

Nutrition key to cow efficiency, expert says

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Heading into the winter months, cattle producers should give careful attention to adequate nutrition of beef cattle, said a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service expert.

Dr. Jason Cleere, [beef cattle](#) specialist, College Station, told producers at the recent South Central Texas Cow-Calf Clinic in Brenham to monitor body condition of their cattle to ensure those [cows](#) will raise a healthy calf and properly re-breed.

"Cattle markets have been phenomenal," Cleere said, "and things are green and the outlook is great."

However, lack of nutrition is one of the main causes for cattle not breeding, he said.

"Nutrition is extremely important to the cow-calf operation," Cleere said. "The way we manage cattle to calve at two years of age and have a calf every year, you've got to have some nutritional management out there for them."

Cleere said one of the most important things producers should do is look at the body condition of their cows.

"The other thing is look at manure," he said. "It varies, but it tells us what is going on with those cattle, what they are eating and the quality of their diet. "

Body condition scoring is a numerical system for evaluating the condition or fatness of breeding cattle. The system ranks cattle from one, very thin, to 10 very fat. Cattle in average condition would receive a score of five. Cleere said cattle will first put on fat in the brisket area, then behind the shoulder and onward towards the rear of the animal.

"The effect of body condition score on pregnancy rates is significant," he said. "Research indicates that cows should be at least a body condition score of 5 at calving to achieve optimum re-breeding rates.

"However, the best time to be looking at body condition score would be when you wean your calves so that nutritional management decisions can be made prior to calving," he said. "You should look at it year round, and especially during the [winter](#) feeding period to make sure the cattle are being supplemented properly."

Cleere said body condition score also impacts how much money cull cows will bring when sold. He demonstrated a cow with a body condition score of two with a value of \$50-\$60 per hundredweight. A cow with a [body condition](#) score of six was worth \$75-\$85 per hundredweight.

"If we compare the two values on these cows, it equals \$920 to \$495 in difference between the cows," Cleere said. "The heavier cow weighs 1,150 pounds versus 900 pounds on the thin cow. When it comes to making culling decisions due to drought, if we let those cows get too thin and calve, it's going to hurt reproduction rates. If it didn't rain and we had to sell, we have animals a lot less valuable if you let them get too thin. Some tried to squeeze the value out of their cows and skimp on feeding."

Cleere advised monitoring cows throughout the year to not only optimize reproduction, but to have [cattle](#) in condition to bring added dollars if forced to decrease cow numbers due to dry conditions.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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