

Organic Dairy Pasture Policy

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA) supports the Pasture Recommendation of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Livestock Committee, dated June 7, 2001, which stated that "grazed feed must provide a significant portion of the total feed requirements" for organic ruminant animals. The National Organic Program (NOP) has failed to adopt this recommendation and has also failed to ensure that all certifiers require sufficient pasture systems as a basis for certification. NODPA concludes that a quantitative minimum pasture policy with measurable parameters needs to be adopted by certifiers, processors, and the NOP. Consistent with the NOSB recommendations and consumer expectations, NODPA recommends the following pasture standard for all organic milk producers:

Organic dairy animals, from 6 months of age and up, must consume no less than 30% of their daily dry matter intake from pasture for a minimum of 120 calendar days per year, with a maximum stocking rate for lactating ruminants of 3000 animal pounds per acre of pasture up to a maximum of 3 cows per acre.

- Pasture is land growing suitable grasses and other forages from which the ruminant animals self-harvest the plant material, which is still connected to its roots, for food by grazing. Feeding green chop or any mechanically harvested or stored feed on a pasture setting does not qualify as pasture.
- Pasture must be managed to prevent environmental degradation.
- The only stage of production exemption allowed is from birth to six months of age. Lactation is not an allowable stage of production exemption from providing pasture for milking animals for the entire grazing season.
- Unless under irrigation, most farms will have to maintain a lower stocking rate than the maximum noted in order to meet the minimum 30% dry matter intake from pasture.
- The maximum stocking rate of 3000 animal pounds per acre means that the ratio of animals to the total number of acres in the lactating ruminant pasture system for the full grazing season cannot exceed 3000 animal pounds per 1 acre of pasture. Thus, herds with larger breed cows will have to maintain a stocking rate lower than 3 cows per acre and smaller breeds can have no more than 3 cows per acre.
- This standard sets a base minimum. Organic dairy producers are encouraged to provide much more pasture than this minimum, as many producers are so doing. Ideal intake of pasture for organic dairy animals is 50% or more of their dry matter needs, from weaning age on up through their full life cycle, and for the fullest extent of the grazing season.
- Climates, areas, or farms that cannot provide a minimum of 120 days of grazing should not be considered for organic dairy production.
- Herd size must be adjusted appropriately to the amount of pasture that can be provided by the farm's land base. Land that normally produces stored feed may need to be converted to pasture to ensure adequate pasture intake.