

Organic Milk, Organic Meat.

What the Access to Pasture Rule Means for Organics.

On February 12, the National Organic Program published a final rule that establishes pasture standards for organic livestock. The Access to Pasture rule specifies that organic milk and meat products come from organically-raised animals that are actively grazing on pasture.

Organic livestock practices

Organic agriculture is an integrated farming system that fosters cycling of resources, promotes ecological balance, and conserves biodiversity. The key requirement for organic animal agriculture systems is that all *organic* ruminant systems must be pasture-based. In other words, livestock must actively graze on a daily basis during the grazing season, have access to the outdoors, and not be confined during the non-grazing season.

Criteria for organic livestock

The pasture rule establishes clear and enforceable standards regarding access to pasture for organic livestock operations. It provides certainty to consumers that organic livestock productions are pasture based systems where animals are actively grazing pasture during the grazing season.

These standards require

- Access to pasture throughout the grazing season (specific to their geographical climate)
- Diet consisting of at least 30% dry matter intake from pasture grazed during grazing season, totaling at least 120 days.

Additionally, 'organic livestock' denotes...

- No hormones to promote growth
- No antibiotics or other animal drugs other than vaccinations
- No synthetic parasiticides
- 100% organic feed
- No mammalian or poultry by-products in feed

Enforcement

Organic producers must fully implement the provisions of the rule and must document it in their organic system plans (OSP). These management plans are written procedures concerning all aspects of agricultural production or handling as described in the Organic Food Production Act of 1990.

To operate and market their products as USDA organic, certified organic operations must include a functioning pasture management plan into their OSP, which are then verified annually at onsite inspections. If an operation does not demonstrate compliance, organic certifying agents and the National Organic Program can suspend or revoke organic certification.

