



ORGANIC CERTIFICATION A PRIMER FOR LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS

Why get certified organic? Certified organic producers rely on practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity to produce high quality food and agricultural products with minimal impact to the environment. Aside from the satisfaction of improving your soil, producing healthy food, and protecting the environment, organic growing has financial rewards as well. Consumers are willing to pay top dollar for the assurance that their produce is grown in accordance with the strict standards of the National Organic Program.

SUMMARY OF NOP REGULATIONS

In order to be certified as an organic livestock producer, you must comply with the regulations established in the National Organic Program (NOP) standards, which are codified in 7 CFR Part 205. The standards, which are summarized below, were adopted by the USDA to implement the Organic Food Production Act of 1990.

Allowed and Prohibited Substances § 205.105. Organic production is based on the use of nonsynthetic, or naturally occurring, plant, animal, and mineral materials. All inputs used in organic livestock production must be nonsynthetic or must appear on NOP's list of synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production, found in section §205.603 of the NOP Rule.

Organic System Plan § 205.201. Certified organic livestock producers must develop and follow an organic system plan (OSP). Your OSP must explain the management practices that you will use to produce organic livestock. Your OSP must also list all of your farm inputs and describe your recordkeeping system. If you seek certification through QCS, your approved livestock application is your organic system plan.

Land Use Requirements § 205.202. Organic livestock are raised on land that is certified organic. The NOP requires that land be free of prohibited inputs for at least three years before it is eligible for organic certification, and to be managed in accordance with all applicable land and crop management provisions. If you raise livestock on pasture or produce organic feed, your organic system plan will also include the organic grower application. See the "Fact Sheet for Organic Growers" for more information on regulations specific to organic feed and forage crop certification.

Origin of Livestock § 205.236. The requirement for the origin of organic livestock depends on the type of livestock. Livestock raised for organic meat must be managed organically from the last third of gestation, while poultry must be under organic management beginning no later than the second day of life. A dairy herd can be converted to produce organic milk or milk products after the animals have been under organic management for at least one year. Once converted, all dairy animals are to be managed organically from the last third of gestation.

Livestock Feed § 205.237. Organic livestock are raised on organically produced feed, including pasture and forage. Nonsynthetic substances and approved trace minerals and vitamins are allowed as feed additives, provided that all agricultural ingredients in the mix are certified organic. Additionally, ruminant livestock must be provided with not less than 30 percent of their dry matter from



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pasture during the grazing season. A grazing season can be no less than 120 days and can be more if the geographical climate allows.

Livestock Health Care § 205.238. Preventative health care practices including the use of vaccines are the keystone of organic livestock health care. If preventative practices are not effective, synthetic medications listed in § 205.603 of the NOP may be used.

Livestock Living Conditions § 205.239. Living conditions for organic livestock are meant to accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals. This includes access to the outdoors, shade, shelter and sunlight; fresh air and exercise. Ruminants must have access to pasture and, when appropriate, livestock must be provided clean, dry bedding. Temporary confinement is only permitted under specific circumstances described in the regulation. The total confinement of ruminants in yards, feeding pads and feedlots is not permitted.

Pasture practices § 205. 240 Producers with ruminant livestock must manage their pasture as an organic crop. Taking into account the herd size, pasture type, geographical grazing season, and dry matter demand, pastures must be managed to provide not less than 30% of the dry matter demand for ruminant livestock during the grazing season. Irrigation shall be used, as needed, to promote pasture growth when the operation has irrigation available for use on pasture. Please note it is important that you work with your inspector to schedule your inspection during the grazing season.

Recordkeeping § 205.204. The NOP requires growers to maintain records for a minimum of five years. Recordkeeping requirements include livestock production records, sales receipts, input documentation, invoices for purchased feed, equipment cleaning logs, and all other records necessary to document compliance with the regulations.

Labeling § 205.300-311. The NOP has specific labeling requirements for organic livestock products. If you seek certification through QCS, labels must be submitted to us for pre-approval.

This document is a general summary of the NOP regulations. It is not intended as a substitute for a complete reading and understanding of the law. The full text of the National Organic Program standards can be accessed from the USDA's website, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>, and is also provided in your QCS application packet.

Additional Resources:

Florida Organic Growers (FOG) <http://foginfo.org>

Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) <http://www.omri.org>

National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: <http://attra.ncat.org/>

USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education <http://www.sare.org>

Organic Trade Association <http://www.ota.com> and <http://howtogoorganic.com>

QCS is a USDA accredited certifying agent. QCS cannot provide consultation services to our clients, other than to ensure that their OSP is in compliance with the National Organic Program standards. Florida Organic Growers maintains a list of consultants and can be reached at 352-377-6345.