

## Dear Certification Specialist...

By Laurah Brown, MCS  
Certification Specialist

Dear Certification Specialist,

Last year, we certified the apple orchard on our farm and planted a family vegetable garden, but we did not certify the vegetables. This year, we plan to diversify our organic farm and raise certified broilers. We plan to use the orchard for poultry pasture because it is already fenced in. Plus, we will grow extra vegetables to feed the chickens!

Today, I learned that Maine has only a few certified organic slaughterhouses for poultry and they are booking slaughter appointments in advance! What happens if I can't get our chickens slaughtered at the certified organic facility? Will MCS give us an exemption?

Signed,

Ruffled Feathers

Dear Ruffled Feathers,

Let's sort through your questions one feather at a time.

Poultry should have daily outdoor access once they are sufficiently feathered (around 4 weeks old), but may be temporarily confined during inclement weather.

### What is your plan for housing the chicks when they arrive on the farm?

The National Organic Program (NOP) stipulates the following in regards to livestock housing:

**§205.239 Livestock Living Conditions**  
*Housing must provide for adequate ventilation, adequate supply of clean water and proper sanitation. Housing must provide access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas. Housing must also provide adequate protection from predators.*

### Certified organic feed

Feeding vegetables to the chickens from the family garden would be prohibited unless the farm plans to certify the garden and the vegetable crops. **All livestock feed, including kitchen and garden scraps must be organically produced and certified to the NOP.**

#### §205.237(a) Livestock Feed

a. *The producer of an organic livestock operation must provide livestock with a total feed ration composed of agricultural products, including pasture and forage, that are organically produced and handled by operations certified to the NOP.*

### Application of raw manure

Please keep in mind that the **90/120 day rule** for raw manure application will apply to pasturing the chickens in the fruit orchard.

The application of manure to organic crops is restricted by what is known as the 90–120-day rule, as described in **§ 205.203(c)(1)**. **You may not apply raw, uncomposted livestock manure to food crops unless it is:**

1. Incorporated into the soil a minimum of 120 days prior to harvest when the edible portion of the crop has soil contact;
- OR**
2. Incorporated into the soil a minimum of 90 days prior to harvest of all other food crops.

### Requirements of certified organic slaughter

In order for organic poultry to maintain certified organic status, the slaughterhouse must be certified to the requirements of the NOP.

Maine poultry producers have an option to traditional, commercial, organic slaughter. The State of Maine will issue farms an exemption that allows for the processing of poultry on the farm. The "1000 Bird Exemption" provides a means for small poultry growers to process whole birds on the farm for local distribution.

If you decide to slaughter certified poultry on the farm, an On-Farm Processing

(OFF) form must be completed and approved by MCS. Please contact your certification specialist for additional information, including a list of sanitation materials allowed for use by certified organic operations.

Once completed, please submit the OFF supplement to MCS for review. After review of your processing plan, MCS will schedule an onsite inspection prior to processing the certified poultry.

If you are interested in processing your own poultry, please read about the exemptions before applying directly to the state of Maine, following the links below:

[maine.gov/dacf/qar/inspection\\_programs/documents/mmpi/Fewer%20than%201000%20Bird%20Exemption.pdf](http://maine.gov/dacf/qar/inspection_programs/documents/mmpi/Fewer%20than%201000%20Bird%20Exemption.pdf)

[maine.gov/dacf/qar/inspection\\_programs/documents/mmpi/Fewer%20than%201000%20bird%20exemption%20Registration%20Fillable%20Form.pdf](http://maine.gov/dacf/qar/inspection_programs/documents/mmpi/Fewer%20than%201000%20bird%20exemption%20Registration%20Fillable%20Form.pdf)

