



LIVESTOCK

MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

Transitioning to Organic Sheep or Goat Dairy Production

Any organic goat or sheep dairy product must be made from certified organic milk that has been produced following the National Organic Program regulations. This Fact Sheet provides a brief summary of the regulations for producing organic dairy products. For more detailed information see the MOSES *Guidebook to Organic Certification* or the book *Organic Dairy Farming*, which, though written with a bovine emphasis, will be relevant to goat or sheep dairy. Both books are available from MOSES.

Before you begin your organic transition, find a market for your organic milk or dairy product and decide on your organic certification agency. Work with the certification agency and time your first inspection to occur no later than 4 months before your dairy marketer expects to pick up your organic milk.

- All production animals (milking animals, youngstock, dry animals) must be fed organic feed for 12 months prior to selling organic milk. This feed may come from your own fields that are in their third year of organic transition. Any purchased feed must have a certificate of current certified organic status.
- Organic pasture is required (details follow). Land will not be eligible for certification until 36 months have passed since last application of non-approved materials.
- No prohibited health materials or feed supplements may be fed or used in the 12 months prior to selling organic milk. This means no antibiotics, non-approved parasiticides, no minerals or vitamins with prohibited additives such as mineral oil or artificial flavorings.
- Even though there are approved synthetic parasiticides on the National List of the National Organic Program, they can only be used in an emergency, and only for ewes or does when they are not lactating or in the last third of gestation. If used in an emergency for organic dairy animals, the milk must be withdrawn from organic sale for 90 days after use. These synthetic parasiticides are specifically prohibited for all organic slaughter animals. Parasites can be controlled through pasture management, allowed herbal and natural treatments, and breeding for resistance.

- Once certified as organic, individual replacement animals must be born or purchased from a certified organic operation. Groups or entire herds/flocks may be added, but must go through a one-year transition period before their milk can be sold as organic.
- Rams or bucks need not be certified organic unless they will be sold as slaughter animals. Artificial insemination is allowed. Breeding hormones are not allowed.
- Any animals sold for organic slaughter must be raised under organic management from the last third of gestation.
- You must ensure that pastures and manure applications do not cause soil erosion or pollute ground or surface water. Any plastic silage or hay wraps cannot be burned.
- Anyone producing animals for organic milk must have the operation certified by a third-party certification agency. Operations will be inspected annually, and a fee of generally between \$600 and \$1,000 per year will be charged. A cost-share is available to help with certification costs for up to \$750 for each category of production (crops and livestock are two categories) or $\frac{3}{4}$ of the cost, depending on which is lower. Check with your state department of agriculture for more information.



Goat and sheep must be out on pasture that offers feed value for a significant portion of the day when the season allows.

Pasture Requirement

Pasture is mandated for all organic ruminants. During the grazing season 30% of the animal's dry matter intake must come from pasture. To get this, grazing land must be managed to produce sufficient forage during the typical grazing season for your region, which must be at least 120 days. The grazing season need not be continuous, and can take into account yearly fluctuations in climatic conditions. Green chop or dry hay fed to animals is not considered "pasture." Sheep or goats 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. Browse in a paddock is acceptable for goats.

Pasture must be certified organic and managed as an organic crop. Youngstock must be out on pasture once they have developed rumens and can digest grass. See the MOSES Fact Sheet *Pasture and Living Conditions for Ruminants* for more information.

Maintaining Animal Health

Preventative health support, breeding and a clean, low-stress living environment are an organic producer's best health tools. Detailed recordkeeping is required, including records tracking the birth, any health events and treatments, all feeds and feed supplements, and dates pastured for all individual animals and herds. Health management procedures, such as stripping to control mastitis, should be noted in each animal's individual health record to verify organic management. Animals must be individually identified by ear tags, neck tags or distinguishing photos or drawings. Recordkeeping helps you understand what products and activities are useful and which are not, and to track genetic traits to aid with culling decisions.

Although non-GMO vaccines may be used, no antibiotics or hormones are allowed in organic production. However, an organic farmer cannot withhold medical treatment to preserve the organic status of an animal. If antibiotics must be used as a last resort remedy, the animal should be treated and sold, or tracked and managed as non-organic. This includes youngstock that are born on the farm after your operation is certified organic. Once an animal that is part of your organic operation is given an antibiotic, this animal cannot ever be an organic dairy or slaughter animal. Animals that had been given antibiotics before you started your one-year conversion to organic milk production can be converted to organic.

Housing must allow for freedom of movement and ventilation to promote animal health. This includes all stages of the animal's life. Any bedding that the animals eat or chew on must be certified organic. Treated wood cannot be used on any new construction 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. Sheep or goats can be confined during winter months, but should have a few hours of outside exercise when weather permits. Youngstock can be confined when young to prevent illness.

Verify with your certification agency that the vitamins and minerals you are feeding meet the organic standards and do not contain any prohibited synthetic or non-organic substances (such as artificial preservatives, colorings, flavorings, anticaking agents or dust suppressants). Also verify with your certification agency that all health products you plan to use are acceptable. Dehorning, castration and tail docking in sheep should be performed using methods that create the least stress to the animal.

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