



B.C. DAIRY TALK

Editor: Annette Moore

Organic Dairy Farming Frequently Asked Questions

Annette Moore, Dairy Commodity Specialist, BCMAF

What is organic food?

Organic food is food that is grown and processed without the use of synthetic chemicals. Organic crops are grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides for at least three years prior to harvest. Cover crops, compost, and other natural fertilizers are used for maintaining soil fertility and are necessary for sustaining certification; biological control and natural pesticides are used for pest control. Organic livestock production requires that animals are fed organic feed, have access to pasture or the outside, and restricts the use of antibiotics and hormones.

Do I need to be certified?

Yes, if you plan on selling organic livestock products, including milk and milk products. Certified organic means that an independent third party has verified that the organic standards have been met for the past 3 years. The Federal Labeling Act regulates the use of the word organic and requires that livestock products that make organic claims must be from certified organic sources.

What is organic feed?

Organic livestock standards require that the animals are raised on certified organic feed. Organic feed is produced without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides for at least three years prior to harvest. Organic feed can have some feed additives such as vitamins, minerals and probiotics added to it as long as they are approved by the certifying organic authority. Approved feed additives are listed in the organic livestock standards.

What kind of health care medicine can I give to my livestock?

A proper herd health program should include strategies for disease prevention, parasite control and disease treatment. Producers of organic animal products may only market healthy animals and animal products. Organic producers of livestock products must not withhold disease treatment in order to represent the livestock product as organic. All vaccinations for endemic disease are approved. Herbal, naturopathic and homeopathic treatments are approved for use on organic animals. Discuss with your veterinarian potential natural treatment programs.

What are the specific time limits for feed, antibiotics, hormones, vaccinations and living conditions for dairy cattle?

Conditions	Requirements
Feed	Requires 100% certified organic feed to be fed for 12 months prior to milk production.
Antibiotics	Restricted - 30 day withdrawal or twice the labeled withdrawal time, whichever is greater.
Hormones	Restricted.
Sanitation practices	Teat dips, milking sanitation chemicals allowed. However, equipment must be double rinsed with clear (tested) water prior to milking.
Vaccinations	All vaccinations for endemic disease are approved.
Living conditions	<p>Bred and milking herd:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires free daily access (weather permitting) to organic pasture for a minimum of 120 days per year. Grazing land must be certified organic. <p>Calves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age: 24 hrs to 3 mos: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> outdoor system - e.g. hutches 5.95 sq.m./animal (64 sq ft/animal); indoor system 3.72 sq.m./animal (40 sq ft/animal). 3 mos to 181.4 kg (400 lbs) - 7.43 sq.m./animal (80 sq ft/animal). 400 lbs to breeding age - 9.29 sq.m./animal (100 sq. ft/animal).
Animals	<p>Herd must undergo 12 month transition period. Replacements - from non-certified sources must undergo a 12 month transition period. 10% of herd can be replaced in this manner. Bulls - no requirements. Embryo transplanted animals prohibited.</p>

How much will certification cost?

A membership may range from \$25 to \$500 per representative depending upon the certifying agency. This membership will be charged on an annual basis. Other charges depend on the time taken for the certification process and the verification inspections. Hourly rates can be as much as 30/hr. Check with your Certifying Body as prices vary. Fees will range depending upon the size of the farm, complexity of the inspection and the fees charged by the Verification Officer. A commercial dairy farm under normal conditions would likely pay at least \$600 per year.

Do I have to apply every year?

Organic certification is done on an annual basis and will be the responsibility of the member to insure re-application dates are met.

What kind of records do I need to maintain?

All organic stock must be ear tagged or individually marked. Organic livestock producers must maintain a clear and verifiable audit trail for all organic products produced. The following is a list of example records that a producer must have to insure a complete audit trail:

- All medications administered (dates, dosages, and sources);
- All feed bought and fed (receipts, sources, organic certificates);
- All feed supplements used (receipts, sources, dates and quantities given to livestock);
- Purchase and sales records for livestock and livestock products (dates, weights, description, etc.);
- All materials used in the on-site production of crops for feed (receipts, source, date quantity applied);
- Other more general records would include: herd health records, milk recording, sanitation and purge records, monitoring results (SCC, SPC, etc).

Will my farm be inspected and by whom?

Yes your farm will be inspected. A Verification Officer will visit twice in the first year, and once per year thereafter. More inspections may be required and will depend upon the Certifying Body and the conditions on the farm. The officer inspects the animal production areas, including barns, fields and pastures. Officers will ask questions regarding the livestock production practices, and request to view the livestock production and input/output records.

Are there any restrictions on labeling my organic, livestock products as organic if I become certified?

There are no restrictions to labeling dairy products as organic provided the product is certified organic and the label is approved by the certification agency. Follow normal federal labeling approval procedures.