



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

An organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system

Outdoor Access

by Cheryl Bruce - Vermont Organic Farmers, LLC

In early 2007, VOF began conducting regional spot checks to verify that producers are meeting the outdoor access requirement. The NOP Standards require that all animals over six months of age have daily access to the outdoors during the winter months:

The producer must establish and maintain livestock living conditions which accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals including: access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, and direct sunlight suitable to the species, its stage of production, the climate and its environment. The VOF Guidelines interpret stage of production in dairy animals to mean all animals over 6 months of age. While it is acceptable to provide temporary confinement during periods of severe weather, all animals over 6 months of age must have daily outdoor access (Section 205.239).

We anticipate these regional inspections will continue through early spring. If an inspector arrives at your farm, he or she will be looking to see that either the animals are outside or there is sufficient evidence to verify that animals had been out in the last 24 hours.

Producers who have not met the outdoor access requirement on their farm will receive a non-compliance letter; however, VOF will consider a producer's justification for temporarily confining animals.

The producer may be asked to document what changes will be made in order to meet the standard. If significant changes must be made, the producer will be asked to submit a timeline for completion of the project.

The inspector will note any improvements at each annual inspection visit. If there continues to be no improvements made, the producer may risk losing their organic status. If you have concerns about this issue, the NOFA-VT Organic Dairy and Livestock Technical Assistance Staff are available for on-farm consulting and can connect you with NRCS and other resources that can help you to meet the outdoor access requirement.



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