Understanding the USDA Organic Program

Based on a law passed by Congress in 1990
October 2002
Code of Federal Regulations
CFR 7 Part 205

www.ams.usda.gov/nop

- Organic is a production claim.
  - Organic is about how food is produced and handled.
- Organic is not a content claim.
  - It does not represent that a product is “free” of something.
- Organic is not a food safety claim.
  - Organic is not a judgment about the quality and safety of any product.

Any farmer or processor who sells more than $5000 annually of organic production, must be Certified to use the organic label, with a yearly inspection to continue their certification.

Exempt operations cannot sell crops that are further “processed”, this would include livestock feed.
Farmer chooses certification agency and receives application

Application received by agency

Agency reviews application and may ask for more information

Agency assigns inspector, crops must be seen during growing season

Inspector writes report and sends to agency

Agency reviews all documentation, and either approves or denies certification, with comments.

A three to five hour on-site inspection verifies all information provided on the application, including crops, crop production methods, buffer zones, projected harvest yields, storage and sales.

Animal health, housing and feed.

It can be beneficial to have an outsider review and discuss the organic management system.

Organic system plan -

A plan of management of an organic production or handling operation that has been agreed to by the producer or handler and the certifying agent and that includes written plans concerning all aspects of agricultural production or handling described in the act and the regulations. Documentation is an important aspect of certified organic farming.

Organic certification is a quality management system.
Organic Production and Handling Requirements

Components of the Organic System Plan
- Practices
- Materials used
- Monitoring
- Recordkeeping
- Management and buffer zones

Hand drawn map with inputs and activities noted by field and date

Basic Organic Crop Records
- Receipts or labels verifying seed, input and labor purchases
- Activity logs verifying tillage, planting, cultivation, and harvest
- Long term field histories, giving overview of crop rotation and yields
- Storage records verifying where and how much and to whom crop sold
- Sales records verifying sale to the organic market
### Basic Organic Livestock Records

- Receipts or birthing records verifying source of livestock.
- Individual animal health records, with all "health events".
- Harvest and storage records for crops, periodically tracking inventories to justify feed grown or purchased and fed.

Pasture rotation-differing rations during grazing season.

- Labels for all feed supplements, including salt and minerals as well as ALL animal health products.
- Sales records verifying sale to the organic market.

### Definition

Organic production - A production system that is managed in accordance with the Act and regulations to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity.

### Land Requirements

No prohibited substances applied to it for a period of 3 years immediately preceding harvest of the crop. Fields must have distinct boundaries and buffer zones.

This includes no use of nonapproved seed treatments for the transitional years.
The Big Three Nos
NOT
• Genetically engineered
• Grown with sewage sludge
• Irradiated

And
• Not Grown with synthetic materials that have not been placed on the national list of approved substances.

Many organic farmers leave a 25 to 30 foot buffer area of roads, grass, hay or trees along the borders of their fields where prohibited sprays from the neighbor may present a risk to the organic integrity of their crop.

Materials and the National List
➢ All naturals approved
➢ All synthetics prohibited
➢ If a natural is on list, then prohibited
➢ If synthetic on list, then approved
➢ List is broken into crops, livestock and ingredients in processed products.
### Inerts

**Present in Pesticide Formulations**

- **List one**: very toxic
- **List two**: somewhat toxic
- **List three**: unknown toxicity
- **List four**: generally recognized as safe (GRAS)

*Only list four inerts allowed on organic land or crops to be sold as organic.*

### Soil fertility

Manage fertility using rotations, cover crops and application of plant and animal materials.

### Organic Crop Fertilizers

- Fish Emulsion
- Kelp Meal
- Soybean Meal
- Feather Meal
- Blood Meal
- Bone Meal
- Humic Acid
- Compost
- Raw Manure

**Soil Amendments – mined**

- Quarry lime okay, hydrated lime not okay for soil amend
- Gypsum – calcium sulfate okay
- Recycled wall board – not okay

- Soil Bacteria – AgRestore type products
- Dehydrated pelletized manures/composts
**MANURE---MUST be** **composted** **UNLESS** it is
- Applied for a crop not for human consumption (such as livestock feed).
- Soil incorporated not less than 120 days prior to the harvest whose edible portion is in contact with soil particles. (Potatoes)
- Soil incorporated not less than 90 days prior to the harvest whose edible portion does not have direct contact with soil particles. (Sweet Corn)

**Compost defined as:**
Processed from plant and animal materials
- Initial Carbon:Nitrogen ratio between 25:1 to 40:1
- Temperature maintained between 131 and 170 degrees F for 15 days using a windrow that has been turned at least 5 times
- Temperature maintained between 131 and 170 degrees F for 3 days using an in-vessel or static aerated pile.

*Processed manures that reach 165 degrees or 150 degrees for one hour or can be proven to contain less than 1000 most probable number (MPN) fecal coliform and 3 MPN Salmonella per 4 gram can be used with no restriction, the same as compost.*

**Farmers must plant organic seeds, unless they document they cannot find an organic version of the variety, quality or quantity they want to plant.**

**Availabilty of organic seeds increases every year.**

**High price is not an acceptable reason to not buy organic seed.**
### Seed treatments

- Clay – allowed if the coating does not contain other nonapproved ingredients
- Captan (pink fungicide)-synthetic and not allowed
- Rhizobial bacteria for legumes—only if nonGMO

### Pest, weed and disease control hierarchy

1st: Cultural (crop rotation, sanitation, seed variety)
2nd: Natural biological, botanical or mineral inputs
3rd: Approved synthetics on the national list—provided the CONDITIONS for use are DOCUMENTED and the previous 2 were ineffective

### Slaughter animals

Livestock products that are to be sold, labeled, or represented as organic must be from livestock under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation
Breeder or dairy stock that *has not been* under continuous organic management since the last third of gestation *MAY NOT* be sold, labeled, or represented as organic slaughter stock.

Poultry or edible poultry products must be from poultry that has been under continuous organic management beginning no later than the second day of life.

**What is organic dairy production?**

*Dairy animals have been certified organic by an approved USDA agency to label their milk or dairy animals as organic.*

- Feed must be organic.
- Health care within organic requirements.
- Pasture is mandated.
- Housing must allow for freedom of movement.
- Records maintained on health and feed
One year of organic management prior to sale of organic milk or organic dairy animals. 100% certified organic feed and health care.

Feed given all ages of cattle during the conversion year, can be in the 24-36 month "transition to organic", as long as it is grown by the farmer requesting the organic dairy certification.

Transitional feed cannot be used if purchased from off the farm.

ONCE CONVERTED AFTER 1 YEAR:

1. All future organic dairy animals on the farm must be certified organic from before their own birth (last third of gestation within their mother). All feed and management 100% organic.

All feed contains only organic agricultural ingredients.

Feed supplements do not contain poultry or mammalian by-products

No artificial colors, flavors, dust suppressants, anti-caking agents.
Pasture for ruminants is **MANDATORY**

Pasture provides feed value when seasonally appropriate.

Administration of vaccines and other veterinary biologics **ALLOWED**

*Use of antibiotics is prohibited in all livestock production sold as organic.*

Artificial insemination is allowed. Breeding hormones are not allowed.

*Bulls do not need to be managed organically, unless they are to be sold as organic slaughter animals.*
• NOS: Producers cannot withhold medical treatment from a sick animal in an effort to preserve its organic status.

* Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and shall not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced.

**HERBS and HOMEOPATHIC REMEDIES ALLOWED**

205.239 Livestock Living Conditions

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

Provision of conditions which allow for exercise, freedom of movement, and reduction of stress appropriate to the species;
Access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, and direct sunlight suitable to the species, its stage of production, the climate, and the environment.

**Housing**
No treated wood where animals have access
Promote freedom of exercise, good ventilation, expression of natural behavior.

If treated wood in place before organic certification, can remain, no NEW installations, this includes corals and fenceposts (must prevent access for new installations)

(3) Appropriate clean, dry bedding. If the bedding is typically consumed by the animal species, it must be certified organic.

Sawdust not from treated wood.

No shiny or colored newsprint unless the farmer can prove no heavy metals in the ink.