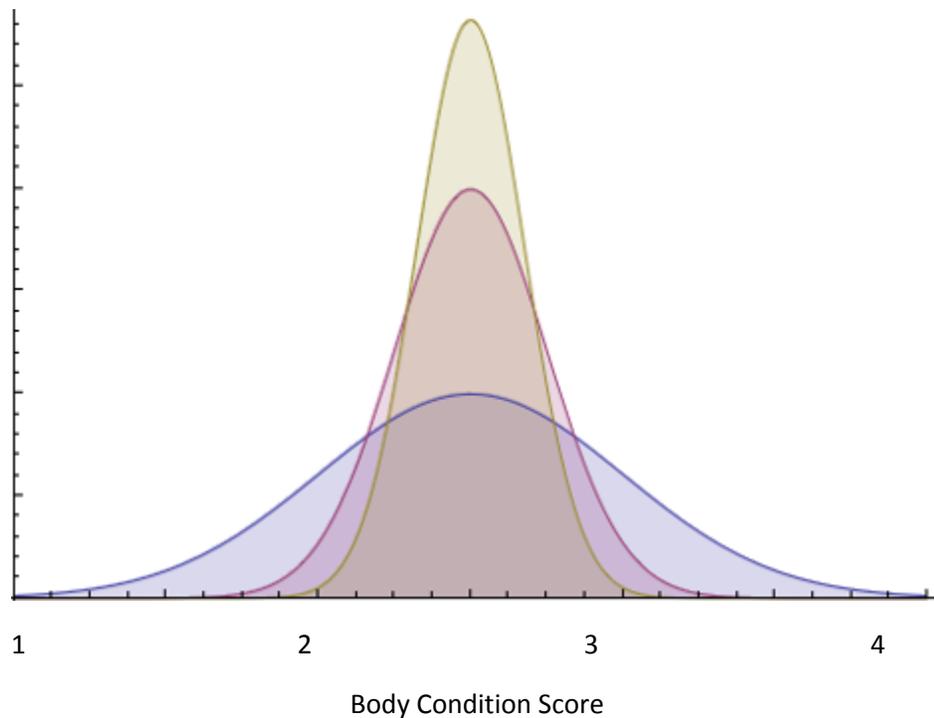


The Power of Consistency

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At a dairy I recently visited – it struck me how consistent the cows body condition was in each pen. The normal distribution curve would have a very high peak, as opposed to most “normal” herds I visit where the body condition is considerably more variable. What does that mean? What difference does it make?



What factors make managing a dairy so challenging? People, cows, feed, weather, equipment, markets, you fill in the blank – but it boils down to the endless complexity of constantly changing variables. Decisions that were made yesterday would be different today, because your herdsman is in a bad mood, the feeder was late getting the cows fed, the corn market is up, the loader is broke down – whatever it might be, variation kills productivity. We are going to focus specifically on the cowside dynamics associated with variation – but suffice it to say the logic is similar for many other factors as well.

When we make decisions on how best to formulate a ration that “fits” a particular group of cattle, the most important considerations is to accurately describe the group of cows in the population you are formulating a ration for and to accurately describe the feedstuffs that will be fed to this population. The formulation models that nutrition consultants utilize to help do the math when balancing rations, rely heavily on knowing what the target nutrient levels need to be for a particular group of cattle – size, body condition, lactation number, days in milk, reproductive status, etc. ...

Similarly, we must accurately describe in the nutrition models the feed ingredients that could potentially be used in the ration formulation. Energy values, protein, fiber, mineral content, moisture, and many other factors are measured against each other in different feedstuffs to determine the least cost

formulation to provide the levels of each nutrient that the nutrition consultant has determined to be the target amount.

Now, coming back to the normal distribution graph, or bell shaped curve, and why it is important to what we are doing. We are going to describe the average cow or the average feed ingredient and input values into the model as an average. We know that cows and feed will not all be exactly average there will be cows that differ from the average both on the high and the low side, this is described as the coefficient of variation. The smaller this number is the tighter the group is, or the less variation there is. It is much easier to formulate a ration and get the desired results when the cows are very similar. It is also much easier to formulate a ration and get the desired results when the feed ingredient is consistent.

Consistency encompasses many areas – ownership, growth, genetics, management, feed procurement, feeding – just to name a few. Cows love consistency. Cows will reward dairymen when they are able to take advantage of consistency on the dairy. How can you become more consistent? Undoubtedly, it will result in higher production, better reproduction, better health, and ultimately reward you by showing up in your bottom line.