



OEFFA Organic Certification Fact Sheet

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Dairy Herd Health

Caring for your dairy herd in compliance with NOP rules.

Effectively managing organic dairy herd health within the NOP rules can be challenging, but shouldn't be intimidating. To start with, many effective products that a producer may have used for years before converting the herd to organic may not be compliant with the rule. The rule also limits teat dip products that may be used and practices and products used for physical alterations. While one can work with a trusted veterinarian, they simply may not have experience with organics. Each healthcare treatment must be pre-approved by the certification agency prior to use. Of course, a farmer may not withhold medical treatment from a sick animal to preserve its organic status. But once an animal is treated with a prohibited medication, it permanently loses its organic status. Thus, prevention is the best strategy for organic producers.

NOP Citation & Definitions

➤ See NOP §205.238 and §205.603.

Categories of livestock products:

➤ *Feed*

All agricultural products that are given to livestock on a regular basis, plus supplements and additives. All agricultural products in feed must be certified organic and additives and supplements must be nonsynthetics or allowed synthetics.

Examples: A grain ration plus a mineral premix for nutritional balance or forage plus an inoculant.

➤ *Healthcare*

Items used occasionally or intermittently to treat or prevent health concerns in your herd. Since they are not fed on a regular basis, agricultural products in healthcare items do not need to be certified organic, but all ingredients must be nonsynthetic or allowed synthetics.

Examples: Hoof and udder care products, microbials, aloe & garlic, and homeopathic remedies.



➤ *Drugs*

Items used to treat a diagnosed condition and may not be used preventatively. They are often registered with the FDA and may be further restricted by the national list. They may contain nonsynthetic or allowed synthetic active ingredients and excipients per §205.603(f).

Examples: Some injectable vitamins and minerals, electrolyte treatments, flunixin, lidocaine, and oxytocin.

➤ *Production Aids*

Items that do not fit the other categories. Use the products according to the manufacturer's directions.

Examples: Water or manure treatments and pest control products.

Prevention

In organic dairy production, prevention of problems is particularly important since treatment options are limited. Three primary prevention strategies are vaccines, adequate nutrition for your herd, and close observation of herd health. Recordkeeping is also a necessary part of every organic production system.

Vaccines may also be used as a preventive measures against known problems in your region. All vaccines approved by the USDA are approved for use in organic production.

Vitamins and minerals necessary to meet the nutritional requirements of organic livestock must be provided as part of the feed ration. Often the best way for livestock to get these necessary nutrients is through well mineralized managed pasture and hay. Since some supplementation is nearly always necessary, you should also know that nonsynthetic and most synthetic vitamins and minerals are allowed in feed. The best way for producers to determine which synthetic vitamins and minerals are allowed is to refer to Appendix B in the *OMRI Generic Materials List*.

Using materials that prevent problems later goes beyond vitamins and minerals. For instance, products like diatomaceous earth may inhibit parasite problems and feeding or periodically using probiotics may aid digestion and overall health.

It is also important to observe the health of individual animals and of the whole herd on a regular basis. Record any problem and any potential causes in a notebook; this may help you diagnose problems before they progress and also aid in developing prevention strategies for future use. When a substantial problem is present that needs treatment, record the problem, the treatment used, and the affected animal(s).

Treatment

If you have identified a problem with an animal or the herd, prompt action is the best to prevent

complications. If the problem is a familiar one, be sure that the treatment you use is approved for organic use. For other problems, you'll want to discuss the issue with your vet. If your vet suggests products for treatment, check your approved product list or contact the OEFFA office—the recommended product may have already been reviewed. If not, we would be happy to look into it to find out if it's approved for organic use. Also, many milk companies have vets on staff who are well versed in organically-approved treatments.

Injectable vitamins may be used as drug treatments and injectable electrolytes may be used to treat milk fever. However, you should be sure we have reviewed the specific product before you use it.

Ivermectin is allowed in emergency treatment for dairy and breeder stock when *preventative management* has not prevented parasite infestation. It is prohibited in slaughter stock. Ivermectin cannot be used in breeder stock during the last third of gestation or during the lactation period for the offspring to be organic. Milk from cows treated with Ivermectin cannot be in the organic milk stream for 90 days after use. If you have used Ivermectin, please document this in your healthcare records to comply with the above restrictions. Alternative products to deal with parasites are available that do not carry these restrictions.

Teat Dips

Producers must be careful when selecting all inputs to be used in their organic system, but teat dips can be especially tricky. The NOP allows Iodine, Hydrogen Peroxide, and Chlorhexidine (only if the others have stopped working) for use as active ingredients in teat dips. Commercial teat dip products contain many other ingredients, often referred to as "inerts" or "excipients," that serve many purposes including improving the distribution or efficacy of the active ingredient, enhancing delivery of the product, or conditioning the skin. Some of these substances are natural, such as lanolin, and others are allowed synthetics, such as glycerin; however, many would be completely unrecognizable to most people.

Ultimately, certifiers are responsible for confirming that teat dips meet the standards; this includes contacting the manufacturer and reviewing a complete list of all active ingredients and excipients. OEFFA has extensively researched and discussed teat dip ingredients and during the process of policy development. This policy takes into account both the practical needs of dairy producers and the need to protect the integrity of the organic label.

Teat dips may be used on a daily basis as a treatment for chapped or damaged teats, to protect animals from post-milking infection, and for the promotion of food safety. Some teat dips are restricted



to use after milking only, due to their ingredients. Common soap and water may be used for an udder wash if the udder is thoroughly rinsed and wiped before milking. Allowed soaps include some hand and dish soaps without antibacterial ingredients.

Physical Alterations

Physical alterations of livestock must be accomplished in a manner that minimizes pain and stress. All planned materials and procedures must be listed in the OSP. Synthetic materials used for dehorning, relieving pain, etc. must be on the national list to be approved for use. To date, we have not reviewed any approvable dehorning paste. For poultry, minimal beak trimming is allowed for protection of the flock at no later than 10 days of age. De-beaking (severe beak trimming), toe clipping/clubbing, and other surgical alterations are prohibited.

Use of Prohibited Substances

Treatment may not be withheld from a sick animal in order to preserve its organic status. Any animal, including young stock, treated with prohibited drugs will permanently lose its organic status and may never return to organic production. Individual animals may not be converted or re-converted.

Animals treated with prohibited drugs must be clearly identified as separate from organic animals. All meat, milk or milk products from treated animals must be segregated from organic products and there must be clear documentation of the separation. Any dairy animal treated with prohibited drugs may not return to the organic milking herd, even if the animal is managed organically and remains on the organic farm. The milk from a treated animal may not be used to feed organic young stock except its own, provided the animal was managed organically during the last third of gestation.



Resources

Treating Cows Naturally: Thoughts and Strategies, 397 pages; by Hubert Karreman, DVM; describes treatments for common dairy cow diseases using biologics, botanical medicines, homeopathic remedies, acupuncture and conventional medicine. This book also discusses organic dairy farming, conservation principles, grazing, and comparison of DHIA data between organic and conventional herds. Available from ACRES U.S.A., 1 (800) 355-5313, \$40.00.

Alternative Treatments for Ruminant Animals, 246 pages; by Paul Dettloff, D.V.M.; This is a hands-on reference by a large animal veterinarian with nearly four decades of experience. Dr. Dettloff discusses how to move from conventional practice to a holistic and sustainable approach to animal health; provides farmers with methods of care that are practical, acceptable for organic operations and have been proven to work. Available from ACRES U.S.A., 1 (800) 355-5313, \$28.00.

Organic Dairy Farming: A Resource for Farmers, 192 pages; editor Jody Padgham of MOSES, with 20 authors; This book explains the basics of production and certification for organic dairy. Chapters on herd health, dairy nutrition, milk quality, calves, pasture, soils, organic crop management. Available from the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), 715-778-5775, \$14.95.