

# ***Organic Livestock Production – FAQs***

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## **What is the definition of an organic product?**

An organic product is that which is raised, grown, or processed without the use of synthetically-produced chemicals or fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, or any other pesticides, growth hormones, growth regulators, or genetically modified organisms.

## **What does “certified organic” mean?**

A product with this label will have an audit trail showing that it has complied with the stringent production and processing standards of the Canadian Organic Products Regulations, as verified by an independent third party.

## **Does all the feed have to be organic, too?**

Yes. All feed sources must be certified organic, without exception. Feed processing must also occur in certified organic facilities.

## **How much does it cost to become certified organic?**

The cost of annual certification is in the range of \$600 - \$1500, depending on the types of enterprises on the farm, the number of acres and the certifying agency being used.

## **On a mixed farm, does the entire operation have to be organic?**

No. The livestock operation could be organic and the grain operation could be conventional, but the entire operation must have plans to convert to organic production within 10 years (or 5 years in some jurisdictions).

## **Are there any commercial synthetic products that can be used?**

Yes, but they must be on the Permitted Substances List (PSL) included in the Canadian Organic Products Regulations.

## **What if an animal is sick and needs antibiotics?**

Under no condition shall an animal be refused treatment if its health is in danger. If antibiotics are necessary, the animal may be treated, but it must then be tagged and sold as non-organic.

## **What about vaccinations? Are they allowed?**

Most vaccinations are allowed, subject to approval by the certifying agency. This includes vaccinations to stimulate production of maternal antibodies and probiotics, as appropriate to each region and/or as required by law.

**Do processing facilities such as slaughterhouses and dairies have to be certified?**

Yes. Any facilities that handle organic food products must be inspected by an independent third party acting on behalf of a certifying agency.

**What about transportation of organic livestock or processed products?**

Commingling of organic and conventional products (live, raw or processed) is prohibited. Organic animals must be physically identifiable and segregated from non-organic ones. Cleaning methods must only use products on the PSL.

**Are homeopathic practices allowed?**

Yes, but homeopathic and biotherapies must be registered with the Bureau of Veterinary Drugs, Health Canada, and are permitted only with the approval of the certifying agency.

**Is a farmer allowed to switch back and forth between organic and conventional production?**

No. Production units cannot be rotated in and out of organic production.

**How does a herd or flock start out to be organic?**

- Slaughter animals must be managed organically from birth.
- Poultry for meat must be managed organically from birth
- For eggs, laying hens must be managed organically for at least 42 days.
- Milk must come from milking animals that have been managed organically for at least 12 months.
- Beef to be sold as organic must be maintained under continuous organic management. Non-organic breeder stock may be brought into an organic operation provided that the animals, if gestating, are brought into the organic operation prior to the third trimester. There are no restrictions on male breeding stock. The practice of artificial insemination is discouraged.

**Does manure have to be composted?**

If possible, manure should be composted before being applied to organic land. There are many restrictions related to manure sources, land application of manure and the timing of manure application, so producers must get approval from their certifying agency before applying manure.

**How much of a premium can an organic producer get from the marketplace?**

Although production costs can often be higher in organic operations, gross returns are generally 30-50% more than those earned from conventional products.

**What resources are available?**

The *Organiculture* page on the MAFRI website lists several helpful links:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/organic/>

The "*Organic Livestock Handbook*" published by the Canadian Organic Growers is a good printed resource. It is available at [www.cog.ca](http://www.cog.ca)