



## USDA Issues Final Rule on Organic Access to Pasture

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 12, 2010 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced details of the final regulation regarding access to pasture for organic livestock operations. This rule amends the National Organic Program (NOP) regulations to clarify the use of pasture in raising organic ruminants.

"Clear and enforceable standards are essential to the health and success of the market for organic agriculture," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "The final rule published today will give consumers confidence that organic milk or cheese comes from cows raised on pasture, and organic family farmers the assurance that there is one, consistent pasture standard that applies to dairy products."

The final rule provides certainty to consumers that organic livestock production is a pasture based system in which animals are actively grazing pasture during the grazing season. The majority of organic dairy and ruminant livestock producers are already grazing animals and maintaining pastures that meet the requirements of this rule. These standards contain clear requirements that will provide greater assurance that all producers are being held to the same standards.

USDA received a substantial number of comments on provisions of the rule affecting finish feeding practices of slaughter livestock, and has extended the comment period for this provision for 60 days. Finish feeding is commonly

used by organic farmers and ranchers to improve the grade of beef and involves feeding livestock grain

"It is difficult to decouple standards for milking cows from standards for finish feeding," said Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan. "Since finish feeding gets swept up into this dairy rulemaking, we are taking an extra step and inviting public comment on the finish feeding requirements. We want to be certain that our actions pertaining to finish feeding are aligned with organic principles."

This final rule is the culmination of a process that was initiated in 2005 when the National Organic Standards Board recommended that ruminants obtain a minimum 30 percent dry matter intake for at least 120 days. The proposed rule, published on Oct. 28, 2008, received over 26,000 comments from producers, retailers, handlers, certifying agents, consumers, trade associations, organic associations, animal welfare organizations, consumer groups, state and local government entities and various industry groups.

The main components of the rule include:

- Animals must graze pasture during the grazing season, which must be at least 120 days per year;
- Animals must obtain a minimum of 30 percent dry matter intake from grazing pasture during the grazing season;
- Producers must have a pasture management plan and manage pasture as a crop to meet the feed requirements for the grazing animals and to protect soil and water quality; and,
- Livestock are exempt from the 30 percent dry matter intake requirements during the finish feeding period, not to exceed 120 days. Livestock must have access to pasture during the finishing phase.

The final rule becomes effective 120 days after publication, June 17, 2010. Operations which are already certified organic will have one year to implement the provisions. Operations which obtain organic certification after the effective date will be expected to demonstrate full compliance.

Although this is a final rule, comments on the exceptions for finish feeding of ruminant slaughter stock may be submitted before April 19, 2010. This 60-day comment period pertains to the finish feeding provisions only. The specific questions to consider and instructions for submitting comments are available on the NOP website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP> .

Copies of the final rule and additional information are on display on line at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP> .

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