



## ORGANIC LIVESTOCK REQUIREMENTS

Organic certification verifies that livestock are raised according to the USDA organic regulations throughout their lives. [www.ams.usda.gov/organicinfo](http://www.ams.usda.gov/organicinfo)

Like other organic products, organic livestock must be:

- Produced without genetic engineering, ionizing radiation, or sewage sludge.
- Managed in a manner that conserves natural resources and biodiversity.
- Raised per the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (National List).
- Overseen by a USDA National Organic Program-authorized certifying agent, meeting all USDA organic regulations.

- Fed 100 percent certified organic feed, except for trace minerals and vitamins used to meet the animal's nutritional requirements.
- Managed without antibiotics, added growth hormones, mammalian or avian byproducts, or other prohibited feed ingredients (e.g., urea, manure, or arsenic compounds).

To determine if a farm complies with the USDA organic regulations, certifying agents review the farm's written organic system plan and on-site inspection findings.

### Which substances can be used to prevent and treat diseases in organic livestock?

**Prevention.** Since organic farmers can't routinely use drugs to prevent diseases and parasites, they mostly use animal selection and management practices. Only a few drugs, such as vaccines, are allowed.

**Treatment.** Pain medication and dewormers (for dairy and breeder stock) are examples of allowed animal drugs. These therapies are only allowed if preventive strategies fail and the animal becomes ill.

Approved synthetics: <http://bit.ly/livestock-synthetics>

If approved interventions fail, the animal must still be given all appropriate treatment(s). However, once an animal is treated with a prohibited substance (e.g., antibiotics), the animal and/or its products must not be sold as organic post-treatment.

## ORGANIC LIVESTOCK STANDARDS

Farmers and ranchers must accommodate the health and natural behavior of their animals year-round. For example, organic livestock must be:

- Generally, managed organically from the last third of gestation (mammals) or second day of life (poultry).
- Allowed year-round access to the outdoors except under specific conditions (e.g., inclement weather).
- Raised on certified organic land meeting all organic crop production standards.
- Raised per animal health and welfare standards.



## ORGANIC LIVESTOCK REQUIREMENTS (continued)



### How do the organic standards support animal welfare?

Organic livestock must be raised in a way that accommodates their health and natural behavior:

- Access to the outdoors
- Space for exercise
- Shade
- Fresh air
- Clean, dry bedding
- Clean drinking water
- Shelter
- Direct sunlight

Organic management reduces stress, reducing the incidence of diseases and supporting animal welfare.

## RUMINANT PASTURE STANDARDS

Organic ruminant livestock—such as cattle, sheep, and goats—must have free access to certified organic pasture for the entire grazing season. This period is specific to the farm’s geographic climate, but must be at least 120 days. Due to weather, season, or climate, the grazing season may or may not be continuous.

Organic ruminants’ diets must contain at least 30 percent dry matter (on average) from certified organic pasture. Dry matter intake (DMI) is the amount of feed an animal consumes per day on a moisture-free basis. The rest of its diet must also be certified organic, including hay, grain, and other agricultural products.

### After an animal reaches the 120-day grazing minimum, does that mean it no longer needs to be on pasture?

No. Ruminant livestock must graze on certified organic pasture throughout the entire grazing season for the geographic region. Depending on region-specific

environmental conditions (e.g., rainfall), the grazing season will range from 120 to 365 days per year.

Per the USDA organic regulations, the grazing season is the period of time when pasture is available for grazing due to natural precipitation or irrigation.

Outside the grazing season, ruminants must have free access to the outdoors year-round except under specified conditions (e.g. inclement weather). Ruminant slaughter stock are exempt from the 30 percent DMI from pasture requirement for the last fifth of their lives (up to 120 days).

To access worksheets on calculating DMI from pasture, visit [www.ams.usda.gov/NOPProgramHandbook](http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOPProgramHandbook).

## BENEFITS: ORGANIC MANAGEMENT

Organic livestock production and pasture-based systems provide many benefits:

**Environment.** Organic farmers and ranchers use practices that minimize impacts to the off-farm environment. They implement plans to avoid manure runoff, instead using manure as fertilizer or composting it to conserve nutrients. Additionally, farmers use sustainable practices such as crop rotation and cover crops to maintain soil fertility and protect soil and water quality.

**Animal Health.** Pasture-based diets improve ruminants’ digestive health, making the rumen (first stomach) less acidic. This lower acidity increases the number of beneficial microorganisms that help ferment ruminants’ high-fiber diet. Pasture-based systems have been shown to reduce hock lesions and other lameness, mastitis, veterinary expenses, and cull rates.

For a detailed guide on organic livestock production, visit <http://bit.ly/organic-livestock-guide>.