

ANIMAL CONDITION

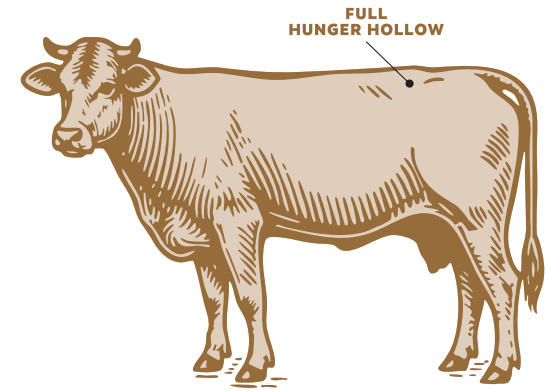
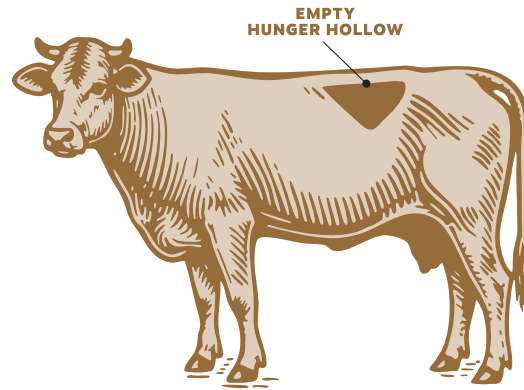
Animal condition is the cornerstone of livestock production. If your animals are not in good enough condition to fulfil the next task the farm needs them to perform – produce milk, re-conceive – then the economics of the farm is going to take a hit. When you transition to regenerative grazing you are 100% in charge of the catering for your cattle. You are doing precision grazing and if you are not precise in your grazing and lick management things will go wrong.

With regenerative grazing you are in 100% in charge of the food that ends up in your cow's "bowl" each day. If you don't feed them they don't eat. If you feed them too little each day their performance goes down. It is essential to make sure that the animals are getting the daily intake they require. Both in terms of quantity and quality. In terms of dry matter intake and their minimum nutritional requirements.

Fortunately for cattle farmers our cattle come with three gauges; keeping your eye on these gauges is as important as keeping your eye on the oil gauge on your machinery.



1. GUT FILL

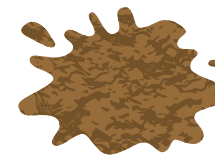


This shows you that your cow has a full rumen, if her rumen is not full then she is missing out. Hungry cattle do not perform, hungry cattle also break out of their grazing strip, usually after knock-off time. The Hunger Hollow (honger holte) is located on the LEFT flank of cattle, where the rumen comes up against the skin of the animal. If the sun sets on an empty hunger hollow then that is a day of lost production.

2. DUNG SCORE

The fresh dung of cattle tells you how well digestion is functioning in your cattle. If their diet is not balanced then this shows in the consistency of their dung.

The dung is telling you about what was happening in the rumen a day ago. It is an early warning system about the roughage:protein balance in the cow's diet and whether you are getting it right or wrong. Dung, like gut fill, should be checked every day. We have created a basic three level scale: you want the middle one.



"THE DAIRY"

The dung is runny, like a dairy cow's. The protein content in the diet is high, and fermentation is fast. Nutrients and water are passing through your cow and being wasted. Make a change!



"PUMKIN PIE"

This is what you want, soft but not runny. The rumen is balanced, and the dung is soft but stays together. There is often a little crater on the top.



"THE BAKER"

It looks like knot bread or a croissant. The dung is in layers and too hard. Rumen throughput is slow, and your cow is not getting what it needs. The diet contains too much fibre and not enough protein. Make a change!

3. BODY CONDITION SCORE

This is a slower gauge than Gut Fill and Dung Score; it tells you how you have performed as the head caterer for the last two weeks. **Ideally you want to maintain body condition score (BCS) between 2.5 and 3.5 on the 5 point scale.** Although the scale has 5 points no one should be farming at score 1 or score 5: 1 is dying and 5 is obese. BCS at calving gives the best indication of a cow's re-conception chances. If BCS >2,5 then a conception rate above 75% is a possibility. Below BCS-2 conception rate falls rapidly.

There are a number of places to look at to gauge the BCS of a cow. The easiest area is the short rib or T-bone (shown in the image to the right), where the degree of fill between the skin and the short rib is what you are looking at. That area must at worst be flat; when it becomes concave, your cow's score is now BCS-2. If it is convex, it's a BCS-3 or more.

The second indicator position is the hook bone, more specifically, the gap between the hook bone and the spine. The same measuring applies here, it must not be concave.

The critical score to focus on is BCS-2. A cow with a BCS-2 has used all its fat reserves and is using muscle to supplement its daily requirements. This mostly happens when a cow is lactating and the grass is not green. If BCS-2s make up 5% or more of your herd, you need to make urgent grazing or supplementation changes to bring that number back below 5%. The prospect of body conditioning a whole herd of 200 animals is an overwhelming prospect but you do not need to do that. It is easy to count the BCS-2s as you walk through your herd. Start counting and hopefully when you get through the herd the total of BCS-2s you counted is less than 5% of the total number in the herd. If there are say 200 cows in the herd and while walking you count 10 BCS-2s and you still have half the herd to count, you have a problem.

Other areas that are used in scoring are the ribs and the pin bones from behind. You should not be seeing the individual ribs, and the pin bone should be covered in muscle.

