



Guidelines for Certification of Organic Meat
Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF)
Northeast Organic Farming Association
of Vermont (NOFA-VT)
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Organic Beef Production

In the context of a farm as a living organism, animals can play an important role in establishing and maintaining vital, biologically active, mineralized soils. Organic livestock production seeks to balance the quality of healthy animal life with commercial livestock production through management of the building blocks of animal health without dependence on medical and chemical intervention. The building blocks of animal health are habitat, behavior, nutrition and selection. All organic animals on certified organic farms must be managed in accordance with the following standards.

Origin of Livestock (205.236)

Breeding stock - Breeding stock meant to produce organic animals for slaughter can be brought onto the farm at any time. However if they are gestating, they must be brought onto the farm and under continuous organic management no later than the last third of gestation before giving birth to organic offspring.

Slaughter Stock - Animals meant to be slaughtered and sold as organic meat must come from breeding stock which has been managed organically from the last third of gestation and must be under continuous organic management until slaughter (If an animal was ever managed non-organically, it can not be sold as organic meat).

Accepted

- Farm-raised stock or purchased stock from certified organic producers for replacement animals.
- Breeding stock purchased from non-certified producers, provided the animal is not in the last third of gestation and is managed organically from the time of purchase.
- Conventional breeder stock can only nurse their own offspring. A non-organic breeder cannot be a nurse animal for other organic calves other than her own.
- Male livestock for the purpose of breeding may be purchased, leased or borrowed from conventional sources.

Prohibited

- Purchase of slaughter stock from non-certified producers.

Please Note: All purchases of organic animals and organic hay and forage must be accompanied with the proper documentation. Proper documentation includes copies of organic certificates, receipts indicating dates, amount purchased, cost, etc., and a livestock identification list that includes animal id names and/or numbers and indicates whether animals qualify as organic slaughter stock.

Livestock Feed (205.237)

All certified animals must receive 100% certified organic feed.

The NOP Standards state: Any field or farm parcel from which harvested crops are intended to be sold as organic, have had no prohibited substances applied to it for a period of three years immediately preceding the harvest of the crop.

Example to determine if a field qualifies:

A farmer's last fertilizer application is on May 31, 2005

On May 31, 2006 he (or she) has ended his first transitional year

On May 31, 2007 he (or she) has ended his second transitional year

On May 31, 2008 he (or she) has ended his third transitional year.

This means crops harvested after May 31, 2008 can be certified organic and fed to organic livestock.

Please refer to the *Guidelines for Certification of Field Crops* for a complete description of the organic standards for crops.

Accepted for feed

- 100% of feed grains and forage, including pastures, managed by organic production practices and if applicable, organically, handled.
- Feed additives and supplements consistent with the National List §205.603. All vitamins and minerals allowed (if FDA approved).

All purchased grain and forages must be certified organic. **You must keep all receipts as documentation of these purchases.** The receipt must state the seller's name, the transaction date and include the amount of product purchased. Purchased hay and forages must also be accompanied by a valid certificate. VOF also recommends obtaining a certificate for all organic grain purchased outside of Vermont.

All feed supplements, including minerals and salt blocks must be approved by VOF. Antibiotics, GMO derived products, animal by-products and synthetic preservatives are not permitted in any feed products. Be sure that any mineral supplements do not contain prohibited ingredients (such as mineral oil). Agricultural substances in feed supplements (molasses, soy oil, etc.) must be organic. **A list of approved products is available through the VOF office.** Please do not use a product that is not on this list without first having VOF review the product for compliance.

Prohibited

- Use of animal drugs, including hormones, to promote growth
- Plastic pellets for roughage
- Urea or manure added to feed or in feed formulas.
- Direct fed mammalian or poultry by-products such as animal fats and rendered products (does not include fishmeal).
- Providing feed supplements or additives in amounts over what is needed by the livestock for nutrition and health.

Calves should be fed whole milk and organic feed. The use of milk replacer and medicated calf grain is prohibited.

Three main sources of Certified Organic bulk grain products in Vermont are:

1. Green Mountain Feeds, Bethel, VT – Eric Dutil, 802/234-6278
2. Morrison's Feeds, Barnet, VT – Mike Thresher/Les Morrison, 802/633-4387
3. Blue Seal, Richford, VT - Robert McCallister, 802/848-7718

Contact the VOF office for a complete list of dealers who offer organic grain in the Northeast and Canada. We can also provide you with a list of certified organic forages for sale in your area.

Pasture Requirement (205.239)

Ruminants are required to have daily access to pasture during the grazing season. While there are not specific guidelines as to the number of acres of pasture per animal, a significant portion of the animal's daily feed intake must be from pasture during the grazing season. The recommended amount of feed from pasture is a minimum 30% dry matter intake during the growing season, but for no less than 120 days per year. The VOF Review Committee has determined that cows over 6 months of age and over must be on pasture.

Pastures must be managed in a way that prevent erosion or water quality problems. In addition, access to streams and

rivers must be restricted/managed in order to prevent these problems. Fenced riparian buffer zones are recommended along waterways to stabilize banks, reduce runoff and erosion and provide wildlife habitat.

Soil Erosion and Water Quality (205.203)

A farm with erosion or other conservation problems must demonstrate a program which halts and/or corrects the damage to maintain their organic certification. Producers with erosion issues on the farm must submit a written plan along with a timeline for coming into compliance. Assistance is available through the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation or the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

A producer must select tillage and cultivation and grazing practices that maintain or improve the physical, chemical and biological condition of the soil and minimize erosion.

Livestock Living Conditions (205.239)

The producer of an organic livestock operation must establish and maintain livestock living conditions that accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals including:

- Daily access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, and direct sunlight.
- Access to pasture for ruminants: All animals over 6 months must be on pasture during the grazing season.
- Appropriate clean, dry bedding. *If the bedding is typically consumed by the animal species, it must comply with the feed requirements and be certified organic.*
- Shelter designed to allow for natural maintenance, comfort behaviors and opportunity for exercise while also allowing for good ventilation and air circulation.
- Housing must provide daily outdoor access during the non-grazing season. The VOF Review Committee has determined that cows 6 months of age and older should have daily turnout, even if only an hour a day during the winter months.

The producer of an organic livestock operation may provide temporary confinement for an animal because of inclement weather, the animal's stage of production, conditions under which the health and safety of the animal could be jeopardized, or risk to soil or water quality. Please note: While animals can be temporarily confined during extreme weather conditions, the entire winter season cannot be considered inclement weather as a reason for keeping animals confined.

Manure must be managed in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil or water, by plant nutrients, heavy metals, or pathogenic organisms and optimizes the recycling of nutrients.

Health Care (205.238)

Animal health is the result of ongoing management efforts to create living soils, provide nourishing forage and feeds, and improve the quality of livestock life. Animals must be kept in a healthy, low stress environment that emphasizes prevention. Compassionate awareness of every animal may give rise to the need for health care treatment. Only health care treatments approved by VOF are allowed for use on organic livestock. **A list of approved products is available through the VOF office.** Please do not use a product that is not on this list without first having VOF review the product for compliance.

All producers must keep a written record of all health substances administered to any animal and a 12-month herd health history must be submitted with your application for certification. Health records must include the date, animal id number, health issue, treatment administered, and follow-up if applicable. Producers must use preventative health care practices and may use approved treatments.

Accepted

- Selecting species and types of livestock suitable to the conditions on their farm and resistant to prevalent diseases and parasites.

- Providing feed sufficient to meet the needs of the animals, including vitamins, minerals, protein and/or amino acids, fatty acids, energy sources, and fiber.
- Establishing appropriate housing, pasture, and sanitation to reduce diseases and parasites.
- Providing animals with the opportunity for exercise, freedom of movement, and reduction of stress.
- Performing physical alterations when needed for the animal's welfare, taking care to minimize pain and stress.
 - De-horning of livestock is allowed, but should be done at an early age (VOF recommends under 10 days old).
- Administering vaccines and other veterinary biologics (all allowed).

When preventative measures are insufficient to prevent sickness, producers may consult the National List and the **VOF Organic Livestock Accepted Health Products List** for allowed medications.

Prohibited

- Withholding treatment from animals to maintain organic status
- Administering any animal drug in the absence of illness
- Use hormones for promotion of growth of livestock
- Selling, labeling, or representing as organic any animal or animal product that has been treated with antibiotics, a synthetic substance not on the National List, or any prohibited non-synthetic substance.

Use of Antibiotics (205.238)

Selling, labeling, or representing as organic any animal or animal product that has been treated with antibiotics is prohibited. In an emergency, a producer should use antibiotics if necessary to save the life of the animal or to prevent suffering. Use of antibiotics should be based on the recommendation of a vet. Withholding treatment of antibiotics from animals to maintain their organic status is prohibited. If a producer uses antibiotics, they must do the following:

- Record the event in their health records.
- **Notify the office of the situation.**
- Tag the animal appropriately to be easily identified as non-organic breeder stock
- If the animal is sold, a receipt must document the sale to a non-organic market

It is prohibited for a producer to withhold treatment to maintain organic status of the animal. If an animal must be treated with a prohibited product, such as antibiotics, for emergency use only to save the life of the animal or prevent suffering, that animal can no longer qualify as organic slaughter stock (meat). However, the animal may be kept on the farm as breeding stock.

For the offspring of the treated animal to qualify as organic, the treatment must not occur during the last third of gestation. In addition, the offspring cannot nurse on an animal that has been treated.

If the breeder stock is to be sold off the farm, it must be sold to a non-organic market, and a receipt must be kept to verify this.

Parasite Control (205.238)

Livestock producers are encouraged to minimize parasite infestations by quarantine and fecal exams for all incoming stock, good pasture management, maintaining clean facilities and culling seriously infected animals. VOF recommends that producers have a parasite management plan for preventing infestations. In addition, biological control methods and nonsynthetic controls such as diatomaceous earth, rock powders, and herbal treatments are permitted.

Synthetic parasiticides may not be used on animals intended to be sold as organic meat. If animals must be administered emergency treatment, on the recommendation of a vet, the treated animals can only be sold or labeled as non-organic meat and that sale must be documented.

Please note: approved parasiticides (Ivermectin and Moxidectin only) may be used on **breeder stock** in health care emergencies and in the case of acute and dangerously high levels of infestation. The treatment must be used **prior** to the last third of gestation and not while nursing young stock to be slaughtered for organic meat. The routine use of synthetic parasiticides on breeder stock is prohibited.

Withholding treatment of parasiticides from animals to maintain their organic status is prohibited. If a producer uses a parasiticide they must do the following:

- Record the event in their health records.
- **Notify the office of the situation.**
- Tag the animal appropriately to be easily identified as non-organic breeder stock
- If the animal is sold, a receipt must document the sale to a non-organic market

Breeding

Accepted

Natural service

Artificial insemination

Prohibited

Use of breeding hormones

Slaughter (205.272)

All animals sold as organic meat must be slaughtered at a facility certified to slaughter/process organic animals. Please contact VOF for a list of certified slaughterhouses. Producers are responsible for maintaining records showing which animals were processed. It is recommended that a copy of the farm's organic certificate be on record at the facility. After slaughter, all parts of the carcass to be sold must be clearly identified as organic and originating from that certified farm. Animals must be treated humanely during loading, unloading, shipping, holding and slaughter.

Animal ID (205.103)

Certified organic livestock producers are required to submit an animal inventory form with their application for certification listing all animals on the farm with tag numbers, breed, birth and/or purchase dates, and whether the animal qualifies as organic slaughter stock. VOF requires that an animal id system is in place.

Accepted ID Systems

Nitrogen Freeze Branding

Necklaces

Tattoos

Ear Tags

Insecticidal ear tags are prohibited

Record Keeping (205.103)

Written records must be kept on an ongoing basis. **You will be required to supply a years worth of records when you reapply for certification each year.** Records are essential, as organic certification is about verifying your farming practices to a third party. It is believed that keeping records can help producers improve their management. VOF has record keeping forms available or you can use your own system.

Records that must be kept by livestock producers include:

- Dates and justifications for all medications administered
- A health care product inventory listing all livestock medications on the farm
- An animal inventory record that identifies all animals on the farm
- Records of all animals entering and leaving the farm

- Records must be kept for individual animals from birth/purchase to slaughter/sale.
- Purchases of organic animals and organic forages must be accompanied by both an itemized receipt and a copy of the seller's certification document. Livestock and crop transaction certificates are available through the VOF office if needed.
- Field records with dates and rates of all inputs applied for each field and harvest yields from each field

Receipts for purchased stock, feed, supplements and inputs for certified feed production on the farm as well as sales invoices for products sold off the farm as organic must be kept to ensure a complete audit trail.

Please refer to the VOF Certification Guidelines book for a more detailed explanation of the National Organic Program Standards. If you have any questions regarding the standards or the application process, please call the office.

NOFA-VT has a Dairy Technical Assistance Program offering on-farm visits to assist producers with grazing and pasture management, parasite management plans, and herd health issues. Also available are articles, fact sheets, books and a farmer-to-farmer mentoring program. In addition, NOFA-VT has a revolving loan fund to provide financing to farmers who are making the transition to organic or sustainable agriculture. Please contact the office if you are interested in either of these programs.

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