



MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

Transitioning to Organic Dairy Production

Organic dairy animals have different requirements for organic certification than slaughter animals. Farmers must follow National Organic Program rules in order for a herd (cows, sheep, goats) to produce certified organic milk.

Before you Begin

Before you begin your organic transition, find a market for your organic milk and decide on your organic certification agency. Work with the organic certification agency and time your first inspection to occur no later than four months before your milk is eligible to be certified organic and your buyer wants to pick up your organic milk.

Transition-Year Feed

For 12 months prior to first selling organic milk, all production animals on the farm, (milk cows, dry cows and young heifers) must be fed either *certified* organic feed OR feed grown on land that is part of your farming operation and is in its last year of conversion to organic—in other words, it is between 24 and 36 months that the land has been free of prohibited materials and you are the one growing it. You can't purchase in-conversion feed from another farm. (Organic inspection should occur during the season this in-conversion crop is growing.) Certified organic feed is that which has been harvested 36 months or longer after a prohibited substance had been applied to the land or crop, and the land was certified as organic during the year the feed was grown.

Documentation of the date of the last prohibited substance application is needed for all fields, including pastures. Prohibited materials include: most chemical fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, synthetic silage inoculants, seed treatments etc. Most natural materials are allowed and a few synthetics are approved—contact MOSES or your certification agency to find out what is allowed before you use it in your transition year.

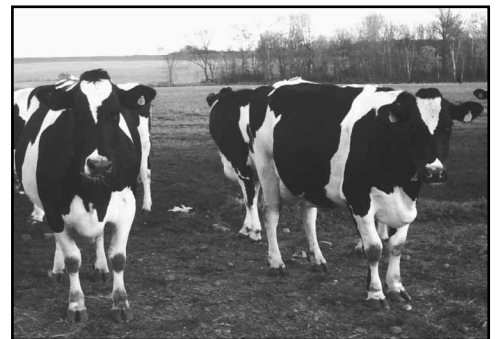
Plan to feed a high forage diet consisting of high quality feeds to promote the health of your animals. Once a

herd is converted to organic production by this method, all replacement organic production animals must be managed organically from last third of gestation (before their birth).

Prohibited Supplements

No prohibited health materials or feed supplements may be used in the 12 months before selling organic milk or once you've established an organic herd. This includes antibiotics, non-approved parasiticides, minerals or vitamins with prohibited additives such as mineral oil, flowing agents or artificial flavorings/colors.

Even though antibiotics are not allowed in organic production, an organic farmer cannot withhold medical treatment to preserve the organic status



of an animal. If antibiotics must be used as a remedy, the animal should be treated and sold or tracked and managed as non-organic. This rule also applies to calves born on the farm after your operation is certified organic. Once an animal that is part of your organic operation is given an antibiotic, that animal cannot ever be an organic dairy or slaughter animal. However, animals that were given antibiotics before you started your one-year conversion to organic milk production can be converted to organic.

Verify with your certification agency that any vitamins and minerals you use meet the organic standards and do not contain any prohibited synthetic or non-organic substances (such as artificial preservatives, colorings, flavorings, anti-caking agents or dust suppressants).

Pasture

Pasture for grazing is required, and has the same certification requirements as cropland, including buffer

zones to lessen risk of pesticide drift on organic fields. Cattle, sheep and goats must have 30% of their dry matter intake (in other words, the nutritional portion of their diet minus the moisture) provided from pasture during the grazing season. Green chop or dry hay fed to cows is not considered “pasture.” Cattle must be grazing the pasture themselves. A dry lot is not considered pasture, since there is no covering on the ground that offers feed value. Calves should be out on pasture once they have developed rumens and can digest grass, no later than six months of age. For more information, see the MOSES Fact Sheet “Pasture and Living Conditions for Organic Ruminant Animals.”



You must ensure that pastures and manure application do not cause soil erosion or pollute ground or surface water. Plastic silage or hay wraps cannot be burned.

Housing

Housing must allow for freedom of movement and ventilation to promote animal health during all stages of the animal’s life. Cows can be confined during winter months, but should have a few hours of outside exercise when weather permits. Calves can be confined up to six months of age. Treated wood on any new construction cannot be used where there is contact with livestock or with soil growing organic crops once the operation is certified organic. If the treated wood is present before the operation is fully organic, it can remain.

Breeding and Herd Management

Artificial insemination is allowed. Breeding hormones are not allowed. Bulls do not need to be managed organically unless they are to be sold as organic slaughter animals. If you raise non-organic bulls or steers for meat, grinding of feed, storage of feed and animal health products must be kept separate from the organic dairy feed and products. Equipment cleaning documentation between the handling or storage of non-organic feeds and organic feeds may be necessary.

Animals must be individually identified by ear tags, neck tags or distinguishing photos or drawing such as

Holstein registration papers. Corresponding individual animal health records must be maintained for each individual animal. Health records must include all health events including birth records. Even if a cow is only stripped clean to control mastitis, this should be noted in her individual health record in order to verify organic management. Record-keeping aids farmers in understanding what products and activities are useful and which are not, as well as tracking genetic traits to aid with culling decisions. Your documentation should be kept current, and be easy to understand.

Verify with your certification agency that all health products used are acceptable. Dehorning and castration should be performed in a way that causes the least amount of stress to the animal. Tail docking is not allowed in cattle unless there is a health problem that cannot be cured any other way, such as a wound which does not heal.

Resources:

www.mosesorganic.org

Resources include *Guidebook to Organic Certification*, online bookstore with books on organic dairy farming, Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program, Organic Info helpline and more.

Also, attend the annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference in February in La Crosse, Wis. for workshops and networking to help you learn more about operating an organic dairy farm.



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