

Post Rock Extension District Column

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Body Condition Scoring — A Herd Management Tool

Body Condition Scoring is one of the most valuable management tools at the disposal of a cattle producer. The number associated with a condition score gives us a direct indication of a cow's previous plane of nutrition and future reproductive capability. Although the individual body condition scores are important, we don't manage individual cows, we manage groups of cows. Thus, it is important for us to look beyond the individual scores and look at the distribution of body condition scores within the herd. If we have a herd (Herd 1) with an average body condition score of 5 that is essentially characterized by the classic bell curve, with a few thin cows (3s), the bulk of cows in the middle (4s and 5s) and a few over-conditioned cows (7s) that is sufficient. Alternatively, we could have a herd (Herd 2) with an average body condition score of 5 that is essentially the result of a few thin cows (3s) and some over conditioned cows (6s and 7s).

Body Conditioning Scoring also has more value when it is done on the same group of cows at multiple times during the production year. If Herd 2 was scored at calving and had been previously scored at weaning and had an essentially normal distribution beforehand, we need to ask ourselves what occurred. What did we change? Although these examples are somewhat extreme they illustrate that we have to look beyond the individual body condition scores at one point during the production year to get the most out of this management tool.

The KSU Beef website has several resources on body condition scoring including a quick reference guide to body condition scoring. These can also be found at your local Extension office among other resources.

Thanks to Justin Waggoner for sharing information related to body condition scoring and for further information, contact me at any Post Rock Extension District Offices in Beloit, Lincoln, Mankato, Osborne, or Smith Center.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Blaire may be contacted at blairet@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit 738-3597, Smith Center 282-6823, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on Facebook at "Post Rock Extension" along with our website www.postrock.k-state.edu.