



National Organic Coalition

PASTURE FACT SHEET

Current USDA National Organic Program Regulations require access to pasture for all ruminant animals [§205.237, §205.239, see below]

USDA Accredited certifiers have been enforcing this standard since the inception of the program in 2002. In recent years however, it has become clear that there has been certification of organic dairies that have no access to pasture for their animals. Yet, USDA/NOP has said that they are unable to enforce this regulation because it is not specific enough, and NOP has embarked on a years-long process to evaluate the standard and propose what they consider an enforceable standard.

In April 2006, USDA/NOP convened a pasture symposium in State College PA to hear from certifiers, farmers, consumers, and industry regarding pasture standards. At that time, most certifiers and farmers agreed that specific and quantifiable pasture standards can easily be implemented within current record-keeping regimes of all certified organic livestock farmers.

Four recent surveys, including one from Whole Foods which was presented to the NOP at the Pennsylvania Symposium, show that the overwhelming majority of organic dairy consumers expect that organic cows are on pasture. In addition, virtually all organic dairy packaging shows pictures of cows on pasture. Pasture intake has scientifically been shown to be correlated with increasing levels of healthful vitamins and essential fatty acids in milk and meat, and well managed pasture reduces input and energy costs.

There is significant, widespread agreement in all sectors of organic that a minimum standard must be put into place to ensure the fulfillment of that expectation. The language being requested is:

Ruminant livestock must graze pasture for the growing season but not less than 120 days per year. The grazed pasture must provide a significant portion of the total feed requirement but not less than 30% of the dry matter intake on an average daily basis during the growing season.

Despite these facts, and a growing consumer concern, USDA has been dragging its feet on mandating a minimum standard, or enforcing the current one. Due to this delay, several Confined Animal Feedlot Operations (CAFOs) have been certified or are currently transitioning to organic production. With the large number of animals on these operations (without any pasture), increasingly significant portions of the organic milk supply have begun to be sourced from such non-complying operations.

Below are specific changes to the Regulation being requested by organic dairy producers and the groups of the National Organic Coalition.

§ 205.237 Livestock feed. -- CURRENT REGULATION

- (a) The producer of an organic livestock operation must provide livestock with a total feed ration composed of agricultural products, including pasture and forage, that are organically produced and, if applicable, organically handled: Except, That, nonsynthetic substances and synthetic substances allowed under § 205.603 may be used as feed additives and supplements.
- (b) The producer of an organic operation must not:
- (1) Use animal drugs, including hormones, to promote growth;
 - (2) Provide feed supplements or additives in amounts above those needed for adequate nutrition and health maintenance for the species at its specific stage of life;
 - (3) Feed plastic pellets for roughage;
 - (4) Feed formulas containing urea or manure;
 - (5) Feed mammalian or poultry slaughter by-products to mammals or poultry; or
 - (6) Use feed, feed additives, and feed supplements in violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

PROPOSED CHANGE : § 205.237 Livestock feed

(c) Ruminant livestock must graze pasture for the growing season but not less than 120 days per year. The grazed pasture must provide a significant portion of the total feed requirement but not less than 30% of the dry matter intake on an average daily basis during the growing season.

CURRENT REGULATION: § 205.239 Livestock living conditions.

- (a) The producer of an organic livestock operation 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. If the bedding is typically consumed by the animal species, it must comply with the feed requirements of § 205.237;
 - (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;
- (b) The producer of an organic livestock operation 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.
- (c) The producer of an organic livestock operation 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 optimizes recycling of nutrients.

PROPOSED CHANGE:

§ 205.239 (b) The producer of an organic livestock operation may provide temporary confinement for an animal because of:

(2) The animal's stage of ~~production-life~~; for ruminants this includes only: (i) birthing; (ii) dairy animals up to 6 months of age; or (iii) beef animals during a final finishing stage not to exceed 120 days.