



Access to Pasture Rule Published

On February 17, the National Organic Program published the long-awaited access to pasture rule to clarify feed and living conditions for livestock production that would qualify their milk and meat for USDA organic certification. The rule establishes enforceable pasture practice standards to satisfy consumer expectations that ruminant livestock animals graze on pasture during grazing season and are not confined. Specifically, the standards require that livestock have:

- Year round access to the outdoors
- Access to pasture throughout the grazing season (specific to their geographical climate)
- Diet consisting of at least 30% dry matter intake from pasture grazed during the grazing season totaling at least 120 days.

NOP is currently welcoming comments from the public concerning a provision of the rule that exempts ruminant slaughter stock from the 30 percent DMI from grazing requirement during the finishing period. All interested parties can submit comments at www.regulations.gov until April 19, 2010.

To provide training and information on how organic livestock producers can meet these requirements, NOP conducted the first of four scheduled training sessions at the MOSES conference in La Crosse, WI on February 25. Participants at the first session responded positively to the level of information they received. Those interested in viewing accompanying rollout materials from the training, including DMI information and calculation worksheets, can access them on the NOP website under "Pasture Rulemaking Information."

The next training will be March 24 in Albany, NY from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Clarion Hotel & Conference Center. Organic producers, certifying agents, and all other interested parties are invited to attend the training, which is free of charge. However, pre-registration is required. To pre-register, contact Judith Ragonesi, NOP Training Manager, at judith.ragonesi2@ams.usda.gov or by telephone at (202) 205-5712.

Talking with Vermont Farmers at NOFA

At the heart of NOP participation in this year's Northeast Organic Farming Association conference in Burlington, VT was the desire to meet with producers and handlers as they discussed the issue most pressing to organic farmers in the state: the disparity between consumer demand for locally produced organic agriculture and the prevalence of agricultural imports and commercial production. NOP emphasized its priority to implement more steadfast measures to maintain the integrity of the USDA organic label.

About 1,200 members comprise NOFA-VT, which is an accredited certifying agent of the NOP. Currently, NOFA-VT certifies 525 farms and processors to the NOP regulations. Participants of the conference responded favorably to the publication of the Access to Pasture rule and also requested further efforts to produce a master list of certified organic operations maintained by NOP.

BioFach 2010

At this year's BioFach 2010 conference in Nuremberg, Germany, NOP officials met with organic certifiers and governmental bodies from across the world, allowing NOP to successfully accomplish two goals: to train foreign certifiers accredited to the NOP and assess NOP's role among the international organic community.

Prior to the expo, 50 representatives of foreign certification companies and certifying governmental bodies attended a one-day training that covered regulatory clarifications and updates to NOP policies. Following the day's training, NOP Deputy Administrator Miles McEvoy addressed conference attendants about NOP's general mission and immediate priorities as well as updates to the U.S.-Canadian equivalency arrangement.

Meetings with certifiers-

A variety of topics were discussed, including:

- High auditing costs incurred by foreign certifiers.
- Issues associated with the Korean organic standards.
- Private personal care standards and the NOP's role in possibly reviewing and approving these private standards.
- Improve Organic System Plans to allow for shorter reviews during inspection.
- Implementation of enforcement procedures for adverse action processes.
- New staff from the NOP Accreditation and International Activities Division assigned to each certifier.
- NOP's progress with reaching an equivalency agreement with the EU.
- Certification of products like vinegar, with wine as an ingredient.

Meetings with government bodies-

- Discussion with India focused on the newly implemented database established by APEDA to monitor certificates and intrastate commerce of organic products.
- Discussion with Chile included clarification of how it can obtain a recognition agreement with the U.S. and its use of NOP training material to assist in educating inspectors and future certifiers.

Other items-

- Discussions with IFOAM/Global Organic Market Access (GOMA) included the development of GOMA's international requirements for Organic Certification Bodies and EquiTool, which would allow countries to establish one set of organic standards and certification requirements for the world.
- *India Organic Traceability.* A trace back database was developed as part of India's anti-fraud initiative. Each certified operation is assigned a UPC code that is applied to the certificate. The UPC code correlates to the farm's fields and/or lot number. The database allows the certifier and APEDA to maintain control over all operations certified in India and if necessary to conduct a fast trace back of any product.
- *EU's Taskforce to Prevent Fraud.* A taskforce was created to look at the growing number of fraud cases associated with organic ingredients, suppliers and products within the European Union. The task force first developed a code of conduct for all certifying bodies, covering 23 countries, to assure a rigid and standardized implementation of EU regulations. A website, where a warning system is currently being developed, was also created by the task force to alert certifying bodies, organic producers and handlers of fraudulent operators. The taskforce is also

involved in developing a standardized residual detection level for pesticides and heavy metals with required action levels for certifying bodies to implement.

- *Unveiling of the new EU seal.* A new EU seal will be issued along with impending revisions to the EU standards. The EU is still developing regulations for origin of raw materials and a positive list for organic processing and natural flavors.

2008 Organic Production Survey Available

In February the National Agricultural Statistics Service released a 2008 Organic Production Survey, which follows up on the 2007 Census of Agriculture. It is USDA's first wide-scale survey of organic producers.

Some highlights:

- Nearly 20 percent of the nation's certified organic farms are in California. Wisconsin, Washington, New York, and Oregon round out the rest of the top five organic farm states.
- Organic farms averaged annual sales of \$217,675; the average for U.S. farms overall was \$134,807. The average production expenses on organic farms were \$171,978 compared to \$109,359 in expenses for all farms. On average, organic farms were \$20,000 more profitable than conventional farms (\$25,448 more expenses, \$45,697 more profit).
- California produced over \$1.1 billion of organic agricultural products representing over 36% of US organic production. Washington, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin, New York, Vermont, Iowa and Texas round out the top ten states in organic sales.
- Livestock products comprised the majority of organic sales at almost 29 percent. Vegetables followed at 22 percent.
- Organic production is poised to grow over the next five years. More than 78 percent of certified producers indicated plans to maintain or increase organic production levels.

Users can access the survey and related information at

http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Surveys/Organic_Production_Survey/index.asp.

NOP Appeals

In February, the NOP Appeals office received 467 adverse action letters, including:

195 Notices of Noncompliance
80 Notices of Proposed Suspension
12 Notices of Suspension
2 Notices of Proposed Revocation
7 Notices of Revocation
28 Denials of Certification
133 Notices of Resolution
10 Surrenders of Certification

Website Redesign

NOP has initiated the second phase of its website redesign project following the release of phase one improvements last month, including tailored pathways that allow users to find information based on subject or need. The second phase will entail developing and implementing new web applications, such as an interactive calendar, an RSS-feed in the NOP Newsroom, a photo gallery of certified operations,

cross-searchable databases, and more. This phase will also address past and future document control issues in an effort to improve the consistency and clarity of NOP's web presence.

Compliance and Enforcement Monthly Update

NOP Compliance & Enforcement Branch Monthly Activity Report Reporting Period: February 2010	
Reporting Categories	Number
Beginning Complaint Inventory	105
New Complaints Received	11
Complaints Closed/Investigation Completed	20
Ending Complaint Inventory	96
Complaints over 270 days	18
Complaints over 180 days	37

NOP Staff Update

Catherine Cash, newly hired Agricultural Marketing Specialist of the Accreditation and International Activities Division, joined the NOP team on February 1. Prior to her hiring she was an Organic Marketing Specialist at the Virginia Department of Agriculture where she helped administer their organic program and served as organic inspector since 2002.