

# Requirements for Organic Livestock in the United States

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**Abstract:** According to the Organic Monitor, organic meat sales in the United States increased by 51% in 2005 with the highest growth reported in the organic beef market. Like most sectors of the North American organic food industry, supply shortages are causing high volumes to be imported from other countries.<sup>i</sup> In order to be sold in the U.S. as “organic,” all agricultural products, including domestic and imported livestock products, must comply with Federal regulations. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulates the production and labeling of “organic” livestock and livestock products under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 and the National Organic Program (NOP), Section 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 205, which is also known as the “Final Rule”.

This article explains the regulations for the production and labeling of livestock and livestock products as “organic” in the United States. Under the Final Rule, “livestock” are defined as “any cattle, sheep, goat, swine, poultry, or equine animals used for the production of food, fiber, feed, or other agricultural-based consumer products; wild or domesticated game; or other non plant life, except such term shall not include aquatic animals and bees for the production of food, fiber, feed, or other agricultural-based consumer products.”<sup>ii</sup> In order to be sold as organic, all animals, except for poultry, dairy, and breeder stock, must be under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation or hatching. Poultry or edible poultry products must be from poultry that has been under continuous organic management beginning no later than the second day of life. Organic milk or milk products must be from animals that have been under continuous organic management beginning no later than 1 year prior to the production of the milk or milk products. Animals must be fed 100% organic feed. Nonsynthetic substances and specifically approved synthetic substances may be used as feed additives and supplements. Organic livestock producers must establish preventative livestock health management practices. Organic animals must not be treated with antibiotics, given growth hormones, or fed slaughter byproducts. Organic livestock living conditions must accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals. In order to be labeled “organic”, meat, milk, and egg handling operations that process organic livestock products must also be certified. Once certified to USDA requirements, all organic livestock products are eligible to display the “USDA Organic” seal.

**Key Words:** Organic; livestock; dairy; poultry; slaughter; origin of livestock; livestock feed; health care; living conditions; records; synthetic; National List.

**Introduction:** The Final Rule contains the following sections: Subpart A: Definitions; Subpart B: Applicability; Subpart C: Requirements for Crops, Livestock and Handling; Subpart D: Labeling; Subpart E: Certification; Subpart F: Accreditation of Certification Agents; and Subpart G: Administrative (the National List and enforcement).

**Regulatory Requirements:** Subpart A defines “livestock” as “any cattle, sheep, goat, swine, poultry, or equine animals used for the production of food, fiber, feed, or other agricultural-based consumer products; wild or domesticated game; or other non plant life, except such term shall not include aquatic animals and bees for the production of food, fiber, feed, or other agricultural-based consumer products.”<sup>iii</sup>

Subpart A defines “pasture” as “land used for livestock grazing that is managed to provide feed value and maintain or improve soil, water, and vegetative resources.”<sup>iv</sup>

Subpart A defines “routine use of parasiticide” as “the regular, planned, or periodic use of parasiticides.”<sup>v</sup>

In order to be sold as organic, Subpart B, section 205.236 requires that all animals, except for poultry, dairy, and breeder stock, must be under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation or hatching. Poultry or edible poultry products must be from poultry that has been under continuous organic management beginning no later than the second day of life.

At the present time, organic milk or milk products must be from animals that have been under continuous organic management beginning no later than 1 year prior to the production of the milk or milk products, except, that, when an entire, distinct herd is converted to organic production, the producer may provide feed that is either certified organic or raised on the farm on land that is in its third year of transition to certified organic production. Once the herd is converted, all dairy animals must be under organic management from the last third of gestation.

Livestock used as breeder stock may be brought from a nonorganic operation onto an organic operation at any time, provided that, if the livestock are gestating and the offspring are to be raised as organic slaughter livestock, the breeder stock must be brought onto the organic facility no later than the last third of gestation.

Section 205.103 requires that all organic operations, including livestock producers, must maintain records that disclose all activities; are auditable; demonstrate compliance; are maintained for at least five years; and are made available to organic inspectors and certification agencies.

In addition, 205.236(c) requires that, “the producer of an organic livestock operation must maintain records sufficient to preserve the identity of all organically managed animals and edible and nonedible animal products produced on the operation.”<sup>vi</sup>

Section 205.237 requires 100% organic feed for organic livestock, except that nonsynthetic substances and synthetic substances allowed under § 205.603 may be used as feed additives and supplements.

Livestock feed used for organic livestock must not contain:

- (1) Animal drugs, including hormones, to promote growth;
- (2) Feed supplements or additives in amounts above those needed for adequate nutrition and health maintenance;
- (3) Plastic feed pellets;
- (4) Urea or manure;
- (5) Mammalian or poultry slaughter by-products to mammals or poultry; or
- (6) Feed, additives, supplements in violation of the Food and Drug Administration.

Section 205.238 requires that organic livestock producers must establish preventative livestock health care practices including:

- “(1) Selection of species and types of livestock with regard to suitability for site-specific conditions and resistance to prevalent diseases and parasites;
- (2) Provision of a feed ration sufficient to meet nutritional requirements, including vitamins, minerals, protein and/or amino acids, fatty acids, energy sources, and fiber (for ruminants).
- (3) Establishment of appropriate housing, pasture conditions, and sanitation practices to minimize the occurrence and spread of diseases and parasites;
- (4) Provision of conditions which allow for exercise, freedom of movement, and reduction of stress appropriate to the species;
- (5) Performance of physical alterations as needed to promote the animal’s welfare and in a manner that minimizes pain and stress; and
- (6) Administration of vaccines and other veterinary biologics.”<sup>vii</sup>

If performed to promote the animal’s welfare in a manner that minimizes pain and stress, the following physical alterations are allowed:

- CATTLE – castration; dehorning; ear or dewlap notching; or hot iron branding.
- SHEEP – castration; tail docking; or dehorning.
- SWINE – teeth clipping; tail docking; castration; tattooing; or nose rings.
- TURKEYS – wing clipping or toe clipping.
- POULTRY (LAYING HENS) – beak trimming or wing trimming.

For health care, section 205.238 states that, “when preventive practices and veterinary biologics are inadequate to prevent sickness, a producer may administer synthetic medications, provided that such medications are allowed under § 205.603.”<sup>viii</sup>

Parasiticides allowed under 205.603 may be used on:

- (1) Breeder stock, when used prior to the last third of gestation but not during lactation for progeny that are to be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced; and
- (2) Dairy stock, when used a minimum of 90 days prior to the production of milk or milk products that are to be sold, labeled, or represented as organic.

At the present time, the only parasiticide listed at 205.603, and therefore allowed with the restrictions above, is ivermectin.

Section 205.238 states that an organic livestock operation must not sell, label, or represent as organic any animal or edible product derived from any animal treated with

antibiotics, any substance that contains a synthetic substance not allowed under § 205.603, or any substance that contains a nonsynthetic substance prohibited in § 205.604.

Section 205.238 also prohibits the use of: animal drugs, other than vaccinations, in the absence of illness; hormones for growth promotion; synthetic parasiticides on a routine basis; parasiticides for slaughter stock; or the use of animal drugs in violation of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

Section 205.238(c)(7) requires that organic livestock producers must not, “withhold medical treatment from a sick animal in an effort to preserve its organic status. All appropriate medications must be used to restore an animal to health when methods acceptable to organic production fail. Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and shall not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced.”<sup>ix</sup>

Organic livestock producers must establish and maintain livestock living conditions which accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals, including: (1) Access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, and direct sunlight suitable to the species, its stage of production, the climate, and the environment; (2) Access to pasture for ruminants; (3) Appropriate clean, dry bedding (must be organic if consumed by species); and (4) Shelter designed to allow for: (i) Natural maintenance, comfort behaviors, and opportunity to exercise; (ii) Temperature level, ventilation, and air circulation suitable to the species; and (iii) Reduction of potential for livestock injury.

Organic livestock operations may provide temporary confinement for an animal because of (1) Inclement weather; (2) The animal’s stage of production; (3) Conditions under which the health, safety, or well being of the animal could be jeopardized; or (4) Risk to soil or water quality.

Organic livestock producers must not use lumber treated with arsenate or other prohibited materials for new installations or replacement purposes in contact with soil or livestock.

Organic livestock operations must manage manure in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, heavy metals, or pathogenic organisms, and they must optimize the recycling of nutrients.

Section 205.603 of the National List contains a list of synthetic substances allowed in organic livestock production. Examples of allowed synthetic substances include: ethanol and isopropanol as disinfectants; aspirin; vaccines and biologics; chlorhexidine for surgical procedures and as a teat dip; chlorine materials as sanitizers; electrolytes; glucose; glycerine in teat dips; hydrogen peroxide; iodine; magnesium sulfate; oxytocin for emergency therapeutic use; ivermectin; phosphoric acid to clean equipment; copper sulfate; lidocaine; hydrated lime; mineral oil; procaine; non-rBST, non-medicated milk replacer for emergency use; DL-methionine for poultry until October 2008; FDA- and AAFCO-approved minerals and vitamins; and EPA List 4 inert ingredients.

Section 205.604 contains a short list of natural substances that are prohibited in organic livestock production. The only item presently on the list is strychnine.

In order to be labeled “organic”, meat, milk, and egg handling operations must also be certified. Product labeling must be legal and show a lot number or date traceable back to the animal. Organic products must not be commingled with non-organic products or come in contact with prohibited substances during handling or processing.

Though its use is not mandatory, all operations certified by NOP-accredited certification agencies can use the “USDA Organic” seal on products that contain at least 95% organic content and meet all labeling requirements.

**Conclusion:** Section 7, Part 205, of the Code of Federal Regulations, which can be downloaded at [www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop) contains detailed requirements for the production and labeling of “organic” livestock and livestock products in the United States. Organic slaughter animals must be managed organically from the last third of gestation, or from the second day after hatching for poultry. Feed must be 100% organic. All livestock must have access to the outdoors, and ruminants must have access to pasture. The use of growth hormones and antibiotics is prohibited. All organic livestock operations must be certified by a USDA-accredited certifying agent. Detailed records of all feeds, medications, and transactions must be maintained. Organic integrity must be protected by preventing organic livestock and livestock products from coming in contact with prohibited substances or being commingled with non-organic products. Livestock producers who receive organic certification are rewarded by identification of their product as “organic”, and are able to participate in this fast-growing market.

#### **Cited References:**

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<sup>i</sup> [www.organicmonitor.com/newsletter.htm](http://www.organicmonitor.com/newsletter.htm), Research Publication: #3002-44 The North American Market for Organic Meat Products, July 2006.

<sup>ii</sup> CFR Section 7, Part 205, National Organic Program Regulatory Text, updated November 3, 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> CFR Section 7, Part 205, National Organic Program Regulatory Text, updated November 3, 2003.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.