



ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture

A program of the National Center for Appropriate Technology • 1-800-346-9140 • www.attra.ncat.org



Tipsheet: Organic Cattle, Sheep, and Goats for Dairy

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic dairy regulations apply to all milk animals including cows, goats, and sheep. This tipsheet highlights some of the regulations and points to resources for further study.

Considerations

- Do you have a market for organic milk?
- Do you have access to certified organic stock or do you plan to raise your own? Are you transitioning a whole herd to organic certification?
- Do you have adequate pasture and a source of organic feed?
- Can you raise your animals in compliance with organic regulations regarding access to the outdoors, pasture availability, and health care?
- Is the premium you will receive for organic milk enough to cover the higher input costs?



Dairy cow on pasture. Photo: Linda Coffey, NCAT

Marketing Strategies

Producers contemplating the transition to organic dairy production should consider both the organic production regulations and the practical viability of an organic dairy business. It is important to determine your market before making the transition to organic production. Organic dairy producers must have a reliable market, with adequate contracts and prices sufficient to cover their production costs and sustain their business. Be sure to understand your market thoroughly and also consider alternate marketing strategies. Wholesale organic milk buyers are not present in all areas of the country.

Feed

Organic feed for dairy animals must include pasture. Many resources on pasture management and dry matter intake calculation tools are available in the NOP Program Handbook (Section A: Standards and Section H: Notices to Certifying Agents), and in ATTRA publications listed in the Resources section of this tipsheet. In addition to pasture, a reliable supply of supplemental feed—whether it is grown on-farm or purchased—is critical for a compliant and profitable organic dairy. ATTRA offers an online database of organic livestock feed suppliers. You can self-list at www.attra.ncat.org/directories.html. Another way to locate organic feed producers in your region is to check certifiers' directories.

Origin of Dairy Livestock

For initial conversion of a herd, dairy animals must be under continuous organic management for at least one year before their milk can be considered organic. The lone exception to this rule is described in 7 CFR §205.236(a)(2)(i), which provides the opportunity for a producer to transition both land and animals simultaneously over three years (with animals consuming third-year transitional feed grown on land that is managed organically as part of the operation's organic system plan).

