



LIVESTOCK

MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

Pasture and Living Conditions for Organic Ruminant Animals

Recent changes in the Organic Rule now dictate that 30% of the dry-matter intake of ruminant animals must be provided from grazing during the “grazing season,” or from forage that has been cut and is still in the pasture as “residual forage.” Grazing is when an animal breaks off forage from a living plant whose roots are still attached to the soil. Fresh green chop transported to the animals is not considered pasture. This means allowing animals out on pasture for enough hours per day to graze, and not providing large amounts of feed right before they are let out of the barn.

Thirty percent dry-matter intake from grazing for 120 days in a calendar year is specified in the rule as the minimum. Where climate allows, the season may be extended. Most certifiers will use NRCS grazing information to determine the actual length of the grazing season in each region. A farmer in northern Minnesota will have a much shorter grazing season than a farmer in Missouri. The grazing season does not need to be continuous.

The National Organic Program intends to enforce the grazing regulation rigorously. If environmental or other conditions do not allow for a farm to meet the requirements of this rule, then certified organic livestock cannot be produced at that location.



Organic ruminant animals must get 30% of their dry-matter intake from grazing.

Recordkeeping

Farmers must document the amount and nutritional value of grazing and non-grazing rations to prove their operation meets the dry-matter-intake requirement. Organic certification agencies, MOSES, and eOrganic all have information to aid in calculating how much nutrition animals are receiving from grazing. The dry-matter (or nutritional content) of various feeds can be looked up in a chart. The dry-matter calculation for the amount of feed is subtracted from the nutritional requirements of ruminants according to weight and type. Using this subtraction method, the number left is how much dry-matter came from pasture during the grazing season.

Records must include a description of the total feed ration for all ages and types of animals on the farm, or “feeding groups.” All feed produced both on and off the farm, the percentage of each type of feed, (corn, small grains, beans, forages, pasture etc.), feed supplements for each feeding group, and changes to the rations made throughout the year in response to the use of grazing as part of the ration must be recorded. Verification that all feeds are certified organic and all feed supplements are approved for organic use is necessary for all types of organic livestock production.

Feeding During the Non-Grazing Season

When there is no green forage growing in the fields (in other words, it is not the grazing season), yards, feeding pads and/or feedlots can be used for access to the outdoors and feeding. The area must be large enough to prevent crowding and competition among the animals for the feed provided. Continuous total confinement of ruminants of any species is prohibited. There is no requirement that sacrificial pasture be used during these non-grazing times of year, although it is allowed if soil and water quality are not endangered. These non-grazing season exercise and feeding areas can be concrete or dirt, but must be designed and managed to prevent environmental contamination from runoff. Frequent removal of wastes is one method to prevent contamination, and also serves to promote animal health and well-being.

Organic Bedding Requirement

All “roughage” used for bedding, (any agricultural product that the animal might consume) must be certified organic. Wood shavings or sand are not typically consumed by animals and are not agriculturally produced—these do not need organic certification. However, straw, corn fodder, cobs, hay,

soybean stalks or any other item of this type must be organic in order to feed organic animals. Organic livestock feed crops grown by exempt-from-certification operations (under \$5,000 a year in organic sales) cannot be fed to certified organic livestock nor used as bedding. Exempt producers may decide to become certified in order to sell organic livestock feeds.

Temporary Confinement

Animals at some stages of production may be exempted from the pasture rule. Calves under the age of six months are exempt from the grazing and dry-matter intake requirements. Ruminants may be confined during sorting or shipping for sales, or for up to one week before showing at a fair or demonstration (such as 4H). Cows may be confined for one week at the end of their lactation period before being dried off, for up to three weeks before freshening, and one week after freshening. Cows may be confined for short periods during the day for milking. The Organic System Plan must incorporate a milking schedule that ensures sufficient grazing time to meet the dry-matter intake mandate. Lactation is not a stage of life that allows confinement, and thus not an exemption from the grazing requirement.

Dairy calves may be confined to up to six months of age. After that they must be on pasture during the grazing season and can no longer be individually housed. During that six month period the confined calf must have freedom of movement within their confined area, with no tethering that limits their ability to lie down or move about freely. Fiber animals such as sheep or angora goats can be confined for short periods to enable the producer to perform shearing activities.

All temporary confinement activities should be documented for review by the certification agency.

Regulations for Finishing Beef

The rule allows for beef animals to be held for up to 120 days in feedlots or yards for finishing. For smaller ruminants, the finishing period cannot exceed one-fifth of the animal's total life, or 120 days, whichever is shorter. However, if the finishing period corresponds with the grazing season, these animals must still be maintained on pasture, but they are not required to meet the 30% dry-matter intake from grazing requirement. The definition of pasture mandates the land is covered with vegetation that provides some feed value. However, for this exempted finishing period the pasture does not need to provide the same amount of nutrition as when the ruminants were younger.

Pasture Management

The management of pasture must be included in the Organic System Plan. Pasture is considered a crop like any other on the farm, and the management should not lead to soil erosion or water contamination. The health and vitality of the pasture should be sufficient to provide the 30% dry-matter intake required for the entire herd. Irrigation can be used, if available, to encourage healthy regrowth of the pasture during the season, and the pasture should be managed in a way that

minimizes the spread of diseases or parasites among the animals grazing those pastures. If there is not sufficient pasture to meet this rule, then improved pasture management or a lower stocking density should be put in place. While European and Canadian organic standards have stocking rates for each class of animal, the USDA organic regulation does not. The U.S. rule provides for various climates and management strategies found throughout the country, allowing higher or lower stocking rates to still meet the minimum requirements for sufficient feed and a healthy environment. This rule does not require fencing to protect streams from erosion caused by grazing cattle, but producers still must rotate their pastures and/or upgrade their stream access areas to protect water and soil quality.

Each pasture location must be identified in the Organic System Plan with maps, similar to all crop fields. The plan and maps should detail the type of grazing (mob, rotational, etc.) used on the pastures, the amount of pasture per animal, the duration of the grazing season, as well as all permanent fences (moveable or temporary pasture fences not included), shade areas and water sources present. A plan to protect natural wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas should be described in the pasture plan. A description of the feed ration and the grazing aspects for all ages of animals should be included, as described earlier.

Resources to Learn More

The eOrganic dairy team has written an easy to follow piece outlining ten steps to comply with the USDA organic pasture regulation for ruminants. <http://www.extension.org/pages/30340/how-to-comply-with-the-pasture-rule-on-your-organic-dairy-farm-a-10-step-summary>

MIDWEST ORGANIC
& Sustainable Education Service
MOSES

The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) provides education and resources to farmers to encourage organic and sustainable farming practices. To learn more, please see:

www.mosesorganic.org