

SECTION VI-11 ORGANIC MILK PRODUCTION

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The organic food industry has become a growing interest for consumers. The premise of this industry is described by the Government of Canada Organic Production Systems General Principles and Management Standards (CAN/CGSB-32.310-2006):

“Organic production is a holistic system designed to optimize the productivity and fitness of diverse communities within the agro-ecosystem, including soil organisms, plants, livestock and people. The principal goal of organic production is to develop enterprises that are sustainable and harmonious with the environment.”

Organic production requires that practices are being done to ensure that animals are able to perform their natural behavioural processes, while still ensuring their health and animal welfare. There are many specific practices that must be adhered to, and are listed below as outlined in the document referenced above:

- Sheep must have access to an appropriate amount of outdoor pasture, with 2.5 m²/head, and 0.5 m²/head for lambs, and indoors, ewes must have 1.5 m²/head, and 0.35 m²/head for lambs
- In addition to pasture, ewes must be supplemented with organically grown feed as their form of nutrition. Sixty-percent of their diet must be hay, fresh/dried fodder or silage-based, with 15% of the total feed having a forage length of over 10 cm
- Organic animals should not be given synthetically made allopathic (*i.e. conventional*) veterinary drugs or feed additives, such as antibiotics or parasiticides. However, vaccines can be administered, if required. In addition, phytotherapeutic (*i.e. herbal or botanical*) or homeopathic treatment can be used if they are deemed necessary
- If physical changes are required in a flock, such as castration or tail docking of lambs and ear tagging should be accompanied by anaesthetics or pain mitigation drugs
- Sheep that are used for milk production must be milked in a continuous organic system for one year before they are considered for use in organic milk products. Any breeding stock that is purchased must also be confirmed organic
- Record-keeping is very important on organic farms, and all information, such as feed records and disease treatments must be logged in detail

Some of these recommendations are difficult to adhere to when you have a sheep which is ill. It is advised that you do not forgo appropriate treatment of an animal in order to adhere to these organic standards.

If you are considered changing to an organic dairy operation, it is strongly advised to read the document in full as there are many restrictions that must be adhered to. They can be ordered or found at:

<http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ongc-cgsb/programme-program/normes-standards/comm/32-20-agriculture-eng.html>