

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

March 1, 2011

Introduction

Humane and respectful 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 Humane handling, transport and slaughter: general conditions of animal welfare in handling and slaughter** to move towards a comprehensive animal welfare program in certified organic operations.

Background

The Livestock Committee presented a discussion document on handling, transport, and slaughter was presented at the October 2010 meeting. The Committee took the 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 their 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: Humane handling, transport, and slaughter**.

Discussion

Fitness for transport. To avoid the need to cull unfit animals at slaughter, it is essential that only fit animals be loaded for transport. Unfit cull animals are one of the biggest problems encountered at slaughter plants. Although this shouldn't be considered a comprehensive list, animals are unfit for transport if they are any of the following: blind, disabled, fatigued, sick, injured, lame, weak, have unhealed wounds, are within the final 10% of their gestation, or are less than 48 hours old. 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, all shipping containers must have seasonally-appropriate ventilation, bedding (as needed), and non-slip flooring. All consumable bedding must be certified organic. 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.

Certification of transporters. At the October 2010 meeting, the NOSB passed a recommendation to clarify the limitations of § 205.101(b), which states that handling operations must be certified unless they are enclosed in a container prior to being received by the operation and that they remain in the same container and are not otherwise processed while in control of the handling operation. Since these conditions are not met for the transportation of livestock, it is the NOSB's intention that these operations would need to be certified in order to transport livestock.

Animal handling. Slaughter plant staff must be available after hours as 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 adequate in order to identify and/or manage ill or injured livestock.

Slaughter. The recommended language below is intended to ensure that animals are handled humanely 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 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 humanely 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. 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.

Slaughter plant audits. Audits of slaughter plants provide confirmation that animals are being treated humanely 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 humane treatment 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

§ 205.241 Humane handling, transport and slaughter: general conditions of animal welfare in handling and slaughter.

(a) Handling and Transport

- (1) Calves must have a dry navel cord and be able to stand and walk without human assistance if they are being transported to a slaughter or auction facility.
- (2) Transporters and slaughter plants must provide season-appropriate ventilation to protect against cold and heat stresses.
- (3) Bedding as appropriate must be provided to livestock during transportation and prior to slaughter. Consumable bedding in shipping containers and at plants must be certified organic.
- (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 on the shipping container is no more than one hour.
- (6) Emergency plans that adequately address animal welfare must be in place to cover any encountered problems during transport.
- (7) Slaughter plants and 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 must be in place. Handlers may use sleds and place livestock in the bucket, may not push them up against a wall, gate, or any other object.
- (13) Electric prods are available for medical use only, 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.
- (14) Euthanasia must only be performed by trained personnel.
- (15) Euthanasia equipment must be properly stored and maintenance records must be available.

(b) Slaughter

- (1) As part of their organic certification, slaughter plants must be audited annually to meet the following criteria for animal welfare:
 - (a) 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.
 - (b) Conscious, sensible mammals must never be restrained by suspending them by their limbs.
 - (c) 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.
 - (d) One hundred percent of animals are insensible on the bleed rail.
 - (e) 95% of cattle and sheep are effectively stunned via captive bolt or gunshot. 99% of electrodes are placed correctly when livestock are stunned with electricity.
 - (f) No more than 1% of hogs vocalize due to hot wanding. Electrodes must not be energized before they are in firm contact with the animal.
 - (g) When carbon dioxide (CO₂) 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

Motion: Accept the Livestock Committee recommendation on animal handling, transit, and slaughter proposal with discussed changes.

Motion by: TE Second: CB

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