

**National Organic Standards Board  
Livestock Committee  
Proposed Recommendation  
Animal Handling, Transport, and Slaughter**

**September 21, 2011**

**Introduction**

Humane treatment of animals is a basic principle of organic production. The Livestock Committee of the NOSB feels that appropriate and effective expanded regulations, based on social, ethical, and scientific evidence, are necessary to ensure that animal welfare considerations are upheld. The Livestock Committee recommends the addition of **§ 205.241 Animal handling, transport and slaughter: general conditions of animal welfare in handling and slaughter** to move towards a comprehensive animal welfare program in certified organic livestock operations.

**Background**

The Livestock Committee has presented handling, transport, and slaughter documents at the October 2010 and April 2011 meetings. The Committee has taken public comments into consideration while crafting this recommendation. The recommended regulatory language reflects current industry standards in practice due to separate animal welfare certification programs, which are verified by third party audits. The only additional proposed regulatory language included in this recommendation is intended to guard against slaughter plant abuse of newborn calves, an issue that has recently been in the public spotlight. Transporters and slaughter plants which accept organic livestock are already meeting the listed organic requirements.

**Relevant Areas in the Rule**

USDA organic regulations do not currently specifically cover animal handling, transport, and slaughter. Therefore, the Livestock Committee is recommending the addition of a new section titled **§ 205.241: Animal handling, transport, and slaughter**.

**Discussion**

The intent of this document is to assure consumers that certified organic livestock are treated with respect and according to need. This document clearly states expectations for producers, haulers, and slaughter plant personnel. The accompanying guidance document will provide additional clarity.

To avoid mistreatment on the farm, during transport to, or at the slaughter plant, specific prohibited practices are described within the willful acts of abuse. Livestock slips, and falls are also defined.

*Fitness for transport.* To avoid the need to cull unfit animals at slaughter, it is essential that only fit animals be loaded for transport to slaughter. Unfit cull animals are one of the biggest problems encountered at slaughter plants. Livestock that are likely to be condemned or

become downers should not be shipped. Although this shouldn't be considered a comprehensive list, animals are unfit for transport if they are any of the following: disabled, fatigued, sick, injured, lame, weak, have unhealed wounds, are within the final 10% of their gestation, are less than 48 hours old, or completely blind. Additionally, animals that are aggressive, wild, or have had little contact with humans will require good handlers, chutes, and corrals to reduce the stress of transport and confinement. The NOSB intends to create clear and concise guidance documents to assist farmers, certifiers, and others decision-makers regarding fitness for transport.

*Young calves.* Language protecting young calves will be new to the animal industry. In many areas of the country, there is no market for raising dairy bull calves for beef. These calves have little value and are therefore sent to slaughter at the earliest-possible age. Bull calves should be fed and managed as heifer calves on farm and must be strong enough for transport before being shipped.

*Transport conditions.* To ensure continued health and comfort during transport to slaughter, all shipping containers must have seasonally-appropriate ventilation, bedding (as needed), and non-slip flooring. Roughages used as bedding must be certified organic. Bedding is needed when temperatures are below freezing and animals may be in danger of being frozen to the floor or side of the trailer. If transport time exceeds 12 hours, arrangements must be made to provide food, water and rest. Additionally, emergency plans for animal care and alternative transport must be in place to cover unforeseen circumstances, such as accidents or truck breakdown.

*Animal handling.* Slaughter plant staff must be available after hours if needed to receive livestock. Animals are to be treated in a calm, quiet, and humane manner, which reduces stress and incidences of bruising and injury. Additionally, lighting must be enough to read a newspaper, in order to adequately identify and/or manage ill or injured livestock.

*Slaughter.* The recommended language below is intended to ensure that animals are handled properly and with respect throughout the slaughter process. Electric prods and euthanasia equipment must be stored in a clean, dry location. Prods are to be used solely by trained staff for human safety or medical purposes only, typically to save down animals. If an animal does not attempt to rise after being shocked once, it is to be moved immediately and carefully to a safe resting place or euthanized; it is not to be shocked a second time. If the animal makes one or two unsuccessful attempts to rise after being shocked, a second or third shock may be applied to the animal after a rest period. Plants generally allow at least twenty minutes to two hours rest. For each attempt, human assistance must be provided to help the animal to its feet. Additionally, sand or lime should be applied to the flooring as necessary to provide increased traction. If the animal is not on its feet after a third shock, it is to be moved immediately and humanely to a safe resting place or euthanized.

*Ritual slaughter.* Ritual slaughter is done according to religious requirements. The animal is slaughtered, without being stunned, with a razor sharp knife. When the cut is done correctly, the animal appears not to feel it. From an animal welfare standpoint, the major concern during ritual slaughter is the method of restraint. Slaughter plants will use devices that hold the animal

in a comfortable, upright position. For both humane and safety reasons; plants that conduct ritual slaughter will use modern upright restraining equipment.

*Slaughter plant audits.* Audits of slaughter plants provide confirmation that animals are being treated appropriately throughout the process. Animal welfare audits are currently being done in most slaughter facilities as part of various animal welfare certifications' requirements. To comply with these new organic regulations, all slaughter facilities will need to be audited yearly. Organic certifying agents can review documentation from these third-party animal welfare audits and can do any additional auditing as necessary. In-between annual third-party audits, it is necessary for plants to do self-audits on a weekly basis. Self-audits ensure that animal welfare standards are being upheld, identify problems that may arise within the facility or with individual staff members, and identify specific farms that may be shipping problematic animals to the slaughter plant. These problems may be due to animals' genetics or handling; slaughter facilities are encouraged to contact the producers of problematic animals so that these problems can be addressed in the future.

### **Recommendation**

The language shown in the following pages is recommended for rulemaking. The livestock committee respectfully requests that the National Organic Program places only what is necessary into rule. The livestock committee wants to assure consumers that the organic industry practices a high level of animal welfare. The livestock committee does not wish to increase the paperwork burden, certification costs, or discourage small slaughter plants from organic certification.

### **§ 205.2 Terms defined.**

*Willful acts of abuse.* Includes but not limited to dragging non-ambulatory, conscious animals; intentionally applying prods to sensitive animal parts, e.g., anus, ears, eyes, or reproductive parts; malicious driving of livestock on top of one another with or without direct contact with motorized equipment; loading of non-ambulatory animals for transport is excluded; beating or hitting live animals; live animals frozen to trailer floors or sides; lifting an animal by the wool or throwing the animal; and slamming gates on animals.

*Livestock slip.* A knee or hock touching the floor.

*Livestock fall.* The body touching the floor.

### **§ 205.241 Animal handling, transport and slaughter: general conditions of animal welfare in handling and slaughter.**

(a) Handling and Transport to slaughter: Certified organic livestock will be clearly identified as organic and transported in pens within the livestock trailer clearly labeled for organic use and be contained in those pens for the duration of the trip.

- (1) It is the responsibility of the organic producer to ensure that calves have a dry navel cord and are able to stand and walk without human assistance if they are being transported to a slaughter or auction facility.
- (2) The livestock trailer/shipping container and slaughter plant must provide season-appropriate ventilation to protect against cold and heat stresses.
- (3) Bedding must be provided on trailer floors and in holding pens as needed to keep livestock clean, dry, and comfortable during transportation and prior to slaughter. Poultry crates are exempt from the bedding requirement. When roughages are used for bedding they must be organically produced and handled by a certified organic operation.
- (4) Arrangements for water and organic feed must be made if transport time exceeds twelve hours.
- (5) Slaughter plant management shall coordinate with transporters to ensure that waiting time once the livestock trailer/shipping container arrives at the slaughter facility is no more than one hour. If this is not possible animals will be covered, sheltered, or provided comfort as needed for the species.
- (6) Emergency plans that adequately address animal welfare must be in place to cover any encountered problems during transport.
- (7) Slaughter plants and livestock trailers/shipping containers must have non-slip flooring.
- (8) Gates in the unloading area must swing freely, latch securely, and be free of sharp or otherwise injurious parts. Gates are never to be slammed on animals.
- (9) Adequate lighting must be in place to allow animals to be easily observed.
- (10) Livestock slips and falls must be scored in all parts of the facility including holding areas, chutes, stun box and the stunning area. No more than 1% of livestock that walk off the trailer may fall during the unloading process. No more than 1% of cattle, sheep, or hogs may slip during unloading.
- (11) Willful acts of abuse, as defined in § 205.2, are prohibited.
- (12) Humane treatment procedures for handling immobile and fatigued animals upon arrival at the slaughter plant are in place. Handlers may use sleds and place livestock in the bucket, but may not push them up against a wall, gate, or any other object.
- (13) Electric prods are available if needed for human safety or for medical use, i.e., in an effort to save down animals. Prod use must stop after three shocks interspersed with rest periods or if the animal does not attempt to rise. Prods may never be

applied to sensitive parts of the animal: eyes, nose, ears, rectum, or reproductive organs. Prods may not be used on animals less than twelve months of age.

- (14) Euthanasia must only be performed by trained personnel.
  - (15) Euthanasia equipment must be properly stored at slaughter plants and maintenance records must be available.
- (b) Slaughter Plants must meet all FSIS requirements including Humane Slaughter Act.
- (1) No more than 3% of cattle vocalize as they move through the restrainer, stunning box and stunning area. No more than 5% of hogs squeal in the restrainer due to human provocation. No more than 5% of livestock vocalize when a head holder is used during stunning or slaughter.
  - (2) Conscious, sensible mammals must never be restrained by suspending them by their limbs.
  - (3) No more than 1% of animals slip at the stun box or in the stunning area. No more than 1% of animals' fall entering the stun box or in the stun box area.
  - (4) One hundred percent of animals are insensible prior to being hung on the bleed rail.
  - (5) 95% of cattle and sheep are effectively stunned with one shot via captive bolt or gunshot. 99% of electrodes are placed correctly when livestock are stunned with electricity.
  - (6) No more than 1% of hogs vocalize due to hot wandling. Electrodes must not be energized before they are in firm contact with the animal.
  - (7) When carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) or other controlled atmosphere stunning systems, including gondolas or other conveyances for holding a group of animals, are used, animals must be able to lie down or stand without being on top of one another. When head to tail conveyor systems are used, this score may be omitted.

### **Committee Vote**

Move to accept the Livestock Committee recommendation on animal handling, transit, and slaughter proposal with discussed changes.

Motion by: Wendy Fulwider      Second: Joe Dickson

Yes: 5    No: 1    Absent: 0    Abstain: 0    Recuse: 0