



LIVESTOCK

MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

Transitioning to Sheep or Goat Meat Production

In order to sell organic goat or sheep meat, the animals must be raised following the National Organic Program regulations. This Fact Sheet provides a brief summary of the regulations for producing organic meat animals.

Animals sold for organic meat must be raised under organic management from the last third of gestation through birth, and then all of their lives. For small ruminants such as goats and sheep with a five-month gestation, this means the mother animal must be treated organically for a minimum of 50 days. Any dairy animals sent to organic slaughter also must be born from mothers treated organically for at least the last 50 days of gestation.

- Before you begin your organic transition find a market for your organic meat and decide on your organic certification agency. Begin working with the organic certification agency no later than six months before you have animals ready for slaughter.
- All animals raised for organic slaughter must be fed 100% organic feed during their entire lifetime. Any purchased feed must have a certificate of current certified organic status. Hay grown on-farm must be certified organic, so if you plan to sell lambs that were born in the spring, you will need to get your hay fields and grain certified the year before the lambs are born, or else purchase organic hay or grain, until your fields are fully certified as organic.



Organic goat and sheep must be out on pasture during the grazing season.

- Organic pasture is required (details follow). Land will not be eligible for organic certification until 36 months have passed since the last application of non-approved materials.
- No prohibited health materials or feed supplements may be fed or used in either the gestating mother during the last 50 days or during the organic meat animal's lifetime. 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 are specifically prohibited for all organic slaughter animals. If a synthetic parasiticide is used on an organic slaughter animal at any time during its life, the meat produced cannot be sold as organic. Parasites can be controlled through pasture management, allowed herbal and natural treatments, and breeding for resistance.
- Milk replacer is not approved for organic lambs or kids. They may be raised on certified organic milk from cows, goats or sheep.
- The National Organic Program is not yet clear on whether organic breeding animals may be brought in and out of organic production. Some certifiers interpret the rule to mandate that once an animal is certified for organic production, that animal should stay in production unless permanently removed.
- 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.
- Anyone producing animals for organic slaughter 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.

- 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.
- Organic animals must be slaughtered in a plant certified for organic slaughter.

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.

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.

Maintaining Animal Health

Preventive 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. All health management procedures 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.

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