

**National Organic Standards Board  
Livestock Committee  
Proposed Recommendation  
Animal Welfare**

**March 1, 2011**

## **Introduction**

Animal welfare is a basic principle of organic production. The Livestock Committee of the NOSB considers that a focus on animal welfare warrants appropriate and effective regulation. It is important to consider the social and ethical implications as well as scientific research with regard to animal welfare. This proposal involves the following sections:

Language changes to existing sections:

- **§ 205.2: Terms defined**
- **§ 205.238: Livestock health care practice standard**
- **§ 205.239: Livestock living conditions**

This proposal is intended to refine—not replace—the November 2009 NOSB Animal Welfare Recommendation. The combination of the 2009 and this recommendation aim to more clearly identify the parameters that define animal welfare on certified organic operations. As requested by the National Organic Program, it is our intention to create a comprehensive animal welfare program that benefits both livestock and farmers. Except for the specific sections whose proposed changes or addition is detailed in this recommendation, the November 2009 recommendation is still current.

## **Background**

At the May 2009 NOSB meeting, the Livestock Committee presented a Discussion Document on Animal Health and Living Conditions. This document proposed that numerical scoring be used to assess body condition, lameness, coat/feather conditions and cleanliness. Please note that, as described in the discussion section, these assessment measures will be outlined in species-specific Guidance Documents that will be presented at the fall 2011 NOSB meeting.

At the November 2009 NOSB meeting, the NOSB approved an Animal Welfare recommendation that proposed changes to **§205.238 Livestock health care practice standard** and **§205.239 Livestock living conditions** (including the separation into mammalian and avian sections) to give more detail to requirements to ensure animal welfare. This 2009 recommendation also noted the need for the establishment of indoor and outdoor space provision minimums.

At the fall 2010 NOSB meeting, the Livestock Committee presented Discussion Documents on Stocking Density and Handling, Transport and Slaughter, receiving public comment on both documents. This recommendation aims to refine the 2009 recommendation and consolidate it with the Livestock Committee's current recommendations on stocking density and humane handling, transport and slaughter. In completing the current proposal, the Livestock

Committee considered public comment and existing animal welfare standards, reviewed studies presented on animal welfare, and considered existing legislation from other countries.

## Relevant Areas in the Rule

The areas of the Rule currently addressing animal welfare include **§205.237 Livestock feed, §205.238 Livestock health care practice standard, §205.239 Livestock living conditions, and §205.240 Pasture practice standard**. This recommendation includes and builds upon changes recommended by the NOSB in November of 2009.

## Discussion

*Terms defined.* The Livestock Committee has proposed a number of additions to **§ 205.2: Terms defined**. Most of these are found in **§ 205.238 (a) (5) Livestock Health Care Practice Standard** and include various physical alterations, outdoor access, soil, and willful acts of abuse. Since they cause unnecessary pain and distress, often resulting in chronic pain and frustration for the animal, most physical alterations are not allowed. The outdoor access definition seeks to provide clarification for farmers and certifiers. It is our intention that livestock have contact with the soil and exposure to the sky overhead. Therefore, structures with floors and solid roofs overhead, such as enclosures typically described as “porches”, would not be included in outdoor access calculations. To avoid mistreatment on the farm, during transport, or at the slaughter plant, specific prohibited practices are described within the willful acts of abuse definition.

*Indoor stocking density.* The stocking density table lists livestock by species and weight. All livestock must be provided with bedding to maintain comfort and cleanliness whether they are housed with or without a roof. The indoor bedded space allowance provided in this recommendation is to be considered a minimum for housed animals. All animals must be provided with a clean, dry place to lie down. The less space provided per animal, the more labor-intensive it may be to keep them clean and in good health. Bedding keeps animals warm, clean, and dry and also protects animals from developing lesions due to abrasion on rough surfaces. Animals must be managed in a manner that lameness does not become a common or routine occurrence. If routine hoof trimming due to lameness is required, diet or management adjustments will be necessary.

*Outdoor stocking density.* Outdoor access is important for all livestock to enhance muscle tone and relieve boredom. Outdoor runs for cattle are to be considered a minimum during the non-grazing season when weather allows animals to leave the indoor bedded area. Cattle pastured during the non-grazing season may not require an indoor bedded area. Since piglets and chicks must be protected from freezing weather, outdoor runs are not necessary. Calves, lambs, kids, and other young animals require protection from frostbite.

*Market considerations.* Increasingly, consumers are demanding that livestock be treated humanely and with respect. This market trend has led to several different product labels with animal welfare certification; this standard details specific quantitative requirements for animal

stocking rates, handling, transit, and slaughter. This recommendation intends to match the numbers currently used by the various animal welfare certification labels. Ultimately, the Livestock Committee would like the organic seal to be the gold standard, indicating the most nutritious food produced in the safest and most humane manner.

*Outcome-based standards.* At the fall 2011 NOSB meeting, the Livestock Committee intends to present basic outcome-based scorecards and guidance documents for each species to address hygiene, locomotion, body condition, lesions and injury. The Committee will work with the organic community to develop a system that is reasonable, accurate, and enforceable. These guidance documents are intended to both provide producers with information on best management practices for humane animal care and to provide inspectors with assessment tools and the means to consistently apply them.

*Bison.* Bison are not domesticated animals and therefore indoor bedded space would be an added stressor. Bison should not be confined indoors except for medical treatment.

*Poultry.* Poultry houses and outdoor areas must be managed in a manner that allows birds to perform natural behaviors which minimize stress and aggressive acts. A minimum of two square feet of outdoor space is required to protect the soil and to minimize parasite loads via paddock rotation. It is the intent of the livestock committee that outdoor areas provide birds with access to the soil. Porches or other areas with floors and solid roofs would count toward indoor space. Poultry mortality lessens when perches are provided because they encourage natural behaviors, strengthen bones via exercise, allow submissive birds to escape and reduce aggression. Perches allow for maximum use of vertical space within the house. Mobile poultry units require the same amount of indoor space per bird but allow the house to be moved so birds always have access to fresh vegetation.

## **Recommendation**

The language shown in the following pages is recommended for rulemaking.

### **§ 205.2 Terms defined.**

*Caponization.* Castration of chickens, turkeys, pheasants, etc.

*De-snooding.* The removal of the turkey snood.

*Toe clipping.* The removal of the two inside toes.

*Dubbing.* The removal of combs and wattles.

*Beak tipping.* The removal of the curved tip of the beak.

*Cattle wattles.* Created for ownership identification, wattles are made by surgically separating both layers of skin from the connective tissue for 2 to 4 inches on the dewlap, neck or shoulder.

*Access to the outdoors.* See Outdoor access.

*Outdoor access.* Animals have contact with soil and the sky overhead and without a solid roof or walls. Bedding and fencing that does not block sunlight may be used as necessary.

*Soil.* The outermost layer of the earth comprised of minerals, water, air, and organic matter, an abundance of animal life, fungi, and bacteria in which plants grow roots.

*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.

#### **§ 205.238 Livestock health care practice standard.**

- (a) The producer must establish, maintain and describe in the organic system plan practices or procedures designed to improve health care of the livestock operation, including:
  - (6) Physical alterations, absolutely necessary to improve the health, welfare or hygiene of animals; identify animals; or provide increased safety to farm personnel. Physical alterations must be performed at the youngest possible age by competent persons in a manner that minimizes pain and stress and shall be recorded in individual (or flock) animal health records with dates, reason needed, and methods used. The following practices are prohibited:
    - (i) Beak removal, castration, dubbing and detoeing of birds.
    - (ii) Tail docking of pigs and cattle, except when necessary for treatment of injury.
    - (iii) Wattling cattle .
    - (iv) Face branding cattle.
    - (v) Tail docking of sheep shorter than the caudal fold.
    - (vi) Mulesing of sheep.

#### **§ 205.239 Livestock living conditions. (Mammal section)**

- (a) The producer of an organic livestock operation must establish and maintain year-round livestock living conditions which accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals, including:
  - (1) Year-round access for all animals to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, clean water for drinking, and direct sunlight, suitable to the species, its

stage of life, the climate, and the environment: Except, that, animals may be temporarily denied access to the outdoors in accordance with §§ 205.239(b) and (c). If animals are temporarily denied access to the outdoors, the indoor space provided shall meet the minimum indoor space requirements of the chart at the end of this document. Space is calculated by floor space on the inside of the animal's living space. Yards, feeding pads, and feedlots may be used to provide ruminants with access to the outdoors during the non-grazing season and supplemental feeding during the grazing season, but shall be large enough to allow all ruminant livestock occupying these spaces to feed simultaneously without crowding and without competition for food. Continuous total confinement of any animal indoors, in yards, on feeding pads, and feedlots is prohibited. If yards, feeding pads, and feedlots are used, the outdoor space provided shall meet the minimum outdoor space requirements of the chart at the end of this section. All areas contributing to outdoor access must allow contact with the soil during the grazing season.

- (2) For all ruminants, management on pasture and daily grazing throughout the grazing season(s) to meet the requirements of § 205.237, except as provided for in paragraphs (b), (c), and (d) of this section.
- (3) Appropriate clean, dry bedding, sufficient to keep animals reasonably clean, comfortable and free from lesions. When roughages are used as bedding, they shall have been organically produced in accordance with this part by an operation certified under this part, except as provided in § 205.236(a)(2)(i), and, if applicable, organically handled by certified organic operations.
- (6) Calves may be housed in individual pens under the following conditions:
  - (i) Until weaning, providing that they have enough room to turn around, lie down, stretch out when lying down, get up, rest and groom themselves; individual calf pens shall be designed and located so that each calf can see, smell and hear other calves present on the farm.
  - (ii) Calves shall be group-housed after weaning during the non-grazing season, and on pasture after six months of age during the grazing season.
  - (iii) Calves over six months of age shall have access to the outdoors at all times, except as allowed under § 205.239(c).

#### **§ 205.239 Livestock living conditions. (Avian section)**

- (d) The operator of an organic poultry operation shall establish and maintain poultry living conditions that accommodate health and natural behavior:
  - (1) Access to:
    - (iv) the outdoors, at the rate of 2 square feet per bird. Enclosed spaces that have solid roofs overhead, such as those typically described as “porches”, do not

meet the definition of outdoor access and cannot be included in the calculation of outdoor access. Pullets will be provided outdoor access at 12 weeks. Broilers will be provided outside access from 4 weeks of age providing they are fully feathered and weather permits. Once layers are accustomed to going outdoors, a brief confinement period to allow for nest box training is permitted. Direct access to outdoor areas will be provided when temperatures are above 50°F.

(e) Suitable Flooring

- (1) Mesh or slatted flooring under drinking areas to provide drainage;
  - (2) Houses with slatted floors must have 30% minimum of solid floor area available with sufficient litter available for dust baths;
  - (3) Litter must be provided and maintained in a dry manner.
- (f) Birds must have sufficient exit areas, appropriately distributed around the building, to ensure that all birds have ready access to the outdoors. Exit areas must allow the passage of more than one bird at a time.
- (g) Complete clean out of a poultry house is required if there have been adverse health issues with the previous flock; otherwise litter should be refurbished between flocks to maintain a sanitary environment.
- (h) Space Allowance. Poultry housing must be sufficiently spacious to allow all birds to move freely, stretch their wings and engage in natural behaviors. Perching areas and nest boxes may not be used in the calculation of floor space. The following are required:
- (1) Birds in mobile poultry units are subject to the same minimum space requirement as housed birds.
  - (2) Minimum total door opening length is 5 feet per 1,000 laying hens. Minimum door opening height is fourteen inches.

**Mammalian Stocking Rate Charts**

<b>Livestock</b>	<b>Indoor Bedded Space</b>	<b>Outdoor Runs and Pens</b>
<b>Bison weight (pounds)</b>	Square feet / animal	Square feet /animal
Up to 220	NA	70.0
220-440	NA	120.0
440-770	NA	190.0
Over 770	NA	400 .0
<b>Beef cattle weight (pounds)</b>		
Up to 220	15.0	10.0
220-440	25.0	20.0
440-770	40.0	30.0
770-1100	50.0	40.0
over 1100	10.0 per 220 pounds	8.0 per 220 pounds
<b>Dairy cattle weight (pounds)</b>		
Up to 220	15.0	10.0
220-440	25.0	20.0
440-770	40.0	30.0
770-1100	50.0	40.0
over 1100	10.0 per 220 pounds	8.0 per 220 pounds

**Mammalian Stocking Rate Charts (continued)**

<b>Livestock</b>	<b>Indoor Bedded Space</b>	<b>Outdoor Runs and Pens</b>
<b>Sheep and goats (pounds)</b>	Square feet / animal	Square feet /animal
Adults up to 225	20.0	30.0
Adults over 225	25.0	40.0
Nursing lamb or kid	4.0	20.0
Weaned kid or lamb	10.0	30.0
<b>Swine</b>		
Sow and piglets	48.0	40.0
Sows	30.0	30.0
Boars	64.0	85.0
<b>Growing pigs (pounds)</b>		
Up to 24	1.0	0.5
24—47	2.0	1.0
47—109	3.0	1.5
109—157	4.0	2.0
157—225	5.0	2.5
225—255	6.0	3.0
<b>Rabbits</b>		
Adult rabbits	3.0	20.0
Pregnant does	5.0	20.0
Doe and litter	8.0	20.0
Young rabbits 5-12 weeks	1.0	N/A

**Avian Stocking Rate Charts**

<b>Livestock</b>	<b>Indoor Bedded Space</b>	<b>Outdoor Runs and Pens</b>
<b>Chickens</b>	Square feet / animal	Square feet /animal
Laying hens and breeders	<i>With perch space for 20% of birds: 1.5</i>  <i>With 6 inches perch space per bird: 1.2</i>	2.0
Pullets	<i>With 3 inches perch space per bird: 1.0</i>	1.0
Broilers	1.0	1.0
<b>Other poultry</b>		
Turkeys and Geese—breeding, laying, or meat birds (pounds)	1.0 per 7.5 lbs.	1.0 per 7.5 lbs.
Ducks-meat	1.0	3.0
Ducks-laying hen	2.5	6.0
Ducks—breeder	1.5	6.0
<b>Mobile poultry units</b>	<b>Square feet per bird in mobile unit</b>	<b>Maximum number of birds per acre</b>
Laying hens and breeders	1.5	800
Broilers	1.0	1,000
Turkeys	1.0 per 7.5 pounds	540
Geese	1.0 per 7.5 pounds	540
<b>Reserved for additional species</b>		

**Committee Vote**

Motion: Approve the animal welfare proposal with discussed changes.

Motion by: CB Second: CW

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