



## New Jersey Department of Agriculture Organic Certification Program

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### Egg Production Guidance for Producers

The requirements for egg production are found in various sections of the USDA's regulations for organic production and handling (7 CFR Part 205, the National Organic Program; Final Rule). Requirements for the management of organic livestock are found in the Rule at §§205.236 – 205.240. Organic feed for livestock must comply with the requirements for organic crop production, §§205.200 - 205.206, along with the handling requirements of §§205.270 – 205.272. Resulting eggs must also adhere to these requirements for handling, and if labeling eggs as organic or 100% organic, the labeling requirements of §205.303 must be followed.

This guidance document will help to explain some of the requirements for certifying organic egg production. Organic producers are encouraged to read the Rule, and to work with the NJDA Organic Certification Program for further clarification.

#### § 205.236 Origin of livestock.

(a) *Livestock products that are to be sold, labeled, or represented as organic must be from livestock under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation or hatching: Except, That, (1) Poultry. Poultry or edible poultry products must be from poultry that has been under continuous organic management beginning no later than the second day of life;*

As noted, organic poultry can be transitioned from day old conventional chicks. Organic producers may purchase day old chicks from conventional sources. Organic chicks, poults, or mature birds from a certified organic operation are encouraged for organic systems. Save all invoices and/or receipts for all livestock purchased, and ensure there is way to verify that what you have received are day old birds if that is the situation. If buying from another organic producer that is not certified by NJDA for organic production, verification documents, such as a copy of the operation's organic certificate or official transaction certificate issued by an accredited certification agent should be acquired and kept on file for inspector review.

#### § 205.237 Livestock feed

All of the agricultural components of livestock feed must be organically produced. Any remaining components, such as additives or supplements, must meet the feed requirements in the Rule. It is the grower's responsibility to demonstrate livestock feed meets the Rule requirements. If purchasing organic feed from off-farm be sure to secure documentation verifying the feed was produced organically. Keep all receipts for purchased feed. If buying feed components from another certified producer, verification documents, such as a copy of the operation's organic certificate or official transaction certificate issued by an accredited certification agent should be acquired and kept on file for inspector review.

Natural feed additives and feed supplements can be provided to poultry through feed or free choice offerings. The Rule defines feed additives and supplements as follows:

**Feed additive. A substance added to feed in micro quantities to fulfill a specific nutritional need; i.e., essential nutrients in the form of amino acids, vitamins, and minerals.**

**Feed Supplement. A combination of feed nutrients added to livestock feed to improve the nutrient balance or performance of the total ration and intended to be:**

- (1) **Diluted with other feeds when fed to livestock;**
- (2) **Offered free choice with other parts of the ration if separately available; or**
- (3) **Further diluted and mixed to produce a complete feed.**

Synthetic feed additives and supplements can only be used if they are listed in the National List §205.60(c) and (d). All feed supplements and additives must be fed in amounts that are not above what is required for adequate nutrition and health, and must not violate the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

Feed for organic poultry must **NOT** contain drugs or hormones that promote growth, plastic pellets, urea, manure, or poultry and mammalian slaughter by products.

#### **§ 205.238 Livestock health care practice standard**

While most growers do not have many concerns with chickens and health care, it is still important to know what is required in advance to save time, money, and save poultry from unnecessary suffering. This section of the Rule is similar to other sections (such as §205.206; *Crop pest, weed, and disease management practice standard*) in that a “*hierarchy*” is established. A grower **must** use the practices in part (a) (preventive maintenance) before resorting to part (b) (medications on the national list).

Vaccines and other veterinary biologics are allowed. Antibiotics, growth hormones, and non-listed medications are prohibited. Part (c)(7) of the health care practice standard **prohibits a producer from withholding medical treatment to preserve an animal’s organic status**. That means if a bird becomes sick despite preventive measures, and the only medicine that could help is a non-listed synthetic or antibiotic (which would knock the bird out of organic certification) the medication **must** be administered, and the bird must be removed from certification.

#### **§ 205.239 Livestock living conditions**

Living conditions for organic livestock must accommodate the health and natural behaviors of animals. This includes access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, and direct sunlight. It also requires animals have appropriate, clean dry bedding. If roughages are used as bedding they must be organically produced and handled.

The rule allows for *temporary* confinement of animals under certain conditions; however, it is important to realize that these allowances cannot be used to confine an organic animal for extended periods of time.

Because organic layers and broilers must have access to the outdoors, some New Jersey producers pasture their birds using mobile coops called “chicken tractors”. Chicken tractors with appropriate space are an acceptable way to house birds while giving them access to the outdoors and protecting them from predators. Any tractors or other housing used for organic livestock must be of sufficient size for the number of birds and must not allow organic animals to come into contact with wood that has been “*treated with prohibited substances*” (§205.206(f)). Treated lumber may be used for livestock housing and fencing only if it can be demonstrated that organic animals would not have access to the treated lumber.

The last part of the livestock living conditions section is the requirement that producers manage manure in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, heavy metals, or pathogenic organisms, and optimizes the recycling of nutrients. The rule has additional requirements for the handling of animal manure in §205.203(c). NJDA has a guidance document on composting that covers these requirements. Please contact the Department if you are interested in obtaining additional information on manure handling on organic operations.

If materials are used to wash or handle organic eggs, all of the material’s ingredients must be provided for in the National List, §205.605. This precludes many types of commercial soaps and detergents. If using materials to wash or handle eggs, ensure you have thoroughly vetted the allowance of these materials in order to maintain organic integrity.

A very important aspect of egg production for producers and consumers is food safety. The NJDA Organic Certification Program distributes sections from the USDA Egg-Grading Manual when requested. While not directly related to organic certification, it contains information on the safe handling of eggs (such as the importance of ensuring wash water is at least ten degrees higher than the internal temperature of the eggs). All egg producers are encouraged to call the Supervisor and request a copy of the selected text from this manual.