

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

October 14, 2011

Introduction

Humane and respectful treatment of animals is a basic principle of organic production. The Livestock Committee of the NOSB submits this recommendation to the National Organic program and requests they issue formal guidance to assist producers, harvest facility personnel, and certifiers in developing systems that provide care and respect for the animals during this aspect of the organic food production system.

Background

Harvesting animals for meat is conducted in a countless number of types of systems as designed by individual companies or operators. These facilities must adhere to numerous food safety, worker safety, and animal welfare state or federal regulations. Many also extend religious ritual standards to the process, for clientele that demand further requirements for the process. This guidance will allow the organic food production system suppliers to verify for their customers that the harvest process is conducted in a manner consistent with the Organic Food Production Act.

Relevant Areas in the Rule

USDA organic regulations do not currently explicitly 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**. The protection of organic integrity of the products from commingling and contamination in the harvesting process are currently in place for operations that are certified to meet all processing facility regulations and be labeled as organic under **§205.272 :Commingling and contact with prohibited substance prevention practice standard**.

Committee Recommendation for Guidance

On Farm Handling and Facilities

Handling of livestock is necessary for proper health administration, care of newborns, aiding those with special needs, weaning, and preparation for transport. Handling of animals for transport is a stressful time for livestock. Often it is the only time they have ever been handled in such a deliberate fashion. Livestock are very aware of their surroundings and sense when operations are secure and peaceful in nature.

- a. Operations should have appropriate scale physical restraint mechanisms in place so that animals feel secure in the space confined.
- b. Even when a facility is temporarily modified to corral, sort, and load livestock, the equipment should always be adequate to keep animals from triggering their fight or flight response mechanisms.
- c. Structures, fencing, gates, and catching mechanisms must be sound and adequately designed to perform the required tasks and keep the animals calm.
- d. Facilities should be constructed and maintained to prevent injury due to sharp edges, obstruction to movement, and weak latching mechanisms.
- e. Holding facilities should be designed to allow ease of entry, ability to sort larger animals from smaller ones, and adjacent lots for weak or injured ones.
- f. Lighting, non-slip footing, and sufficient personnel are also necessary to keep animals calm and safe at this time.
- g. Young stock should not be transported until navels are dry or at least 48 hours of age.
- h. Reduced crowding for weak or lame animals, improved lighting for those with poor vision may be necessary.
- i. Excessive use of force, electric prods, lifting or restraining techniques that could further harm the animal are not permitted.
- j. Animals should be euthanized by trained personnel in a manner that minimizes suffering.

Transportation of Animals

- a. Loading of animals should be performed in a quiet, deliberate, and respectful manner.
- b. Ramp inclines should be gradual to discourage balking, likewise stepping up and down should be appropriate for the size of stock being loaded.
- c. Footing should be secure to reduce or eliminate slipping.
- d. Shipping containers should provide adequate footing, be structurally sound, and provide seasonally appropriate environmental conditions.

- e. Animals should have enough room to move within the container and be able to regain a standing position in the event of falling.
- f. Bedding may be necessary for extended duration, which if considered roughage, must be certified organic.
- g. Trips in duration longer than 12 hours may require animals have access to feed and/or water as environmental conditions dictate for animal health considerations.
- h. Poultry crates should be packed at a rate that allows sufficient space for all to lie down and maintain appropriate temperature regulation. Crates should be stacked in a manner to allow sufficient ventilation for respiration and temperature regulation. Protection from the elements may also be necessary.
- i. Poultry should not be frightened into an area which causes piling while being handled for crating or loading. Broilers should not be held by their neck or wings alone.

Slaughter Facilities

- a. Receiving pens at the plant must be sized appropriately for the class of animal being handled and designed to reduce balking.
- b. Stepping up or down should not be difficult for the animal. Ramps should also be gentle enough to encourage movement.
- c. Gaps between the shipping container and flooring of the facility must be minimal to prevent injury and provide safe and secure footing.
- d. Lighting, gates, pens, and latches should be adequate for the animals being handled and provide staff the ability to move and sort the animals in an orderly manner.
- e. Slaughter facilities are required to meet numerous local, state, and/or federal food safety regulations. Organic inspectors should have access to and the ability to review all relevant Federal or State inspection reports. These reports will show if the facility is already under the purview of an animal welfare inspection system.
- f. Inspectors and reviewers can be aided in assessing welfare in plants that are not animal welfare certified by using the species specific criteria outlined in the guidance documents also being developed by the NOSB Livestock committee. These “core” criteria will not attempt to replicate a complete

welfare audit, but will ensure that the most crucial aspects of animal welfare in handling for slaughter are defined in a way that can be objectively observed and assessed.

- g. Slaughter facilities exempt from State or Federal inspection are least likely to be animal welfare certified. Slaughter in these plants usually involves a small number of animals slaughtered at a time, and the process is slower and less mechanized than in larger plants. These conditions make it feasible for organic inspectors to observe slaughter handling and assess whether these core welfare criteria are met.
- h. Animals that arrive in a compromised physical condition must be handled in a respectful manner without the use of excessive human intervention.
- i. The use of electric prods is prohibited, except where animal and human safety is in jeopardy and is a means of last resort.
- j. Euthanasia must only be performed by trained personnel.
- k. Plants offer humane ritual slaughter, which is an indicator of respect for animal welfare.
- l. Slaughter plants may be certified by one or more animal welfare programs. Inspectors may make note of these as they may show intent of the operator to perform their duties in a respectful manner. These do not supersede the organic regulations like state or federal regulations do.

Committee Vote

Motion: Wendy Fulwider Second: Mac Stone
Yes: 4 No: 0 Absent: 3 Abstain: 0 Recuse: 0