

Integrated Parasite Management for Organic Livestock

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Internal parasites are considered by some to be one of the most economically important constraints in raising livestock. Parasite control with no chemical dewormer use requires a combination of extremely good management techniques and some alternative therapies. Understanding the farm system is the most important aspect in order to control internal parasites. Organic producers must be aware of the incidence of parasites in their animals. Cattle will be easier to manage than sheep or goats and older animals will be easier to manage than younger animals. Observation, testing and monitoring animals will be crucial to determining progress and success. Alternative parasite control is an area that is receiving much interest and attention. Programs and research will continue in the pursuit of parasite control, using alternative and more management-intensive methods.

Livestock are almost certain to be exposed to worms at some point in their life. For organic dairy cattle producers, the parasite of most concern is *Ostertagia ostertagi*, the brown stomach worm. Type 1 disease occurs in calves and causes green diarrhea, bottle jaw, weight loss, unthriftiness and low vitality. Type 2 disease occurs when arrested larvae in the abomasal lining descend due to weather conditions conducive to survival. This form will affect adults primarily.

Haemonchus contortus is the most pathogenic parasite for sheep and goats. Management, including the use of FAMACHA testing is critical in order to raise organic sheep or goats. Immunity plays a role, but a much smaller role than with cattle. Selection of sheep and goats that have a high level of resilience will increase the chances of success in producing them organically.

Lungworms, especially in cattle, liver flukes and coccidia are other parasites that create problems for organic producers. Few alternatives are available that have any impact. Management and selection of animals is often the only way to control these parasites.

There is no simple alternative way of preventing or treating strongyles, nor will there be. By looking at the whole farm as an interrelated system, it becomes apparent that there are parts of the system that can be managed to decrease internal parasites and their effects. These management adjustments also increase the overall health of the animal and the farm.