

# Beef Cattle Body Condition Scoring 9 Point System



# Exp: Study on Beef Cattle Body Condition Scoring 9 Point System

## What is Body Condition Scoring?

A common scoring system has been developed to estimate the average body condition of cows in a herd. This system provides producers a relative score based on an evaluation of fat deposits in relation to skeletal features.



## What is Body Condition Scoring?

Body condition scoring is an easy and practical method of assessing the nutritional status of your cows.

The most widely used body condition scoring system for beef cattle in the U.S. assigns scores from 1 (emaciated and carrying virtually no fat) to 9 (excessively fat).

## Importance of Body Condition Scoring to Cattle Producers

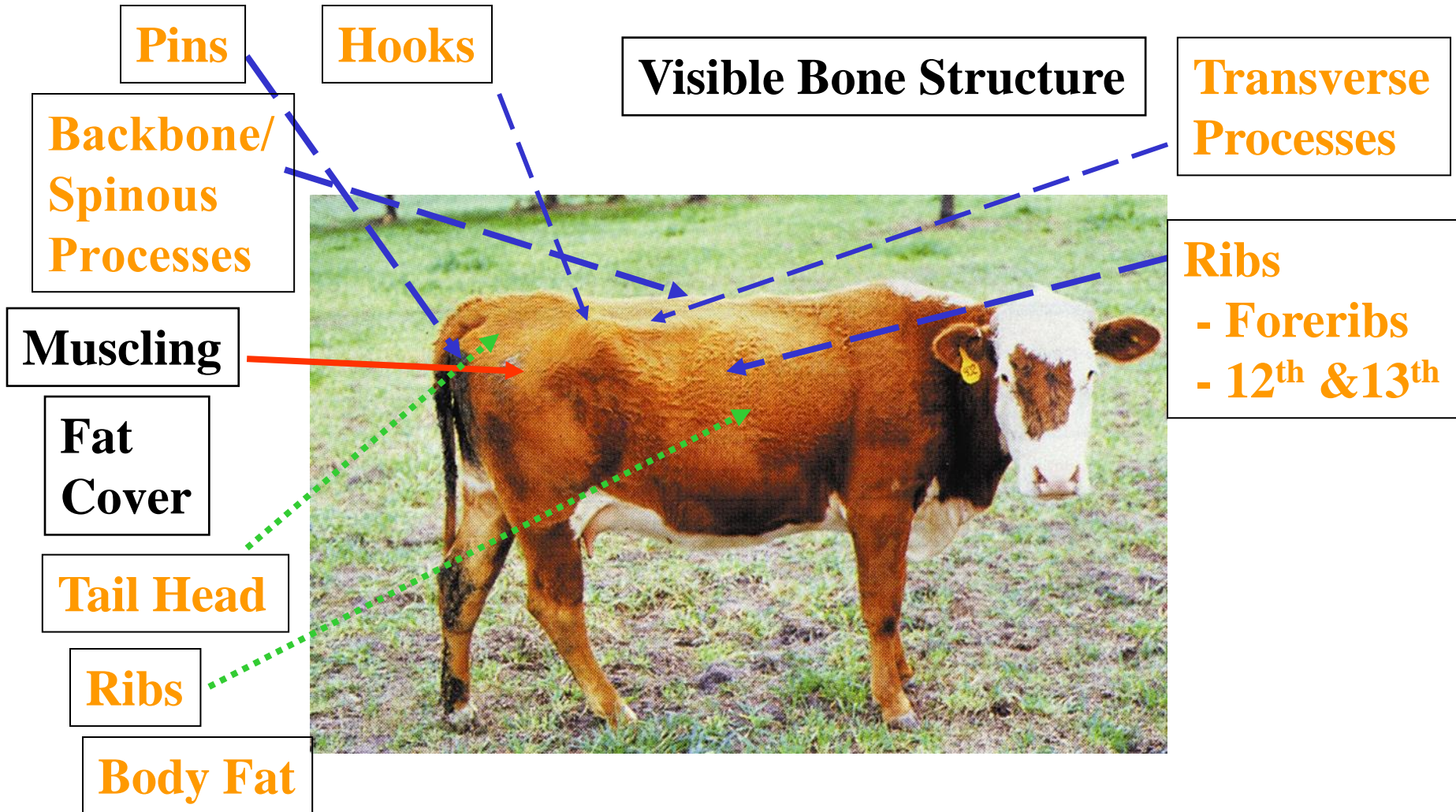
Body condition scoring of beef cattle can be an effective management tool for evaluating the energy reserves of cows and the whole nutritional program throughout the year. Adjusting the nutritional program to obtain desired body condition at different stages of production is necessary to enhance production efficiency.

## Importance of Body Condition Scoring to Cattle Producers

Females that are too thin or too fat can be an expensive investment. Thin cows can have difficulty rebreeding, while fat cows are prone to calving problems and excessive feed costs. Body condition scores (BCS) allow producers, extension personnel, and researchers to communicate more effectively regarding the herd's nutritional status.

# Body Condition Scoring

## What do I look for? Where do I look?



Areas such as the back, tail head, pins, hooks, ribs, and brisket of beef cattle can be used to determine BCS.

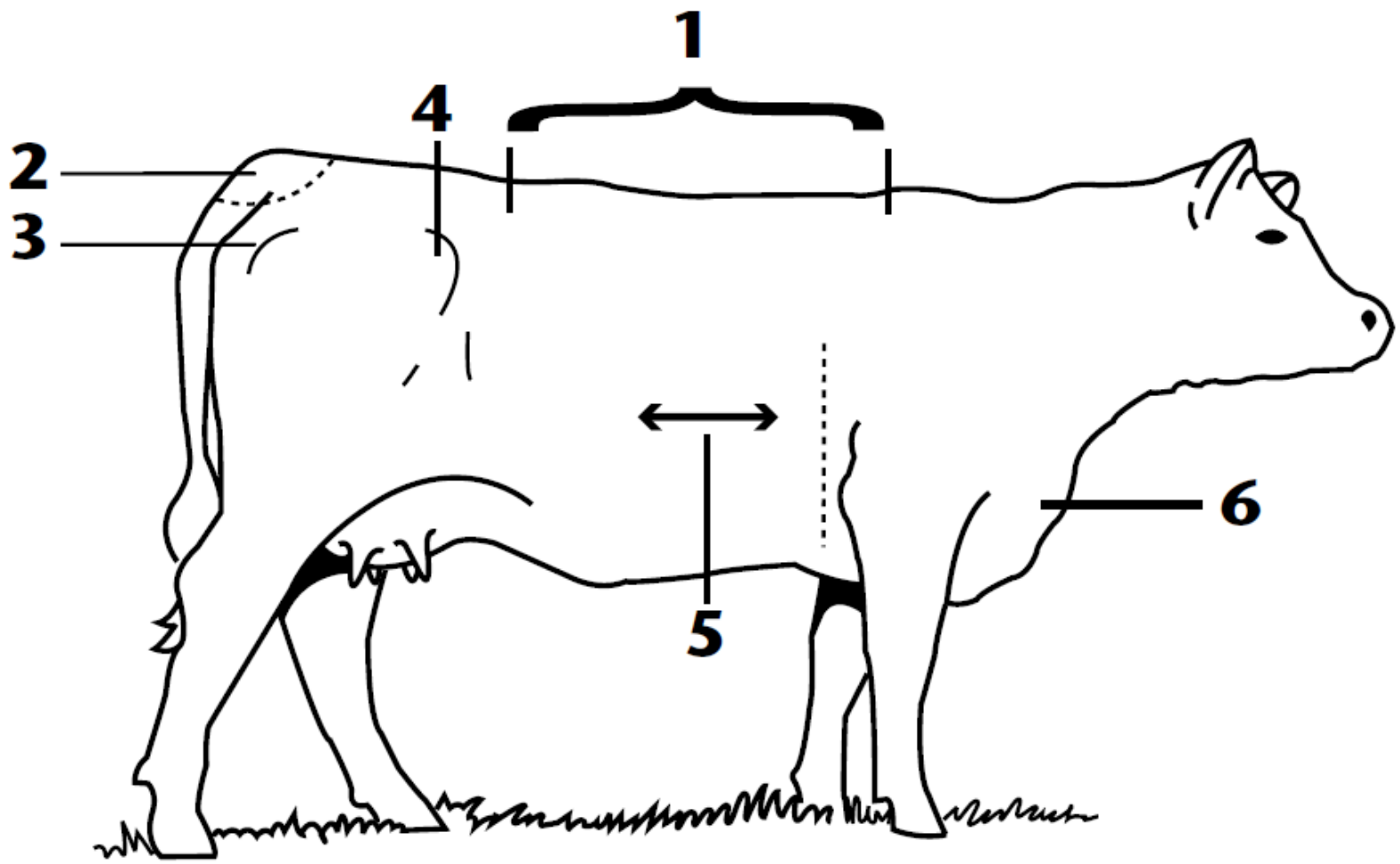
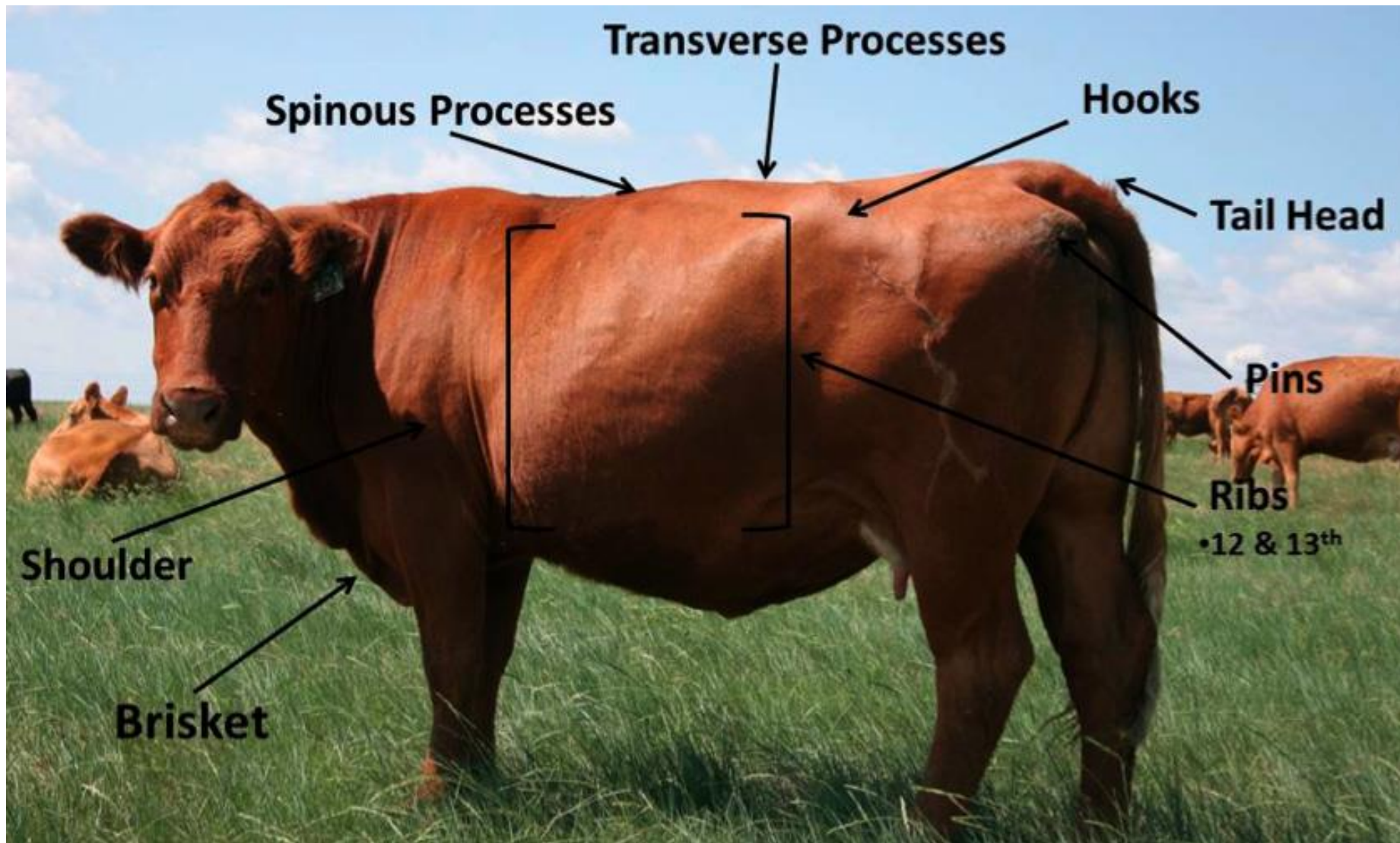
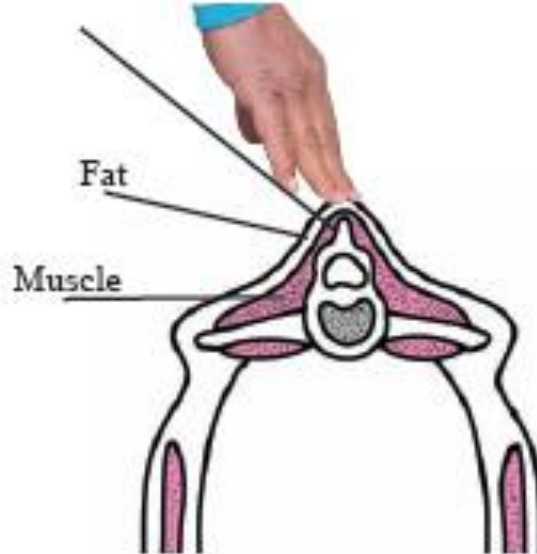


Figure 1. Key points for body condition scoring: 1. back; 2. tail head; 3. pins; 4. hooks; 5. ribs; 6. brisket.

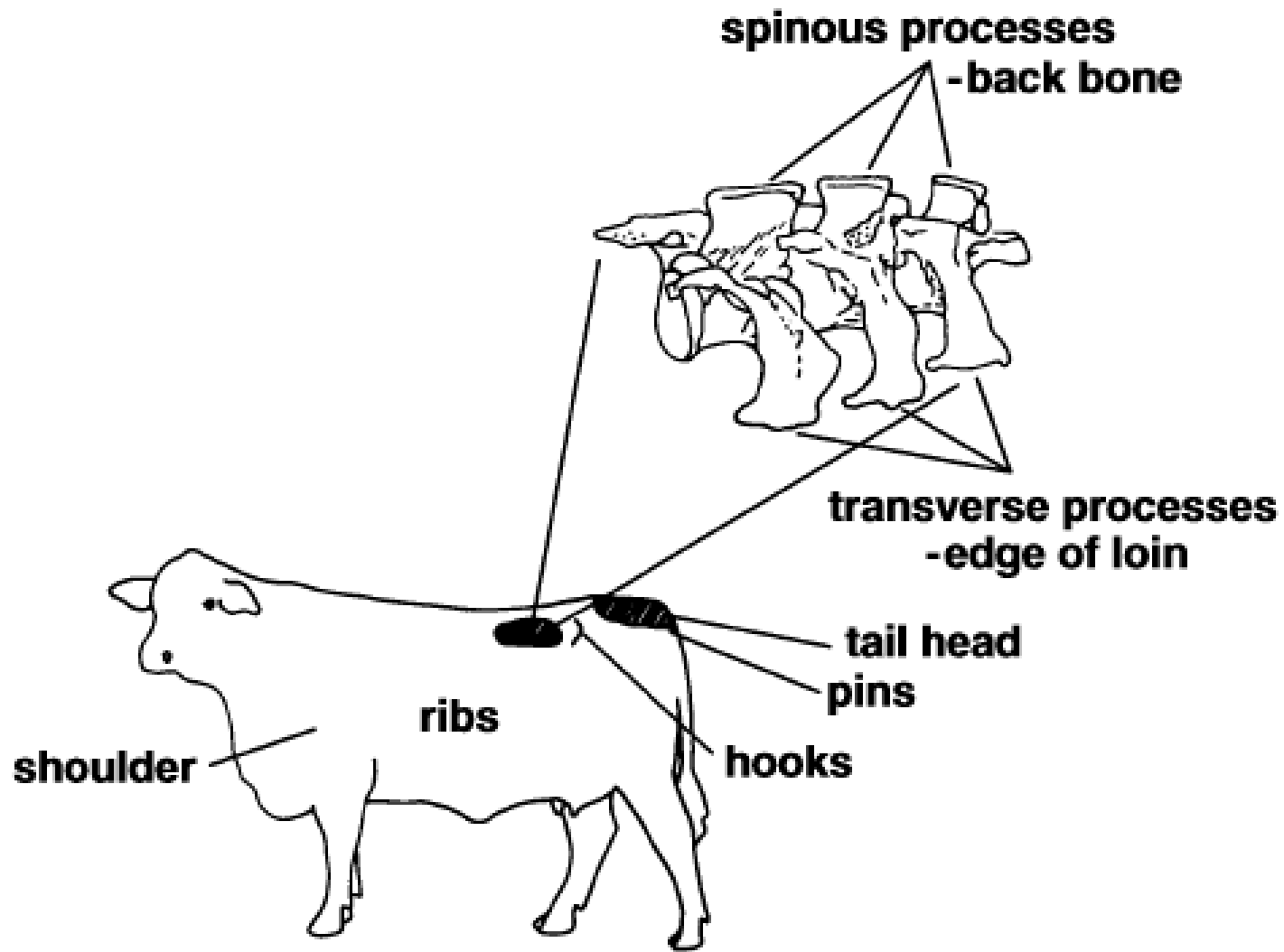


### Spinous process

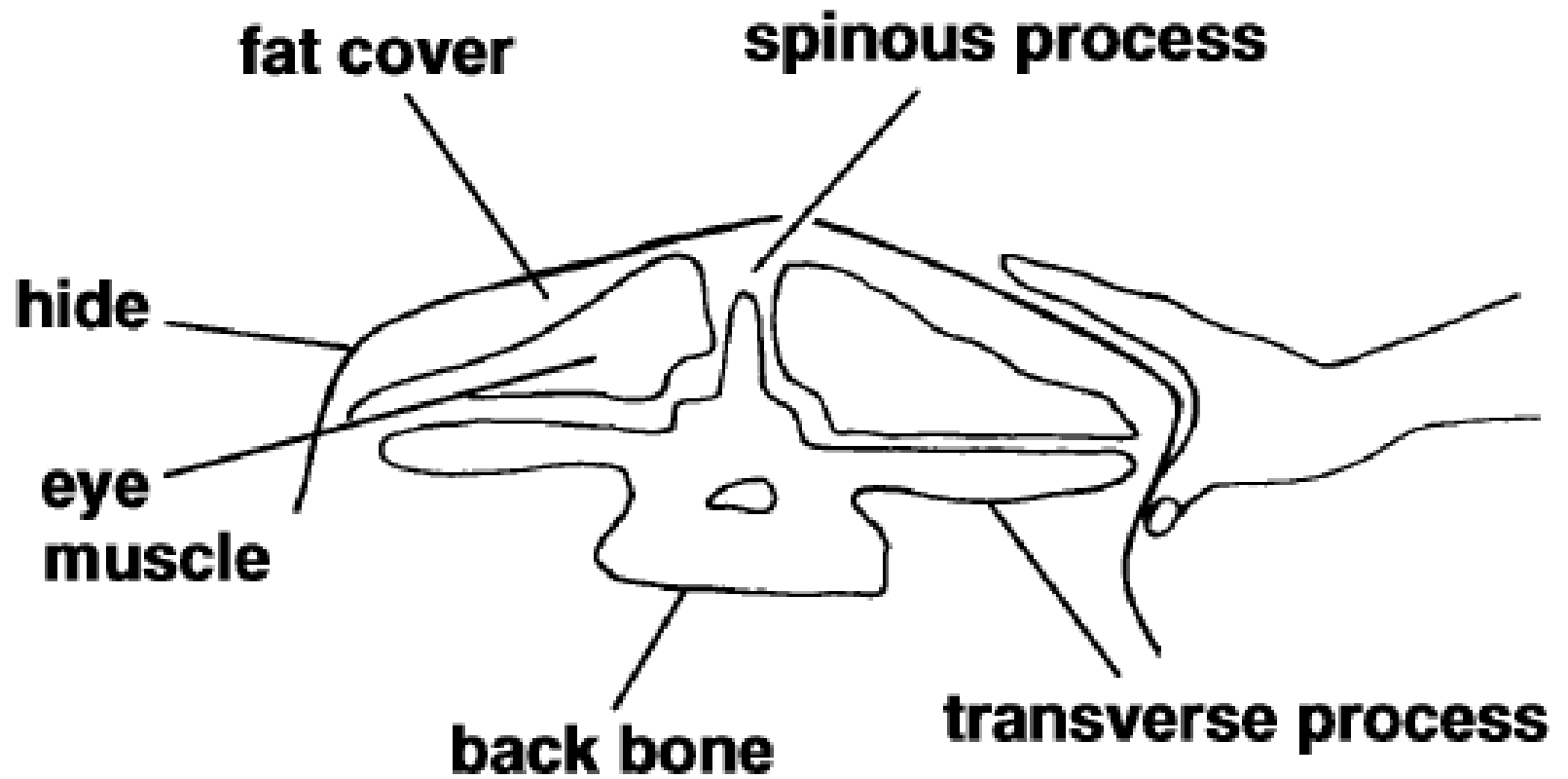


### Transverse process





**Figure . Anatomical areas that are used for scoring body condition in beef cows.**



**Figure . Anatomic areas that are used for scoring body condition in beef cows.**

**thin** —

- 1** Severely emaciated; starving and weak; no palpable fat detectable over back, hips or ribs; tailhead and individual ribs prominently visible; all skeletal structures are visible and sharp to the touch; animals are usually disease stricken. Under normal production systems cattle in this condition score are rare.
- 2** Emaciated; similar to BCS 1, but not weakened; little visible muscle tissue; tailhead and ribs less prominent.
- 3** Very thin; no fat over ribs or in brisket; backbone easily visible, slight increase in muscling over BCS 2.

# Condition Score 1 – Emaciated

## ☞ **Visible Bone structure**

- ✓ Shoulder
- ✓ Ribs
- ✓ Back
- ✓ Hooks
  - Sharp to touch
- ✓ Pins
  - Sharp to touch

## ☞ **Muscling**

- ✓ Very little

## ☞ **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Very little



# Condition Score 2 – Very Thin

## ☞ **Visible Bone structure**

- ✓ Spinous process easily seen
  - Sharp to touch

## ☞ **Muscling**

- ✓ Some in hindquarters

## ☞ **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Very little



# Body Condition 3 – Thin

## ☞ **Visible Bone structure**

- ✓ Foreribs remain noticeable
- ✓ Backbone visible
- ✓ Spinous process
  - Palpate /little pressure
  - Less pronounced intervening space

## ☞ **Muscling**

- ✓ Muscling apparent

## ☞ **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Beginning cover
  - Loin, back, foreribs



**borderline** —

- 4 Borderline; individual ribs noticeable but overall fat cover is lacking; increased musculature through shoulders and hindquarters; hips and backbone slightly rounded versus sharp appearance of BCS 3.

# Body Condition Score 4 – Borderline

## ☞ **Visible Bone structure**

- ✓ Foreribs not noticeable
- ✓ 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> ribs noticeable
- ✓ Transverse process
  - Felt with slight pressure

## ☞ **Muscling**

- ✓ Full but straight  
(not rounded)

## ☞ **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Ribs beginning  
to be well covered



**optimum** —

- 5** Moderate; increased fat cover over ribs, generally only 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> ribs are individually distinguishable; tailhead full, but not rounded.
- 6** Good; back, ribs, and tailhead slightly rounded and spongy when palpated; slight fat deposition in brisket.

# Body Condition Score 5 – Moderate

## ☞ **Visible Bone structure**

- ✓ 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> rib not visible
- ✓ Transverse processes felt firm pressure

## ☞ **Muscling**

- ✓ Full

## ☞ **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Area around tail head filled out but not mounded



# Body Condition Score 6 – Good

## **Visible Bone structure**

- ✓ No distinct structure
- ✓ Transverse processes felt w/firm pressure

## **Muscling**

- ✓ Hindquarters plump and full

## **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Sponginess over foreribs
- ✓ Sponginess around tail head



**fat** —

- 7** Fat; cow appears fleshy and carries fat over the back, tailhead, and brisket; ribs are not visible; area of vulva and external rectum contain moderate fat deposits; may have slight fat in udder.
- 8** Very fat; squared appearance due to excess fat over back, tailhead, and hindquarters; extreme fat deposition in brisket and throughout ribs; excessive fat around vulva and rectum, and within udder;
- 9** Obese; similar to BCS 8, but to a greater degree; majority of fat deposited in udder limits effective lactation. Under normal production systems cattle in this condition score are rare.

# Body Condition Score 7 – Very Good

## ☞ **Visible Bone structure**

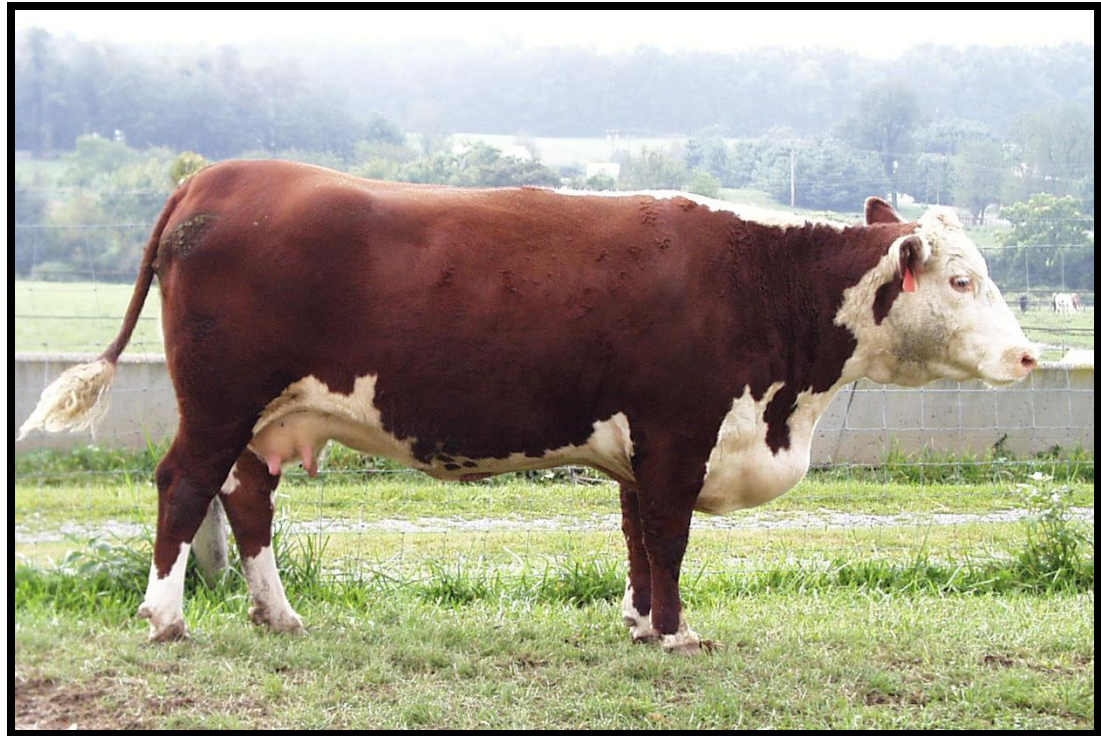
- ✓ No distinct structure
- ✓ Ends of spinous process felt very firm pressure

## ☞ **Muscling**

- ✓ Hindquarters plump and full

## ☞ **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Abundant fat around tail head .



# Body Condition Score 8 – Fat

## ☞ **Visible Bone structure**

- ✓ No distinct structure to none

## ☞ **Muscling**

- ✓ Hindquarters plump and full

## ☞ **Fat Deposits**

- ✓ Thick and spongy
- ✓ Animal appears smooth and blocky



# Body Condition Score 9 – Very Fat

☞ **Visible Bone structure**

✓ None

☞ **Muscling**

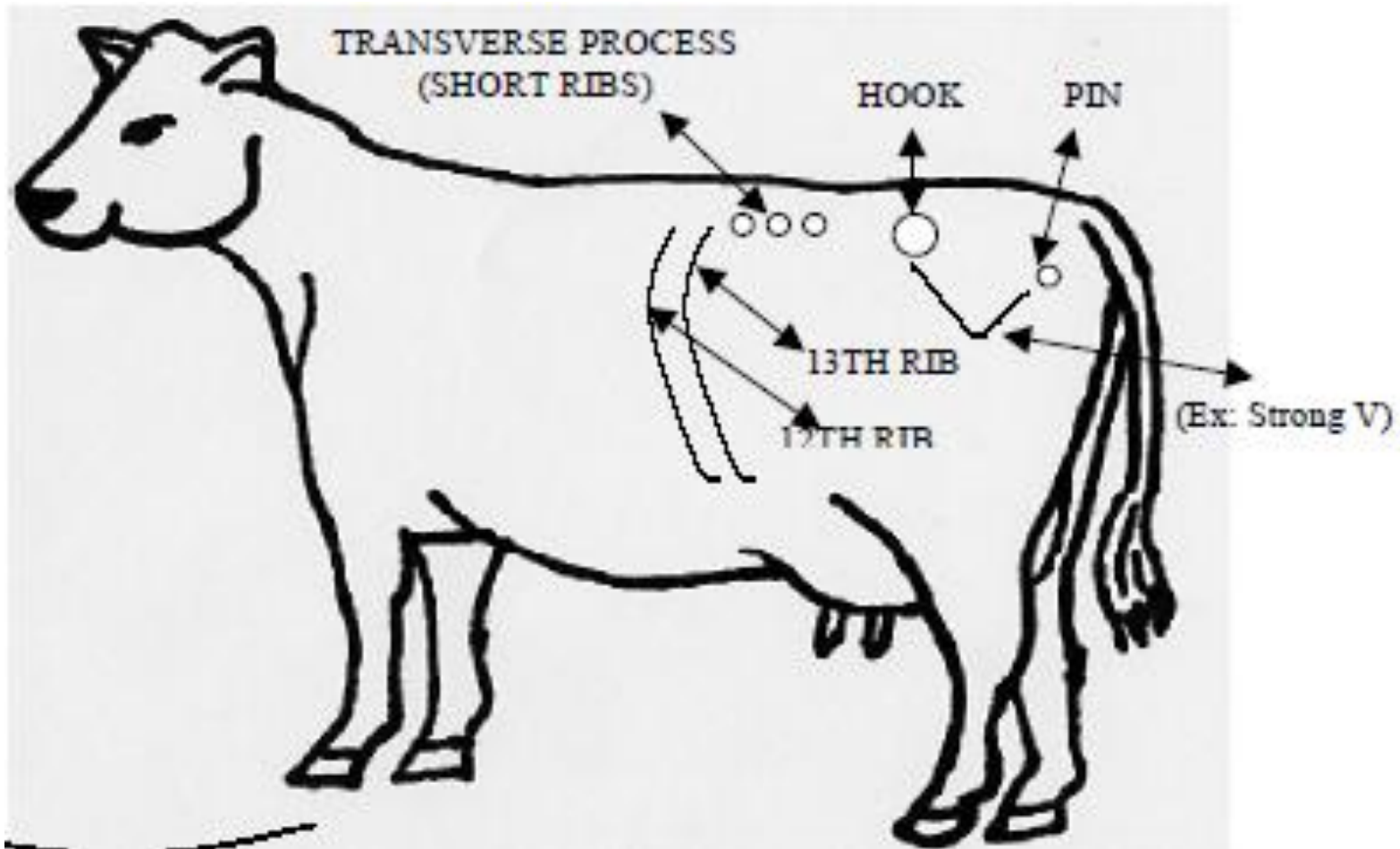
✓ Hindquarters plump and full

☞ **Fat Deposits**

✓ Tail head buried in fat



# SYSTEMATIC WAY TO LEARN BODY CONDITION SCORING OF BEEF COWS



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## STEP 1

LOOK AT THE LAST TWO RIBS (12TH & 13TH RIB)

IF YOU SEE THE 12TH & 13TH RIB, IT IS BELOW 5.

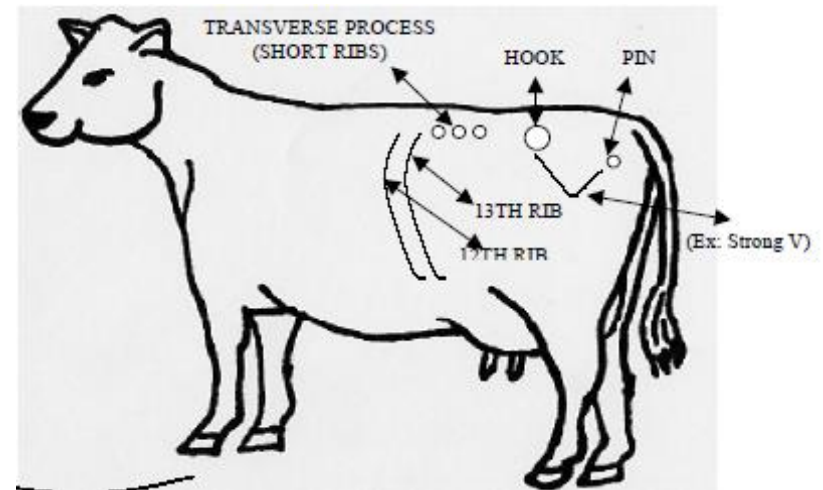
IF YOU DO NOT SEE THE 12TH & 13TH IT IS 5 OR ABOVE.

## STEP 2

IF YOU SEE THE TRANSVERSE PROCESS (SHORT RIB), IT IS 3 OR LESS.

## STEP 3

IF YOU SEE A VERY STRONG V, IT IS A 1 OR 2.

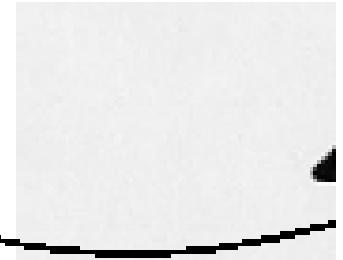


# SYSTEMATIC WAY TO LEARN BODY CONDITION SCORING OF BEEF COWS

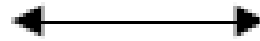
## STEP 4

LOOK BETWEEN THE HOOK AND PINS:

IF A 6, HAS A SHALLOW U

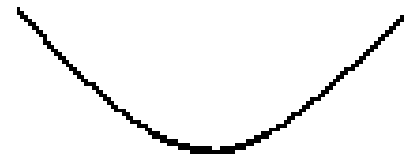


IF A 5, HAS A STRONG U (SHALLOW UMBRELLA)



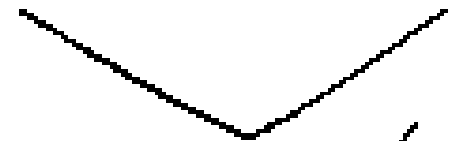
IF A 4, HAS V SHAPE

(IF 12<sup>TH</sup> & 13<sup>TH</sup> RIB IS SHOWING, THE FORRIBS ARE NOT NOTICABLE AND THE TRANSVERSE PROCESS, OR THE SHORT RIBS ARE NOT NOTICABLE.)

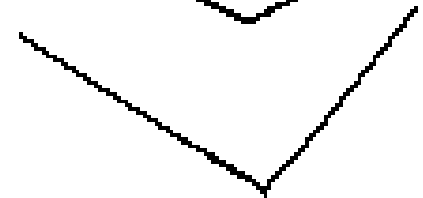


IF A 3, HAS A STRONG V

(WHERE THE TRANSVERSE PROCESSES ARE SLIGHTLY NOTICABLE)

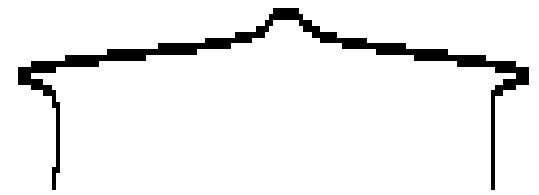


IF A 2, HAS A VERY STRONG V



# STEP 5-DETERMINE TAILHEAD FATNESS BYGETTING REAR VIEW & LOOKING DOWN THE BACK:

IF A 5  
(TEPEE EFFECT FROM REAR)



IF A 6  
(FLAT ACROSS THE BACK)



IF A 7  
(INDENTURE ACROSS THE BACK)



IF A 8  
(DEEP INDENTURE ACROSS THE BACK)  
(PATCHES OF FAT ACROSS THE SIDE)



IF A 9 (EXTRA FAT, TROUBLE WALKING)



Score System	Condition Score								
1 - 9 (Beef)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 - 5 (Dairy)	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5

**Table 1. Reference table for body condition scores.**

Reference point	----- Body Condition Scores -----								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Physically weak	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Muscle atrophy	yes	yes	slight	no	no	no	no	no	no
Outline of spine visible	yes	yes	yes	slight	no	no	no	no	no
Outline of ribs visible	all	all	all	3-5	1-2	0	0	0	0
Outline of hip & pin bones visible	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	slight	no	no
Fat in brisket and flanks	no	no	no	no	no	some	full	full	extreme
Fat udder & patchy fat around tail head	no	no	no	no	no	no	slight	yes	extreme

(Modified from Pruitt, 1994.)

**Table 2. Problems associated with "thin" or "fat" body condition**

<b>Thin Condition BCS 1- 4</b>	<b>Fat Condition BCS 8-9</b>
1. Failure to cycle	1. Costly to maintain
2. Failure to conceive	2. Increased dystocia
3. Increased calving interval	3. Impaired mobility
4. Increased days to estrus	4. Failure to cycle
5. Decreased calf vigor	5. Failure to conceive

**Your Turn!**

# Cow No. A



# Cow No. B



# Cow No. C



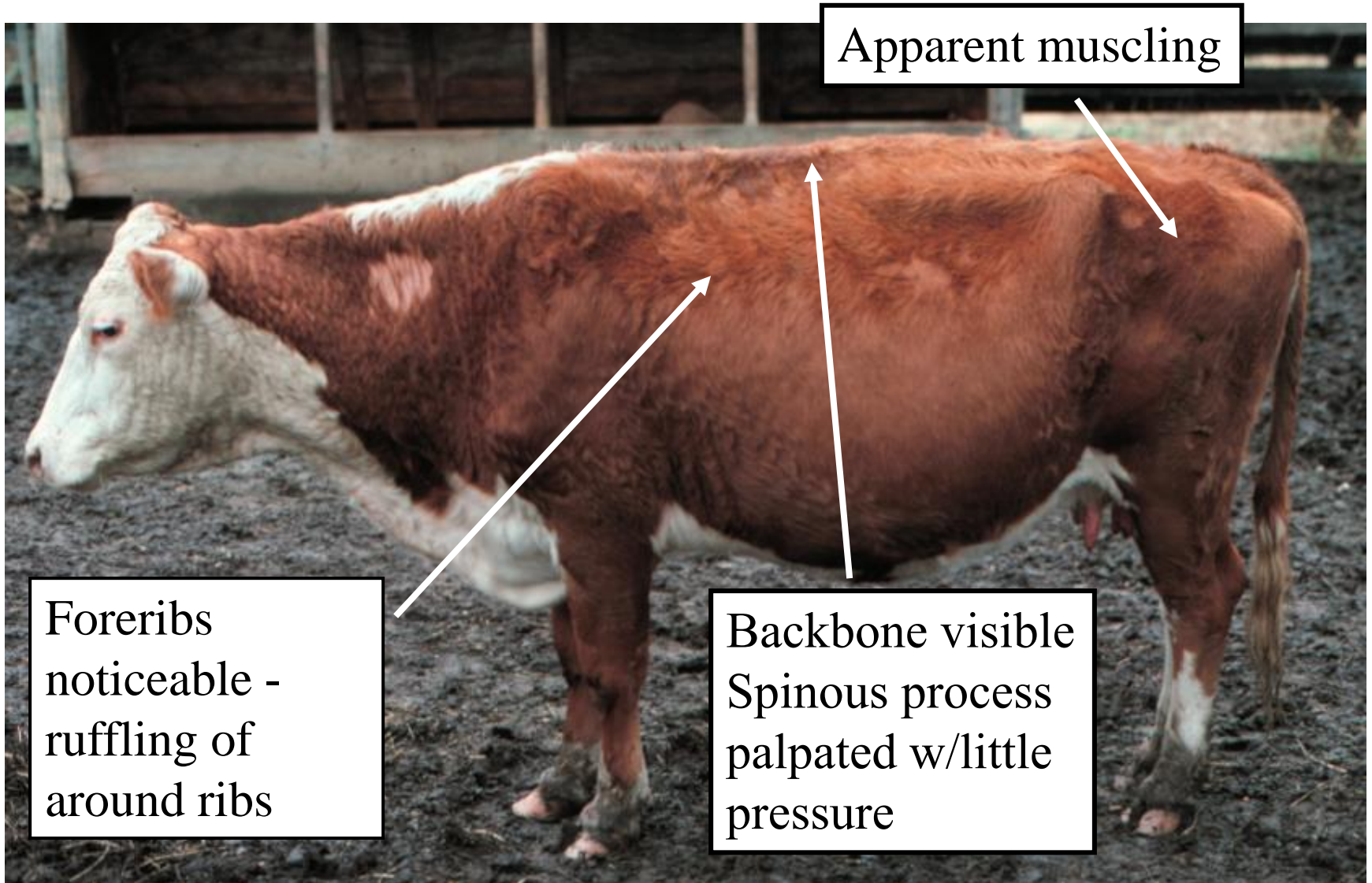
# Cow No. D



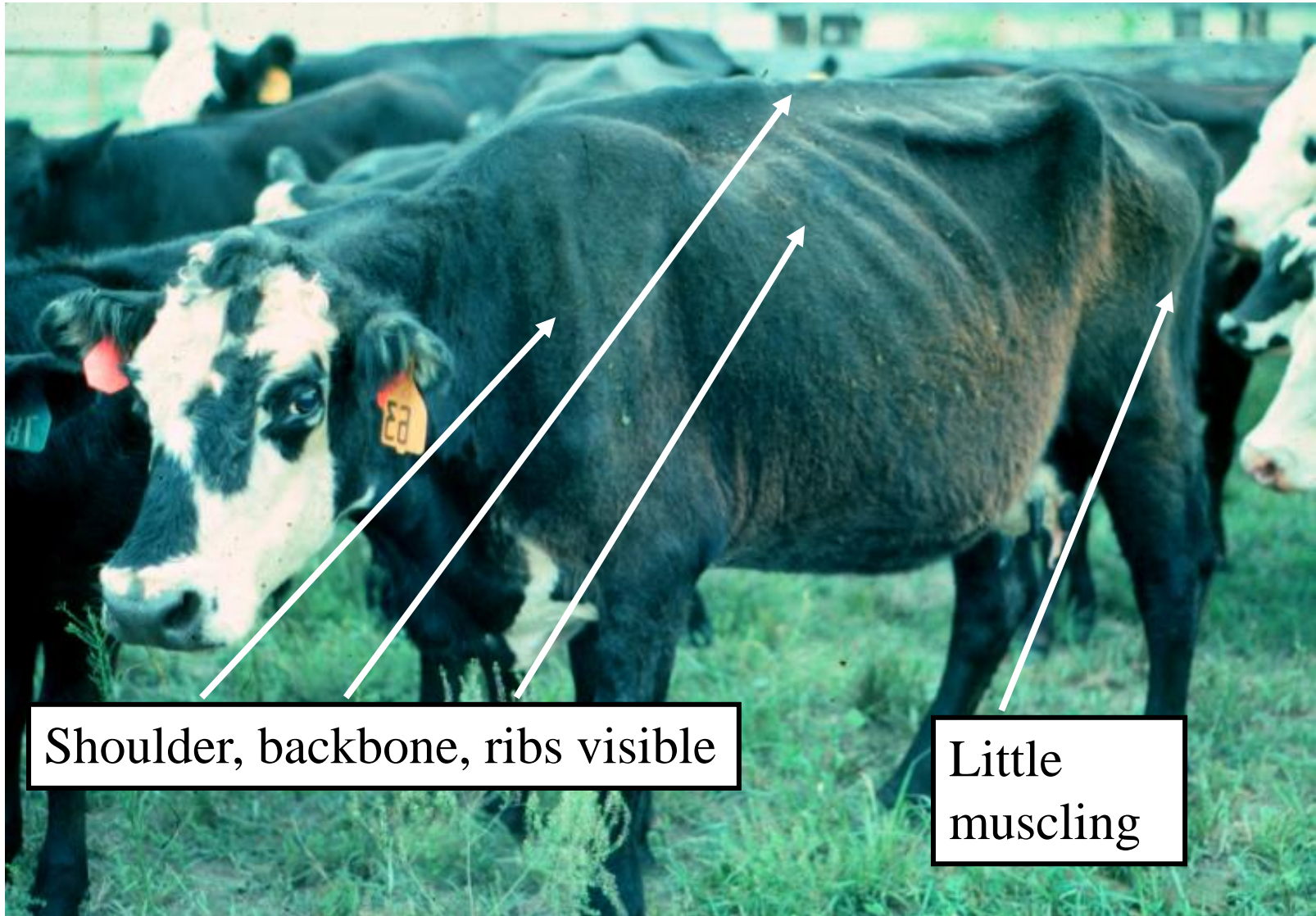
# Cow No. E



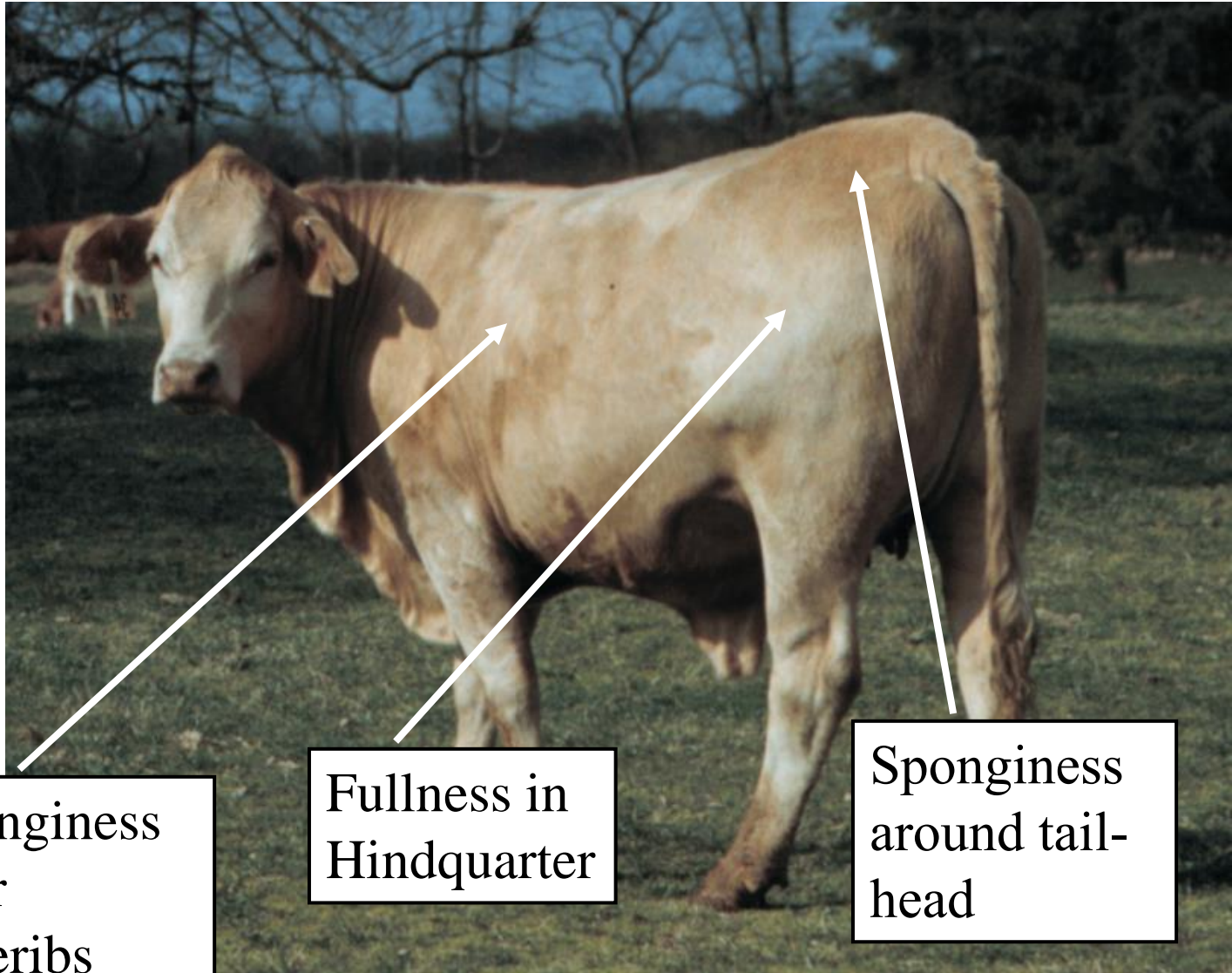
# A. BCS 3 – Thin



## B. BCS 2 – Very Thin



# C. BCS 6 – Good

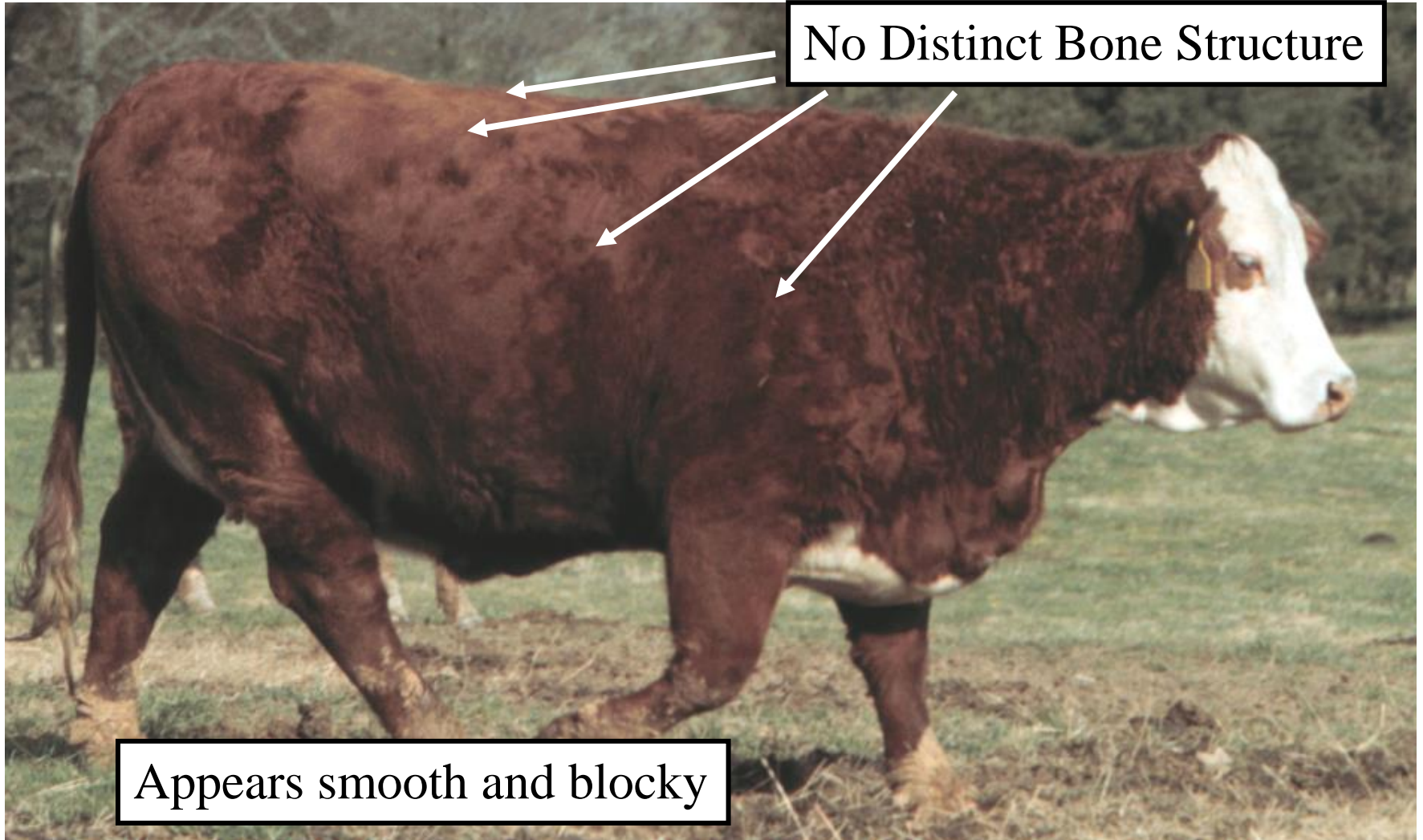


Sponginess  
over  
Foreribs

Fullness in  
Hindquarter

Sponginess  
around tail-  
head

# D. BCS 8 – Fat



# E. BCS 5 – Moderate

Transverse process felt with firm pressure

12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>  
rib not  
visible

Fullness of muscle

