### Borderline

Fore ribs not noticeable; but 12th and 13th ribs are still visible, especially in cattle with a big spring of rib and widely spaced ribs. Straightness of muscling in the hindquarters, with some fullness is apparent. Vertebrae can be identified only by palpation and they feel rounded rather than sharp.



### BCS 5

#### Moderate

12th and 13th ribs not clearly visible to the eye. Areas on each side of tail head are filled in but not mounded. Fairly smooth overall appearance, with no bone structures clearly visible. The vertebrae can only be felt with firm pressure and they feel very rounded. Spaces between vertebrae are not visible, but can be distinguished by palpation with firm pressure. BCS 5 should look average, neither thin nor fat.



## BCS 6

### Good

Ribs fully covered, not noticeable to the eye. Smooth overall appearance due to fat layers over all bone structures, most noticeable over the ribs, back, and hips. Hindquarters appear plump and full. There is a noticeable spongy feel over fore ribs and each side of the tail head. Firm pressure is required to feel vertebrae.



## BCS 7

### Very Good

Abundant fat cover on either side of tail head with some patchiness evident. Ends of the spinous processes can only be felt with very firm pressure. Spaces between processes are barely distinguishable.



## BCS 8

### Fat

Animal takes on a smooth, blocky appearance; bone structure disappears from sight. Fat cover feels thick and spongy with patchiness evident.



## BCS 9

### Obese

Bone structure not visible or easily felt. The quarters are very rounded, with a plump and blocky appearance. Tail head is buried in fat. Animal's movement and mobility may be impaired. Increased incidence of calving difficulty.



### References:

Dr. Shane Gadberry, MP 373 – Feeding Beef Cows Based on Body Condition Scores, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service.

Dexter Photos (BCS 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) from private collection of Patti & Clay Adams, Wakarusa Ridge Ranch, 2005-2007.