



Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service

Organic Fact Sheet #404

Checklist for Converting to Organic Dairy Production

- ❑ Feed to cows whose milk will be sold as organic must be from land that is certified organic.
 - a. No chemical fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, synthetic silage inoculants etc. used on the cropland for 36 months before harvest of the crop.
 - b. Documentation that shows date of last prohibited substance field applications.
 - c. All purchased feed MUST have certificate of organic current certified organic status.

- ❑ Herd can be converted to organic in two ways:
 - a. By feeding 1 year of 100% certified organic feed or
 - b. By feeding 80% organically grown feed and 20% nonorganically grown feed for 9 months, followed by 100% certified organic feed for 3 months.
 - c. Once the herd is certified and selling organic milk, all animals must be managed as certified organic from the last third of the gestation of their mother before they were born.
 - d. The one year converted herd can feed nonorganic feed for their future animals, up to one year before they give organic milk.
 - e. The 80/20 herd must always feed certified feed for each animal's entire life. Documentation must be kept on all feeds and dates fed.

- ❑ Pasture is mandated for all ruminants. Pasture is defined as offering feed value to the cattle. Heifers, dry cows and milk cows must be out on pasture that offers feed value when seasonally appropriate.

- ❑ Housing must allow for freedom of movement and ventilation to promote animal health. This includes all stages of the animal's life. Treated wood cannot be used on any new construction. Cows can be confined during winter months, but should have a few hours of outside exercise when weather permits. Calves can be confined when young to prevent illness.

- ❑ Bulls do not need to be managed organically unless they are to be sold as organic slaughter animals.

- ❑ Artificial insemination is allowed. Breeding hormones are not allowed.

- ❑ Animals must be individually identified by ear tags, neck tags or distinguishing photos. Corresponding individual animal health records maintained. Health records must include all health events including birth records. Even if a cow is only stripped clean to control mastitis, this should be noted in her individual health record in order to verify organic management. Record keeping aids farmers in understanding what products are useful and which are not, as well as tracking genetic traits to aid with culling decisions.
- ❑ No antibiotics 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.
- ❑ Plan to feed a high forage diet consisting of high quality feeds to promote the health of your animals.
- ❑ 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 nonorganic substances.
- ❑ Verify with your certification agency that all health products used are acceptable.
- ❑ You must ensure that pastures and manure application do not cause soil erosion or pollute ground or surface water. Plastic silage wraps cannot be burned.
- ❑ Before you begin your organic transition, find a market for your organic milk and decide on your organic certification agency. Work with the organic certification agency and time your first inspection to occur no later than 2 months before your shipper can pick up your organic milk.
- ❑ Attend the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference in La Crosse WI (www.mosesorganic.org) or try to find an organic farmer/mentor to help you learn more about organic dairy management systems. Ask your extension agent to help you find organic resource materials.



moses

Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service

PO Box 339 Spring Valley, WI 54767

715-772-3153 fax 715-772-3162

info@mosesorganic.org www.mosesorganic.org