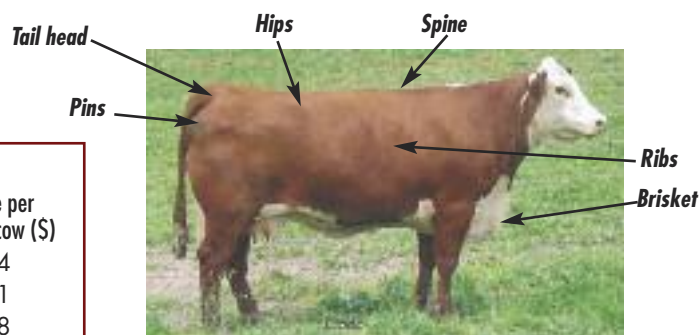


# Knowing how to evaluate body condition is crucial...

We cannot insist enough on this point since it is directly linked to the reproductive performance of your herd (Table 1). It is worth that even if the scale used to measure fleshing varies from 1 to 9 in the USA and from 1 to 5 in Canada, the principle remains the same: a "1" rating represents an animal of extreme thinness (0.5% of body fat), while the opposite rating ("5" or "9") is used to describe a highly obese animal (35% of body fat). The desirable rating at the time of calving is therefore "3" on the Canadian scale or "6" on the US scale. For heifers, it is even desirable to aim for a "3.5" (Can.) or "7" (USA). Be careful not to exceed these limits! Cows that

are too fat are expensive to feed, have more calving problems and are less fertile. The ideal time to evaluate the body condition of your cows is two to three months before calving, which leaves you more than enough time to adjust the diet of the females that are either too thin or too fat.

Figure 1. Strategic points for body condition evaluation



Cow in good body condition: ribs are not visible, some pressure must be applied to feel the spine, hips and pins, and there is some fat around the tail head and brisket.

Table 1. Effect of body condition on performance and income

Body condition (US)	1 <sup>st</sup> heat interval (days)	Pregnancy rate (%)	Calving interval (days)	Calf weight at weaning (lb)	Income per exposed cow (\$)
3	89	43	414	374	154
4	70	61	381	460	241
5	59	86	364	514	358
6	52	93	364	514	387

Source : Rick Funston, University of Nebraska, 2006.