

How to body condition score a cow

2-step “hands-off” scoring method only takes seconds

Using the scoring method described in this booklet is simple and it only takes seconds to score each cow. You only need to make two observations to determine the BCS of any cow to the nearest half score.

- The first observation is made from the back of the cow, focusing on a location where it is easiest to see that she is starting to lay down fat.
- The first observation determines which part of the cow’s body to focus on next. The second observation may be the area between the tail and pins, the backbone or the depression between the hip and pin.

This method is “hands off”. It can be done from a distance. However, to get your eye in, it is a good idea to score some cows “hands on” (see page 17).

Don’t agonise over each cow’s BCS. Make a quick assessment and move on to the next cow. If you score the recommended number of cows (see page 20), the cows you scored a little generously or harshly will balance each other and you will get a good indication of the herd’s average BCS and the range of scores within the herd.

Key points to look at

1st Observation



Look closely at area between tail and pins:

Is it deeply sunken, sunken, slightly sunken or filled in?

2nd Observation



If area between tail and pins is deeply sunken:

Look at insides of pins. Are they hollow?



If area between tail and pins is sunken:
Look at backbone. Is it flat or a bumpy sharp ridge?

If area between tail and pins is slightly sunken or filled in:

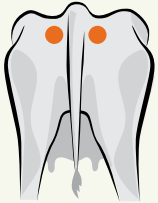
Look at depression between hip and pin. Is it U-shaped, shallow or flat?

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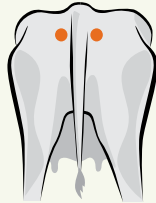
1st Observation

How sunken is the area between the tail and pins?

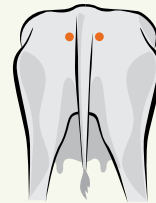
Deeply Sunken



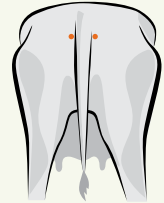
Sunken



Slightly Sunken



Filled In



2nd Observation

Are the insides of the pins hollow?

YES



NO



Condition
Score 3

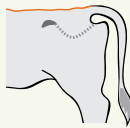
Condition
Score 3.5

Is the backbone a bumpy sharp ridge?

YES



NO

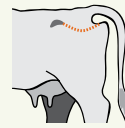


Condition
Score 4

Condition
Score 4.5

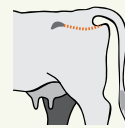
The depression between the hip and pin is:

U-SHAPED



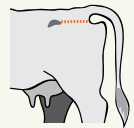
Condition
Score 5

SHALLOW



Condition
Score 5.5

FLAT



Condition
Score 6

Condition Score 3 All breeds

1st observation

Area between tail and pins is deeply sunken

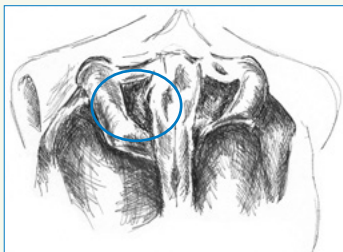


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)



Image courtesy of DairyNZ

2nd observation

Insides of pins are hollow

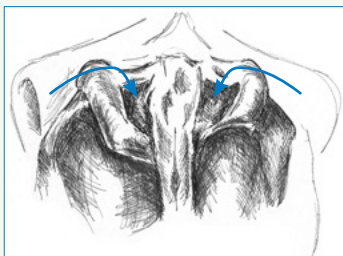


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

Cows in this score also have:

- Very prominent hips
- A backbone that is a very bumpy ridge

Condition Score 3.5 All breeds

1st observation

Area between tail and pins is deeply sunken

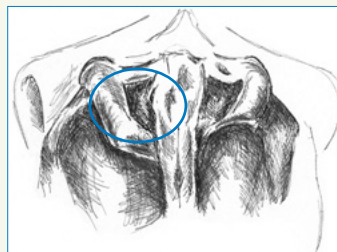


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)



Image courtesy of DairyNZ

2nd observation

Insides of pins are not hollow

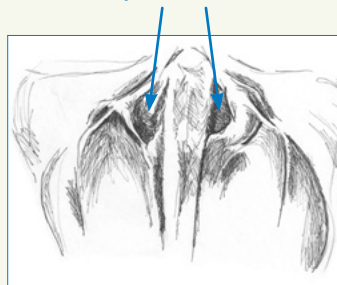


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

Cows in this score also have:

- Prominent hips
- A backbone that is a bumpy ridge

Condition Score 4 All breeds

1st observation

Area between tail and pins is sunken

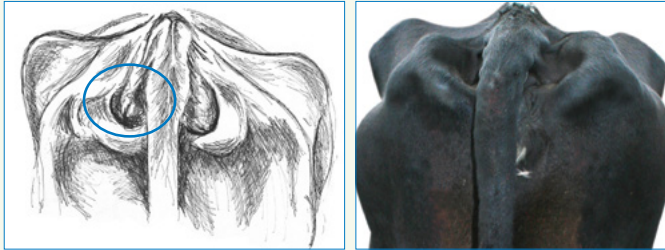


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

Image courtesy of DairyNZ

2nd observation

Backbone is a bumpy, sharp ridge

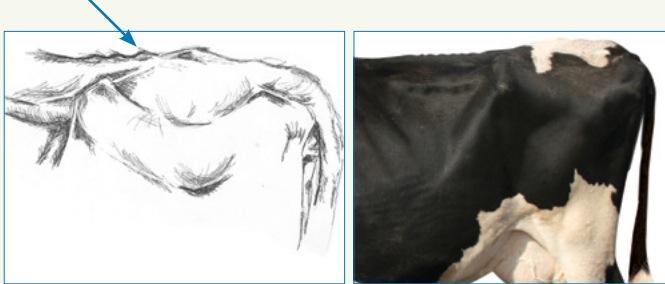


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

Image courtesy of DairyNZ

Condition Score 4.5 All breeds

1st observation

Area between tail and pins is sunken

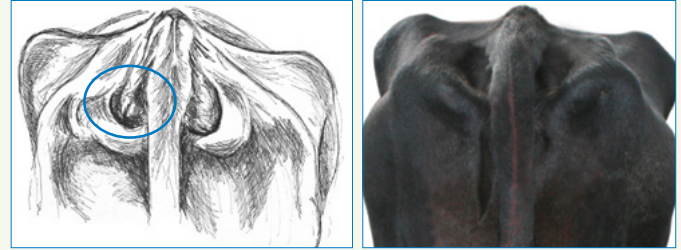


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

Image courtesy of DairyNZ

2nd observation

Backbone is not a bumpy, sharp ridge

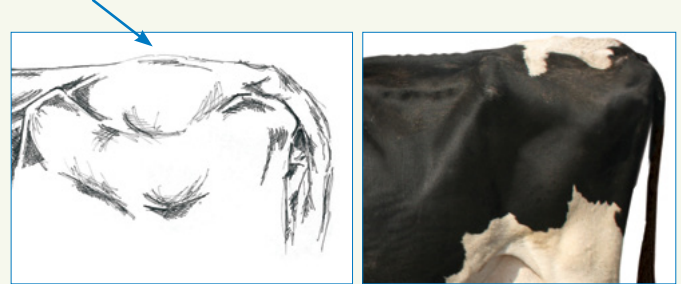


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

Image courtesy of DairyNZ

Condition Score 5 All breeds

1st observation

Area between tail and pins is slightly sunken

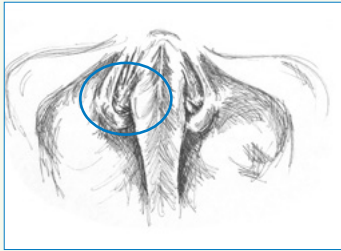


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)



Image courtesy of DairyNZ

2nd observation

Depression between hip and pin is U-shaped

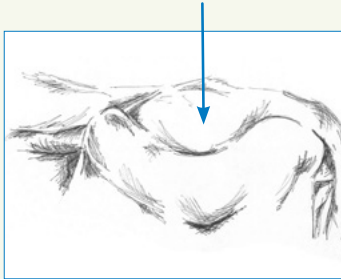


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)



Image courtesy of DairyNZ

Condition Score 5.5 All breeds

1st observation

Area between tail and pins is slightly sunken to filled in

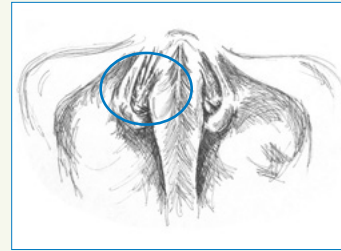


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

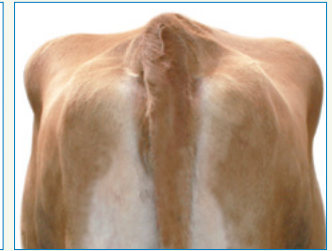


Image courtesy of DairyNZ

2nd observation

Depression between hip and pin is shallow

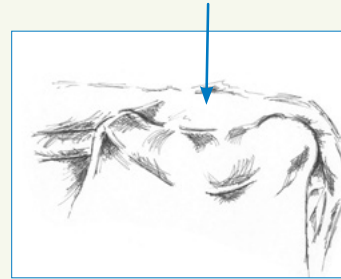


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)



Image courtesy of DairyNZ

Condition Score 6 All breeds

1st observation

Area between tail and pins is filled in

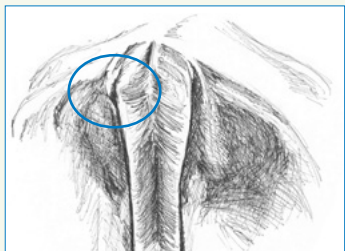


Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)



Image courtesy of DairyNZ

2nd observation

Depression between hip and pin is flat



Image courtesy of DEPI (Vic.)

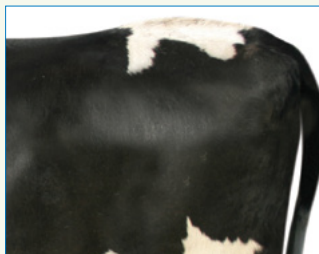


Image courtesy of DairyNZ