

Body Condition Scoring Camera

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Body Condition Scoring (BCS) is a valuable management tool which farmers can implement to help monitor and maintain their cattle's health and welfare all year round.

BCS represents a standardized method of determining the amount of fat an animal carries around their hips, tail and pins. This scoring can provide farmers with animal specific information, which unlike liveweight will not fluctuate due to variable factors such as gut fill.

BCS plays an important role in assisting farmers to determine the nutritional needs, future requirements and reproductive performance of their animals. This is a task which can be carried out quickly and easily, often using the traditional "Penn State Assessment Method". This technique is based on a numeric scale (ranging from 1 – 5) which rises in increments of 0.25.



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There are three key points throughout the production cycle where cattle should be condition scored. These include:

- **Drying off (approximately 8 weeks pre-calving) – Target BCS 2.5 – 3.0**
- **Pre – calving (approximately 3 weeks pre-calving) – Target BCS 2.5 – 3.0**
- **Before first service – Target BCS 2.0 – 3.0**

Regular condition scoring of cattle is highly recommended as part of the Red Tractor Quality Assurance Scheme. It can help detect underlying health issues within a herd, by highlighting animals that may be overly thin or fat. This therefore allows management requirements to be tailored in accordance with animals BCS, to help ensure they reach their target level. It is important to note that lame cattle often have low condition scores and therefore managing cattle foot health is critical in ensuring animals achieve their desired condition scores.

Recent technological developments have seen an automated body condition scoring camera introduced onto the market, both within the UK and abroad. These cameras remove the need to manually handle cattle in order to perform a condition scoring assessment – significantly reducing both labour costs/requirements and stress on farmers/animals. These cameras are typically fitted on an entry/exit gate from the parlour – where animals pass regularly. Automated condition scoring cameras work by producing a three-dimensional image of the animals back each time they pass the camera. These images are produced focusing on three key areas – the pin bones, hook bones and thurl. A breed – specific algorithm is then used to calculate body condition score based off of this 3D image. This automated system produces both weekly and fortnightly trends, allowing variances in body condition score to be easily identified.

Early implementation of this technology has been found to:

- **Reduce on farm cases of Ketosis by 50%**
 - **Improve milk yields by ensuring all cattle are running at their optimum BCS throughout the production cycle**
 - **Minimise the number of returns within the herd and improve conception rates by 50% by ensuring cattle are returned to their optimum BCS post calving**
 - **Improve herd health by identifying underperforming animals early – aiding management decisions and the timely administration of veterinary treatments**
 - **Save both labour costs/time, whilst reducing stress on both animals and farmers**
 - **Eliminate the requirement to bring in external consultants or vets to carry out manual condition scoring.**
- (Source: DeLaval, 2020)

