

What body condition score would you give these heifers?



Knowing how to accurately score cattle for their body condition is a great tool to use to help determine if your cattle are capable of successfully conceiving. This week we will briefly discuss two of the main factors that influence a cow's ability to have a normal heat cycle.

The first factor to consider has two parts, made up of age and breed of the female. Because Brahman and Brahman influenced cattle are later maturing, they will need to reach 16-20 months of age before they can be expected to have consistent heat cycles. English bred cattle (such as Angus or Hereford) typically mature earlier and may begin having regular heat cycles as early as 12-16 months of age. Though these are general rules of thumb, it is important to keep in mind that not all females are the same, and some may mature several months earlier or later than expected based upon their genetics and body condition.

Quality and quantity of nutrients provided, and condition of the females is another important factor to keep in mind. Nutrient intake greatly influences body condition, which then directly impacts reproductive ability. In fact, females in BCS less than 5 have a lower chance of having a regular heat cycle compared to females that are in a BCS 5 or 6.

For example, the heifers in the picture above are 20 month old Brahman influenced open females. In most scenarios, 90% of females in this age group and breed should be expected to have a regular heat cycle if their BCS is between 5 and 6. However, these heifers have a BCS of 4 or 4½. Based on this BCS, we can expect only about 75% of these females to cycle regularly. If these same females were first calf heifers, with their first calf at side during breeding, we would expect only about 50% of them to cycle and breed back successfully. This is due to the low BCS, as cows with calves have higher nutrition requirements than open cows.

Scoring body condition of cattle is useful if done correctly because it can reveal expected reproductive ability, and helps the producer determine if the cattle are receiving the adequate amount of nutrition. If you have any questions regarding body condition scoring and how it aids in making management decisions, please contact us.