



ORGANIC POULTRY PRODUCTION: MEAT

The market for organic poultry products is vibrant and expanding. There are opportunities for small-scale growers to market through various direct-to-consumer venues. Growers in larger operations may sell through a diversity of marketing agencies. Before you get very far in your planning, research your markets to ensure your buyers can accommodate additional producers and clarify any special production requirements (large breasted breeds, heirloom breeds, basic or specialty feeds).

Organic poultry may be grown starting from conventional day-old chicks, poults (young turkeys), ducklings etc. Parent stock need not be organically produced, conventional hatcheries may be utilized. The organic certification application must be submitted before poultry arrive on the farm.

Birds must be treated organically from the second day of life including organic feed, housing and the use of only allowed health treatments.

Organic poultry must have daily access to the outdoors, as weather permits. Outdoor areas need not have green vegetation, however, grass-fed poultry can be a selling factor in some markets and is claimed by some to produce healthier birds and better-tasting poultry products. Any land the birds have access to must be certified organic.

Feed must be either purchased as certified organic or produced on your own certified organic farm. Any agricultural products in feed or feed supplements must be organic. This includes secondary ingredients such as soy oil or wheat middlings. Non-agricultural natural ingredients such as kelp, grit, calcium or fishmeal must be approved for use in organic operations. No synthetic preservatives, colors, flowing agents or dust suppressants are allowed.

Feed may not include mammalian or poultry slaughter byproducts.

Hormones or antibiotics are not allowed in organic meat production. Medicated feed may not be fed. Health issues should be treated through prevention, as most poultry diseases are very difficult to treat. Cleanliness is the best form of defense in disease management.

Farm biosecurity is very important for preventing transfer of diseases from farm to farm, from wild birds to domestic birds and from one batch of poultry to another. When working with multiple flocks on your farm, move from young to old and not vice versa.

Vaccines are allowed, although mostly used in larger operations. Typical vaccines that may be considered include ones for: *Newcastle disease*, *coccidiosis*, *mycoplasma gallisepticum* and *mycoplasma synoviae*. Vaccines may be administered via water, through the air or orally. Healthcare alternatives include vinegar in water, turmeric added to food for coccidiosis, homeopathy, probiotics, herbs and hydrogen peroxide. Note that agricultural substances added daily/routinely to feed or water such as vinegar, turmeric, etc. (not just to treat medical situations) must be certified organic. For more information see ATTRA resources.

Cannibalism may be caused by overcrowding or ration imbalance. Correct these conditions to reduce the problem. Poultry will peck at bloody spots, so if a bird is injured it should be isolated from others.

Predators are often a significant factor for small-scale poultry production. Predators can include raccoons, dogs, fox, coyotes, mink, weasels, opossums, rats and aerial predators including owls and hawks. Poisons are not allowed. Common control methods include the



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use of tight structures, electric net fencing, guard animals and flashing lights.

Housing must allow exercise, freedom of movement and reduction of stress. Stationary houses, moveable pens or moveable houses may be used.

If bedding is used during brooding or housing, it must be certified organic if it is something that the poultry will typically consume (i.e. hay). Typical bedding may be wood shavings (not from treated wood), organic corncobs, organic hay or straw or organic corn fodder.

Processing of meat birds must take place in a certified organic processing facility. Those processing on-farm (allowed in some states in limited numbers check with your state Department of Agriculture) may butcher and sell organic poultry if their processing operation is included in their farm plan, inspection and organic certification. The limit to the number of birds that are permitted per processed on farm NY state is 1,000. It is also important to be aware of the proper insurance requirements when developing a processing program on farm.

Documentation. Records must be kept on source of poultry, feed and supplement use and sources, use and source of any health products, vaccinations, mortalities, outside access, house sanitation practices between flocks and sale of finished product.

Certification. Any operation selling \$5,000 or more in organic product per year must be certified. You must contact an independent third party certification agency such as NOFA-NY Certified Organic LLC, fill out a farm plan and have an annual inspection. For more information see the NOFA-NY "Guidebook for Organic Certification" or fact sheet series on certification.

Marketing. Those following the National Organic Program may label their poultry as "organic." Labeling and packaging must meet organic and state labeling regulations. The USDA organic seal may be used; the certifier's name must be on the package.

More information on small-scale poultry production can be found from:

- NOFA's *Humane and Healthy Poultry Production, A Manual for Organic Growers* (Available from Chelsea Green)
- ATTRA <http://www.attra.org/>
- The American Pastured Poultry Producers Association, <http://www.apppa.org/>
- <http://www.kingbirdfarm.com/>

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