



NOFA-NY ORGANIC FACT SHEET

TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC SHEEP OR GOAT DAIRY PRODUCTION

Those wishing to sell an organic goat or sheep dairy product must make that product from certified organic milk. A herd or flock will produce organic milk only if they meet the National Organic Standards.

Overview of Organic Dairy Farming

- 3 year land transition
- 1 year animal transition
- Transitioning animals may be fed 3 year transition feed from your own farm
- Dairy animals must receive 30% DMI from pasture during the grazing season
- Secure a market for your organic milk before transitioning

To certify land organic it takes three years since the last application of prohibited substances. All production animals (milking animals, young stock, dry animals) must be fed organic feed for 12 months prior to selling organic milk. During the third year of transitions this feed may come from your own fields that are in the final year of transition. Any purchased feed must be certified organic. Organic feed may not come from genetically modified crops.

Pasture is mandated for all ruminants. Pasture for dairy animals is defined as 30% Dry Matter Intake (DMI) for the duration of the grazing season not to be less than 120 days. Animals in all stages of production (including young stock and dry animals) must be out on pasture that offers feed value for a significant portion of the day, when seasonally appropriate. Green chop or dry hay fed to animals is not considered "pasture". A dry lot is not considered pasture, since there is no covering on the ground that offers feed value. Young stock should be out on pasture once they have developed rumens and can digest grass. Browse in a paddock is acceptable for goats, as long as it offers significant feed value. Pasture must be certified organic.

Parasiticides are, in general, not allowed for regular use in organic production. Parasite management is very important and a large challenge for organic sheep and goat dairies. Ivermectin may be



used in emergency cases and only when the animal is not producing organic milk. Parasites can be controlled through pasture management, allowed herbal remedies and breeding for resistance.

Animals may not be brought in and out of organic production. Once an animal is certified organic, they must stay organic unless permanently removed.

Individual replacement animals must be born or purchased from a certified organic operation. Groups or entire herds/flocks may be added, but must go through a one year transition period before producing organic milk.

Any animals sold for organic slaughter must be raised under organic management from the last third of gestation.

Organic milk producers must be certified by a third-party certification agency. Cost-share programs are available in many states to help with certification costs. Check with your state department of agriculture.

Secure a market for your fluid milk or dairy products before certifying to reduce your financial risk.

Plan to feed a high forage diet consisting of high quality feeds to promote the health of



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your animals. Preventative health support, breeding and a clean, low-stress living environment are an organic producer's best health tools.

Any milk replacer must be from non-rBGH treated animals. Currently, non-rBGH milk replacer is not available in the U.S. Organic lambs or kids may be raised on certified organic milk from cows, goats or sheep.

Animals must be individually identified by ear tags, neck tags or distinguishing photos or drawings of animals that can be uniquely identified. Corresponding individual animal health records must be maintained for each individual animal. Health records must include all health events including birth records.

No antibiotics or hormones are allowed in organic production. However, an organic farmer cannot withhold medical treatment to preserve the organic status of an animal. If antibiotics must be used as a last resort remedy, the animal should be treated and sold or tracked and managed as nonorganic. This includes young stock that are born on the farm after your operation is certified organic. Once an animal that is part of your organic operation is given an antibiotic, this animal cannot ever be an organic dairy or slaughter animal. Animals that had been given antibiotics before you started your one-year of conversion to organic milk production can be converted to organic.

Verify with your certification agency that all health products used are acceptable. No prohibited medications can be used during the 12 month transition period. Dehorning, castration and tail docking in sheep should be performed to provide the least amount of stress to the animal. Rams or bucks need not be certified organic unless they will be sold as slaughter animals. Artificial insemination is allowed.

Vaccines are allowed in organic production.

Breeding hormones are not allowed for use in organic production.

Verify with your certification agency that the vitamins and minerals you are feeding meet the organic standards and do not contain any prohibited synthetic or non-organic substances (such as artificial preservatives, colorings, flavorings, anticaking agents or dust suppressants). During the 12 month transition period animals cannot be fed any prohibited substances. Contact your certifier for approval before feeding any supplement.

Housing must allow for freedom of movement and ventilation to promote animal health. This includes all stages of the animal's life. Any bedding that the animals eat or chew on must be certified organic. Treated wood where there is contact with livestock or with soil growing organic crops cannot be used on any new construction once the operation is certified organic. If the treated wood is present before the operation is fully organic, it can remain. Sheep or goats can be confined during winter months, but must have a few hours of outside exercise when weather permits. Young stock can be confined when young to prevent illness.

You must ensure that pastures and manure application do not cause soil erosion or pollute ground or surface water. Plastic silage or hay wraps cannot be burned.

Before you begin your organic transition, find a market for your organic milk and decide on your organic certification agency.

Additional Resources:

Midwest Sustainable Organic Education Service
www.mosesorganic.org

National Center for Appropriate Technology
www.attra.ncat.org

Northeast Organic Farming Association of NY Inc.
www.nofany.org/files/TheOrganicDairyHandbook.pdf

Revised with support from the

