



National Organic Coalition

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USDA Access to Pasture Rule for Organic Livestock Gets a Thumbs Up

For Immediate Release

Alexandria, VA: After two and a half year wait for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to release a draft rule to clarify the access to pasture requirement for organic livestock, the document is receiving high praise from the National Organic Coalition (NOC).

“This draft rule provides the clear, defined, specific language needed for enforcement of one of the central tenets of organically produced livestock—that organic livestock spend a considerable part of their lives in their natural pasture habitat and receive a significant portion of their food needs from fresh, green, growing pasture,” said Kathie Arnold, NY State organic dairy farmer and President of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), a NOC member.

As stated in the proposed rule, more than two thirds of all consumers and 75% of women in a 2006 Consumers Union survey of 1,485 U.S. adults said that the national organic standards should require that animals graze outdoors.

“This and other polls give a clear indication of consumer sentiment towards organic milk — they want and expect organic dairy cows to be raised on pasture before organic milk ends up on the grocery store shelf,” said Joseph Mendelson, Legal Director for the Center for Food Safety, a NOC member. “The newly released draft rule will provide clarity for farmers, certifiers, and USDA regarding the absolute need for pasture for organic animals. Combined with proper enforcement, it will allow consumers to be assured that organic livestock will spend the majority of their lives on pasture.”

Consumer and farmer support for a strong pasture standard is well founded. Pasture intake has been shown to be scientifically correlated with increased levels of healthful vitamins and essential fatty acids in milk and meat, and well managed pasture reduces input and energy costs, and contributes positively to carbon sequestration goals.

Access to pasture for organic ruminant animals (i.e. cows, sheep and goats) has been a requirement of the USDA organic regulation from day one. In general, the accredited certifiers that enforce the USDA organic standards have been requiring organic livestock producers to meet this pasture standard since the inception of the program in 2002. However, it has become clear that a few organic dairies have been permitted to sell milk as “organic” even though their cows have not had adequate access to pasture. USDA’s National Organic Program has stated that the regulation has been too vague for them to enforce consistently and fairly so farmers, processors and consumers have asked the USDA to clarify the rule requiring quantifiable data.

Speaking on behalf of the NOC, Michael Sligh, Director of the Just Foods Program at the Rural Advancement Foundation International in North Carolina, said “NOC members voice their approval of the draft wording, the willingness of USDA to hold listening sessions and encourage USDA to move ahead to a final rule and enforcement with all due haste. After a very long wait, we are thankful for USDA’s work in putting together a sound, commendable pasture rule clarification that can form the basis of a final rule.”

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The National Organic Coalition (NOC) focuses on protecting the stringency and integrity of the national organic standards and is a national alliance of organizations working to provide a "Washington voice" for farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, consumers and progressive industry members involved in organic agriculture.

NOC seeks to work cooperatively with, and add value to, existing organic and sustainable agriculture organizations, networks and coalitions to ensure a united voice for organic integrity.

Members include:

- [Beyond Pesticides](#)
- [Center for Food Safety](#)
- [Equal Exchange](#)
- [Food & Water Watch](#)
- [Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association](#)
- [Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services](#)
- [National Cooperative Grocers Association](#)
- [Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance](#)
- [Northeast Organic Farming Association -Interstate Council](#)
- [Rural Advancement Foundation International -USA](#)
- [Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

All the organizations participating in the Coalition have organic agriculture reform as an organizational priority.

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