

Are your cows in good body condition? Ready for the breeding season?

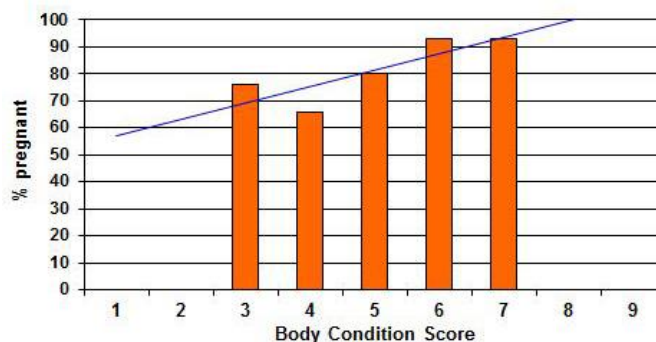
Dr. Cindy Sanders, UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County

As I write this article to talk about Body Condition Score (BCS), I can't help but wonder when we are going to get some rain. Many producers in north and central Florida have prolonged planting any winter grazers until we get some rain.

Looking at the factors that affect reproduction: Nutrition, Herd Health, Environment, and Genetics, we can clearly see they all add up to Herd Management. Since breeding season is just around the corner, we need to be evaluating these factors, especially body condition scores. Nutrition is potentially the most critical factor affecting reproduction.

If we evaluate body condition today, we are actually measuring the past nutritional status of that cow. BCS is an assessment of the fat cover that the cow is carrying. Several factors can play a role in the BCS; forage variety, forage management, date of calving, stocking rate, weaning age, genetics, animal health, and supplementation. Now, in January not many producers have lush quality forage, so we rely on hay or standing forages. Make sure to test your forages so that you can better supplement to meet your cow's nutritional requirements. Evaluating BCS may not pinpoint problems but it focuses the cattlemen's attention to these important areas.

BCS range from 1 (thin) to 9 (fat). Most Florida cattle will range from a score of 3 – 7. BCS below 5, increases days to return to estrus, therefore will get breed later in the season, if at all; increases days to conception, which results in lighter calves at weaning, and lowers pregnancy rates. A BCS of 5-6 is critical.



Relationship of cow body condition score to the percent of cows in the herd that became pregnant.

Source: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/an319>

Improving an average frame size cow from a BCS4 to a 5 will require her to gain approximately 150-200 lbs. It is hard to do that this close to breeding season. BCS determines the type and level of supplement that is required. A BCS of 6 or higher requires 1.0-2.0 lb/day of a supplement containing 30-40% protein. A BCS 4 or below requires 4.0-6.0 lb/day of a supplement.

UF/IFAS has a neat little pocket flip chart for determining BCS that can be purchased at the UF/IFAS Extension Bookstore. I would also encourage you to look up the following UF/IFAS EDIS documents for further information on BCS:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/an319> Implications of Cow Body Condition Score on Productivity

Body Condition is Related to Productivity and is a Powerful Tool for Making Management Decisions in the Beef Cow Herd.



Mature beef cow with a body condition score of 5.

Credit: John Arthington, UF/IFAS



Mature beef cow with a body condition score of 6.

Credit: Matt Hersom, UF/IFAS