

Spring 2016

# The Organic Sprout

MOFGA's Newsletter  
for Organic Producers

## Proposed Changes to Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices

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### Changes Planned for Organic Rules

The National Organic Program (NOP) has proposed changes to the rules for certifying organic livestock and poultry.

The new rules are intended to meet consumer expectations and to set clear standards that lead to consistency for producers and certifiers. The proposed rule covers general healthcare practices, physical alterations, living conditions, and animal handling for transport and slaughter. The most sweeping changes are proposed for poultry producers.

The proposal is based on a 2011 National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) recommendation, though there is a long history of NOSB recommendations on these topics dating back to 1994.

Once finalized, producers would have one year to comply with the new rules, except the outdoor space requirements for poultry, which would have to be met in three years for operations new to organic certification, and in five years for certified operations.

We are providing this summary for producers to review and encourage you to provide feedback to the NOP about how these changes might affect your operation.

### Physical Alterations

Physical alterations may continue to be performed for animal welfare, but can also be performed for hygiene, identification, and safety.

In addition to minimizing pain and stress, physical alterations must be performed at a

reasonably young age and by a competent person.

### Specific practices that will be prohibited:

**Cattle:** tail docking; wattling; face branding

**Poultry:** de-beaking; de-snooding; caponization; dubbing; toe trimming of chickens; toe trimming of turkeys (unless with infrared at hatchery); beak trimming after 10 days of age

**Hogs:** needle teeth trimming limited to top 1/3 of the tooth and may only be performed if other methods to prevent injury failed; tail docking is also restricted to situations where other methods to prevent injury failed

**Sheep:** mulesing; tail docking shorter than the distal end of the caudal fold

### Healthcare Practices

- Feed ration should result in appropriate body condition.
- A comprehensive plan is required to minimize internal parasites, including prevention, management, monitoring, and emergency measures.
- All surgical procedures must be performed as to minimize pain, stress, and suffering using appropriate medications.
- Recording problems and treatments for injured and sick animals in health care records is required.
- Lameness monitoring is required (% of herd or flock suffering and the cause(s)).
- Allowed medications can be used to alleviate pain and suffering in addition to treating illness.
- Prohibits hormone use for reproduction and growth promotion.

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## Proposed Changes (cont'd)

### Euthanasia added to the rule:

- Requires written plans for prompt, humane euthanasia for sick and injured livestock.
- Prohibits suffocation, blows to the head, and neck crushing.
- The producer must examine an animal to be sure it has expired.

## Transport & Slaughter

### Animals must be fit for transport:

- Calves have dry navel cord and can walk on their own.
- No sick, injured, weak, disabled, blind, or lame animals.

### Transport:

- Season-appropriate transport is required, including ventilation and protection from cold/heat.
- Animals, trailers, and holding facilities must be identified as organic during transport.
- Bedding is required in trailers and stalls (except poultry crates).
- If animals will be on the trailer for more than 12 hours, feed and water must be provided en route (includes loading time, not just moving time).
- Animals must not be confined for transport for more than 28 hours (time loading and unloading is not included).
- Must have plans in place to prevent and address problems that might happen in transport.
- Shipping and/or receiving operations need to include transport plans in their OSP(s).

### Slaughter:

- Federal rules regarding slaughter and humane handling during slaughter must be followed and records to demonstrate that must be kept.
- Organic operators exempt from the Poultry Products Inspection Act must ensure that lame birds are not shackled, hung, or carried by their legs. All birds must be stunned prior to exsanguination, and all birds must be irreversibly insensible before scalding.

## Make your voice heard:

Your input matters. All comments will be read and considered. It is important to share your thoughts now before the rule is finalized.

### Submit comments by postal mail:

Paul Lewis, Ph.D.  
Director, Standards Division  
National Organic Program,  
USDA-AMS-NOP,  
Room 2646-So., Ag Stop 0268,  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250-0268

Submit comments online: <http://www.regulations.gov> -type NOP-15-06PR In the search bar click "comment now"

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The *Organic Sprout* is back after a 3 year hiatus. Positive feedback and requests for more in-depth features from our organic producers has prompted us to bring the *Sprout* back to the MCS Community. We expect to release the *Sprout* on a regular basis as a sister publication to the Ag Services Newsletter. Please direct any comments, questions and suggestions to [certification@mofga.org](mailto:certification@mofga.org).

## Proposed Changes to Organic Livestock & Poultry Practices (cont'd) Living Conditions

### Mammals

Though the proposed rule does not specify stocking densities for mammals, cages are prohibited and all animals must be able to lie down fully, turn around, stand up, fully stretch their limbs without touching their enclosure or other animals, and express normal behaviors.

Housing with stalls must have enough stalls for one per animal. Animals are no longer required to be able to feed all at once as long as there isn't competition for feed and they maintain good body condition.

Housing, pens, runs, equipment, and utensils must be cleaned and disinfected to prevent cross infection and build-up of disease-carrying organisms.

The new rule further defines what outdoor access means. Animals must be out from under a roof or walls to be considered outdoors. 50% of the outdoor access space must be soil, except temporarily to protect soil and water quality.

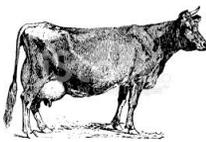
Animals may not be confined to observe estrus. They can only be confined long enough to perform natural or artificial insemination.

Finally, the changes clarify that 4H/FFA facilities do not have to be certified for animals to retain organic status as long as they remain under organic management during these events. Animals sold at non-certified facilities (such as auction barns) lose their organic status.

### Additional Considerations

#### Ruminants:

- The milk from a cow being treated with a substance that requires a withholding period may be fed to her calf.
- Individual pens are only allowed until weaning, after which group housing is required.
- Calves must be able to see, smell, and hear other calves.
- The one week confinement currently allowed at dry off may only be from pasture, not from the outdoors.
- Tie stall barns remain an acceptable form of housing per NOP discussion, but are not explicitly mentioned in the proposed rule.



#### Swine:

Swine must be group housed, except:

- sows at farrowing and during suckling
- boars
- those with documented instances of aggression
- during recovery from illness

Piglets must not be on flat decks or in piglet cages.

Exercise areas must permit rooting, indoors and out, even during temporary confinement.

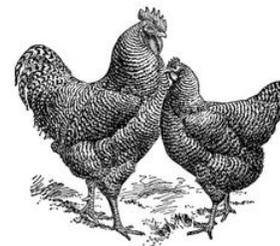


### Poultry

Stocking densities are described in pounds of bird per square foot and are the same indoors as outdoors with exceptions for a few types of housing.

**Layers = 2.25 lbs Pullets = 3 lbs Meat birds = 5 lbs**

Calculations are based on the area birds have access to at a given time. Animals are no longer required to be able to feed all at once as long as there isn't competition for feed and they maintain good body condition. Exceptions for indoor stocking rates: pasture or aviary housing (4.5 lbs.), slatted/mesh floor housing (3.75 lbs.), floor litter housing (3 lbs.).



#### Required:

- Ability to move freely, engage in natural behaviors, and spread wings.
- Access to dust bathing and scratch areas.
- Dry litter.
- Flat roosts must allow birds to grip with feet.
- Six inches of perch per bird (for birds that perch).
- All birds must be able to perch at once (except in multi level structures, in which case 55% must be able to perch at the same time).
- Flooring: mesh or slatted under drinking areas, slatted/mesh floors must have 30% minimum solid area available with litter to dust bathe without crowding (except pasture housing).
- Housing, pens, runs, equipment, and utensils must be cleaned and disinfected to prevent cross infection and build-up of disease-carrying organisms.
- Enough natural light on sunny days so that inspector can read and write with no artificial light.
- Ammonia monitoring on a monthly basis, at minimum.

#### Prohibited:

- Forced molting and withdraw of feed to induce molting.
- Ammonia levels above 25 parts per million (ppm) indoors. When levels are between 10 and 25ppm, producer must implement a plan to reduce to below 10ppm.
- Artificial light extending the day beyond 16 hours (lights must be lowered gradually).

#### Outdoor Access:

- Must provide outdoor access at an early age to train birds to go out.
- Porches are not counted as outdoor space.
- At least 50% of the outdoor access area must be covered by soil.
- Birds must have space to escape from predators/aggressive birds.
- Must have enrichment (vegetation, etc.), and shade.

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## Poultry Conditions, cont'd

### Doors Must Be:

- Sufficient and appropriately distributed around the building to ensure all birds have ready outdoor access.
- Large enough for more than one bird at a time.
- Ample enough to allow all birds to exit in an hour.

### Temporary confinement allowed, if documented each time:

- 4 weeks for broilers.
- 16 weeks for pullets.
- 2 weeks for nest box training.
- Outside temperatures below 40 or above 90 for the part of day birds were confined (with documentation).
- Avian Influenza (or similar diseases), but the threat alone is not enough to justify confinement. There must be a documented occurrence in the region or migratory path-way.
- 4H/FFA events.

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*Columbus, OH*

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# Processing News

by Joan Cheetham, Certification Specialist

## Cleaning and Sanitizing Food Contact Surfaces and Equipment in Organic Operations

Cleaning and sanitizing are important components of organic operations. This article will provide a brief overview of a typical cleaning and sanitizing process and the materials allowed under the USDA National Organic Program (NOP). The usual process for cleaning/sanitizing food contact surfaces and equipment is a liquid process and follows this sequence: clean, rinse, sanitize:

**1) Clean** – Cleaning agents such as soaps or detergents are used to remove dirt, microbes and other residues. Cleaning materials do not need to be approved for organic production. Any cleaner may be used provided that it is disclosed in your organic system plan, approved by MOFGA Certification Services (MCS), and is rinsed from food contact surfaces before organic products are handled.

**2) Rinse** – A potable water rinse must be sufficient to prevent contamination of organic products with cleaning material residues.

**3) Sanitize** – Finally, sanitizers are applied to ensure that cleaned surfaces and equipment are free of pathogenic microbes. Typically there is no rinse step following sanitizer use, therefore, there are restrictions on the types of sanitizers allowed in organic production.

The following types of sanitizers appear on the NOP National List (7CFR 205.605) and are therefore allowed in organic operations with no following rinse step:

- Chlorine materials
- Peracetic/peroxyacetic acid
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Phosphoric acid
- Potassium hydroxide
- Sodium hydroxide

Please remember that all sanitizers need to meet the following requirements: (1) The particular product must be approved by MCS prior to use, (2) It must be labeled for the intended commercial use, and, (3)

It must be used according to label instructions. Sanitizers other than those on the above list may be used, provided measures are taken to prevent contact with organic food products. Please contact MCS if you have any questions.

Chlorine Materials - Sodium hypochlorite is the active ingredient in what is commonly known as bleach or chlorine bleach. If using bleach, you must use a product that is labeled for use in commercial food production. Regular household bleach contains surfactants and/or fragrances that are not allowed in organic production. We do allow *Ultra Chlorox Germicidal Bleach (EPA Reg. No. 5813-100/102)*, which is recommended by food safety experts at the University of Maine. It does not have these additional ingredients and is labeled for a variety of commercial sanitizing uses. Inexpensive chlorine test strips are available to check the strength of your chlorine solution before use. Please contact MCS if you have any questions about the use of chlorine materials.

Peracetic or peroxyacetic acid - Peracetic acid leaves no residues and readily breaks down into water, oxygen and acetic acid. It is an environmentally friendly choice for organic producers. Several SaniDate (peracetic/peroxyacetic acid) products are OMRI-listed and therefore allowed for organic production with no following rinse step.

Please contact MCS when developing or changing your organic production cleaning and sanitizing protocols. We can also direct you to University of Maine and Maine Dept. of Agriculture experts who can provide additional guidance. *If a sanitizer is not OMRI-listed then MCS must review it before you use it. This is necessary as products sometimes contain inert ingredients that are not listed on the label, yet may present a contamination risk to organic integrity.*