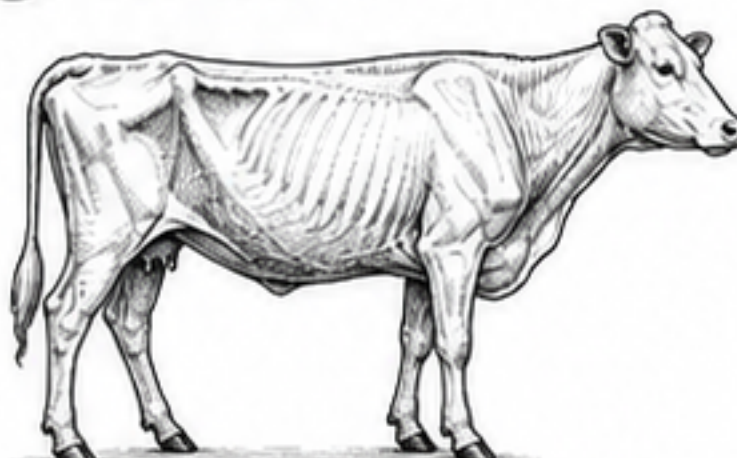
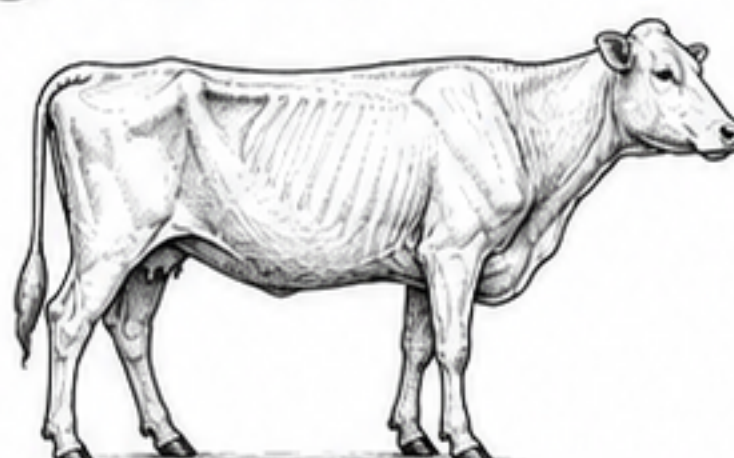
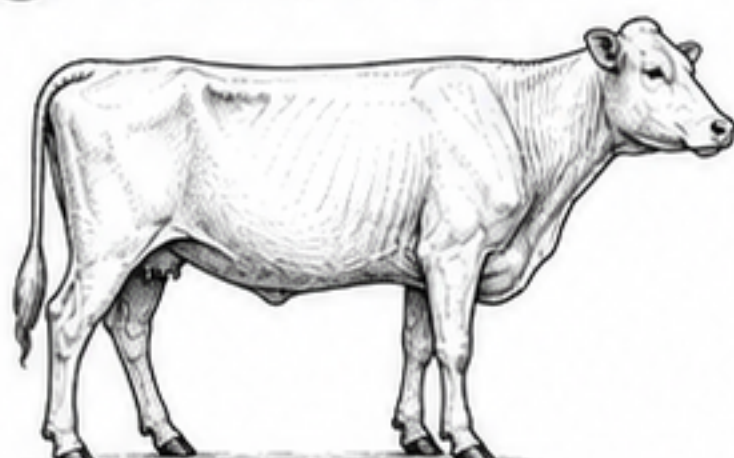
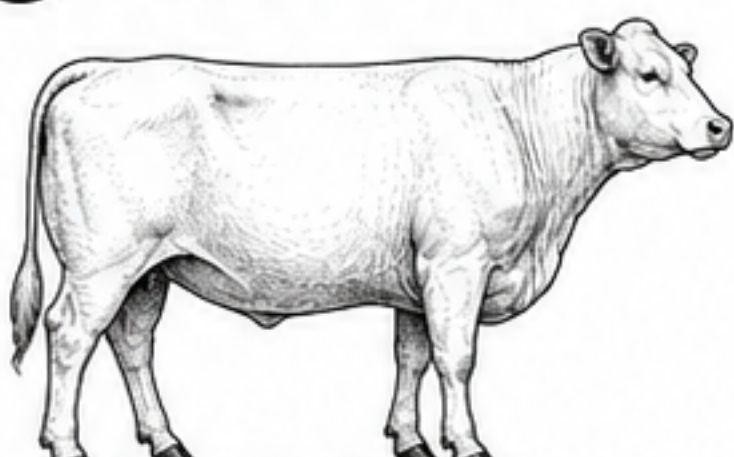
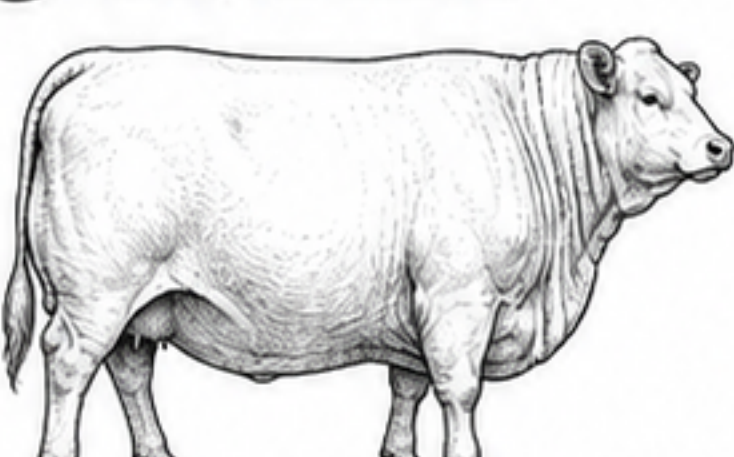


Beef Cow Body Condition Scoring (BCS): 1-9 Scale

High School Agriculture / Animal Science

Body condition scoring estimates a cow's stored energy by judging fat cover and muscle appearance. It is not the same as body weight. Score the whole animal, with special attention to the ribs, backbone, hooks, pins, tailhead and brisket.

1-3 THIN - urgent attention		4 BORDERLINE	5-6 MODERATE / TARGET	7-9 FAT / OVER-CONDITIONED	
1	Emaciated <i>Extremely thin</i>	2	Very thin <i>Very low reserves</i>	3	Thin <i>High management concern</i>
					
All ribs and bone structure are sharply visible. Severe loss of fat and muscle; the cow may appear weak.		All ribs are visible. Spine, hooks and pins are sharp. Severe muscle depletion in the shoulder and hindquarter.		Ribs and backbone are easy to see. No brisket or tailhead fat. Some muscle loss is visible.	
4	Slightly thin <i>Borderline</i>	5	Moderate <i>Common mature-cow target</i>	6	Good <i>Strong target condition</i>
					
Several ribs and the backbone remain visible. Hooks and pins are prominent, but muscle is mostly maintained.		Last two ribs may show. The back is smoother and the spinous processes are hard to identify. Little fat at brisket or tailhead.		Smooth, rounded appearance. Fat can be felt over ribs and pin bones, with some cover at brisket and tailhead.	
7	Fleshy <i>Above target</i>	8	Obese <i>Over-conditioned</i>	9	Extremely obese <i>Severely over-conditioned</i>
					
Ribs are not visible. Brisket is full, back looks flatter, and pockets of fat form around the tailhead.		Thick neck, large brisket and heavy tailhead fat. Back appears flat or square from excess cover.		Very heavy fat cover over the entire body. Tailhead may be buried and mobility can be reduced.	

Key idea: A one-point BCS change is meaningful. Record scores at consistent times and use the same trained scorer when possible.

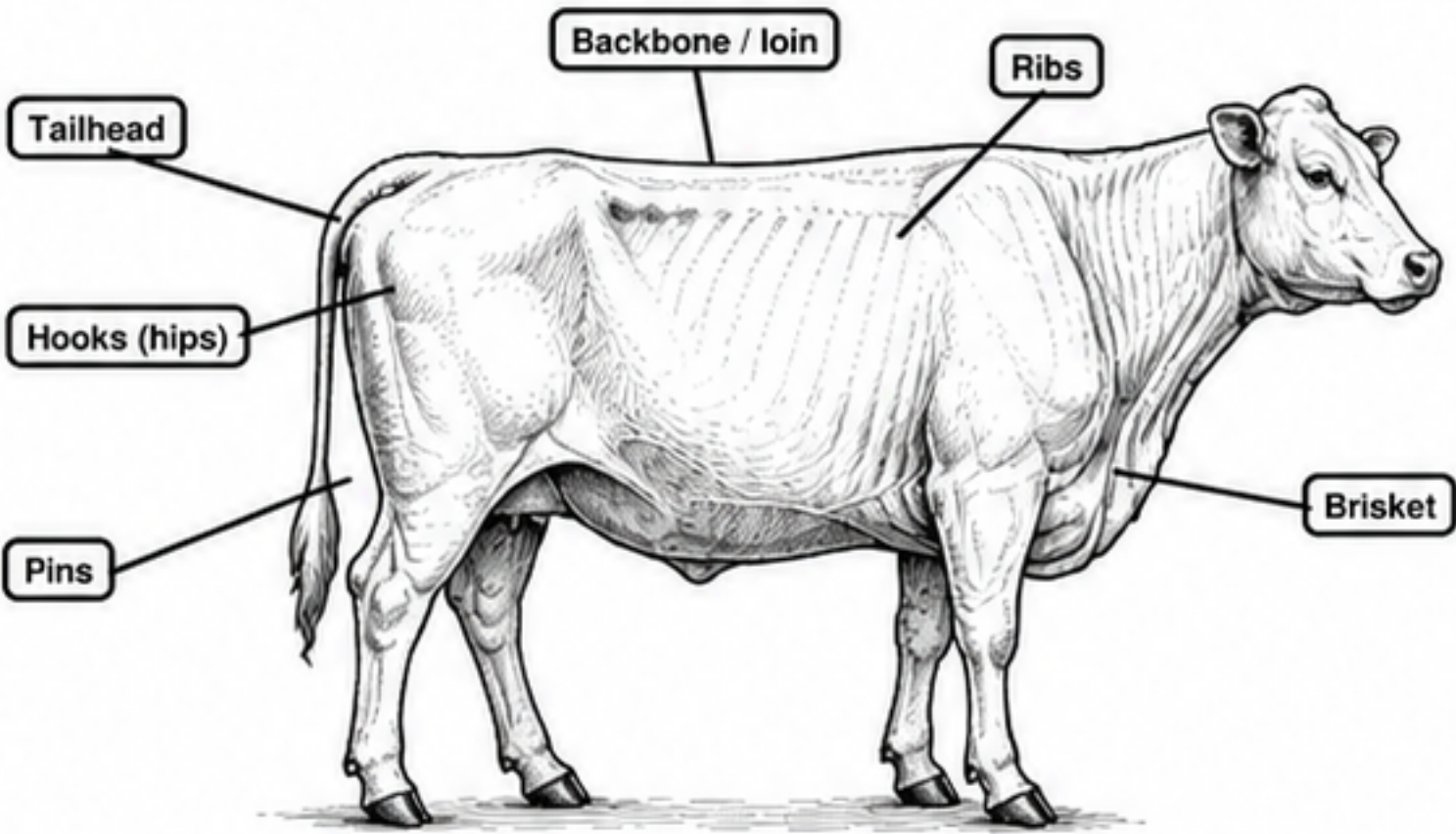
Sources: Oklahoma State University Extension AFS-3283 (2023); University of Nebraska-Lincoln Beef (2020).

How to Score a Beef Cow in the Field

Student Practice Guide

1. Locate the key landmarks

Judge fat cover, not breed type, frame size, pregnancy or gut fill.



2. Use a consistent method

- 1 Observe**
View the cow from the side and rear. Use palpation only when it can be done safely.
- 2 Check bones**
Look for visibility or sharpness of the last ribs, backbone, hooks and pins.
- 3 Check fat**
Look for cover over the ribs, around the tailhead and in the brisket.
- 4 Assign one score**
Choose the single whole-number score that best describes the entire animal.

3. Make a quick first sort, then refine the exact score

THIN: 1-4

Ribs and spine are visible. Hooks and pins are sharp. Little or no tailhead or brisket fat.

MODERATE: 5-6

Back and ribs are smoother. Bone points are less obvious. Fat cover is present but not excessive.

FAT: 7-9

Ribs disappear. Brisket and tailhead become full. Back becomes flat or square from fat cover.

Why BCS matters

BCS at calving is strongly related to how quickly a cow returns to estrus and rebreeds. Many beef operations manage mature cows toward BCS 5-6 at calving and first-calf heifers toward BCS 6. Thin cows are usually more difficult and expensive to improve after calving.

4. Practice: assign a BCS from 1 to 9

A. All ribs and the backbone are sharply visible; the cow appears weak.

☐

B. Several ribs are visible; the spine shows; muscle is mostly maintained.

☐

C. Only the last two ribs may be seen; the back is smooth; little tailhead fat.

☐

D. Smooth body; rounded back; some fat over ribs, pins and tailhead.

☐

E. Ribs are hidden; brisket is full; obvious fat pockets surround the tailhead.

☐

F. Thick neck, very large brisket and heavy fat over the whole body.

☐

Field record

Cow ID	Date	BCS	Evidence observed	Management note

Instructor key for practice: A=1, B=4, C=5, D=6, E=7, F=8 or 9 depending on severity.