

Practitioner in Organic Livestock Management

Pilot Course

Unit 2

**Providing and implementing organic livestock
production: feeding and housing systems**

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Introduction

- Organic farming is based on a set of principles that are related to nature, the environment, sustainability, food production, farming and society. These principles are implemented in practice by standards and regulations.
- European countries implemented regulations that provide common minimum standards for housing conditions, animal feeding, use of veterinary medicine and animal care.
- However, some countries have more stringent organic standards than those specified under common EU regulations.

Introduction

- In organic farming animal husbandry is often understood in terms of natural living.
- One of the main and basic principles of organic farming is that animals are kept as a part of the whole production system and their nutrition should be based on locally grown organic feedstuffs.
- Aiming for a high level of self sufficiency, the feed should preferably be obtained from the same holding where the animals are kept.

Feeding in organic livestock production

- As a general rule, all natural (non-synthetic) feed substances are allowed in organic production and all synthetic substances are prohibited.
- Feeding synthetic amino acids is forbidden not only because they are synthetic but also because the production of these feed additives is supplemented by the use of several chemicals and energy.
- The approach of natural living in organic farming is not just of avoiding chemicals, it is also about respecting ecological principles and the integrity of living nature as a whole.

Feeding in organic livestock production

- Feed is intended to ensure high quality of the products rather than maximising production, while meeting the nutritional requirements of the livestock at various stages of their development.
- The probability of problems with feeding, health and welfare increase with higher level of production.
- Animal breeds with very high productivity levels also have high nutrient requirements that are difficult to meet by using 100% locally grown organic feed.

Feeding in organic livestock production

- EU Regulation requires that 60% of the feed for herbivores (20% for pigs and poultry) should come from the farm itself or be produced in cooperation with other (local) organic farms.
- Rearing systems for herbivores are to be based on maximum use of pasturage according to the availability of pastures at different periods of the year.
- For herbivores, at least 60% (50% during the first 3 months of lactation) of the dry matter of daily rations is to consist of roughage, fresh or dried fodder, or silage.

Feeding in organic livestock production

- All young animals (mammals) must be fed on natural milk, preferably maternal milk, for a minimum period, depending on the species concerned:
 - 3 months for cattle
 - 45 days for sheep and goats
 - 40 days for pigs
- Roughage, fresh or dried fodder, or silage must be added to the daily ration for pigs and poultry. Forages for pigs need to be young and leafy, with few stems and straws.

Feeding in organic livestock production

- Rotational grazing on high quality pasture, supplemented with local grains and legumes, is recommended for organic pig farms.
- Animals on pasture may grow slower and require more feed per unit of gain, due to high fibre intake and increased exercise compared with conventional animals.
- Insufficient amino acid supply in feeding pigs and poultry with locally grown feed is one of the biggest challenges in organic farms where monogastric animals are raised.

Feeding in organic livestock production

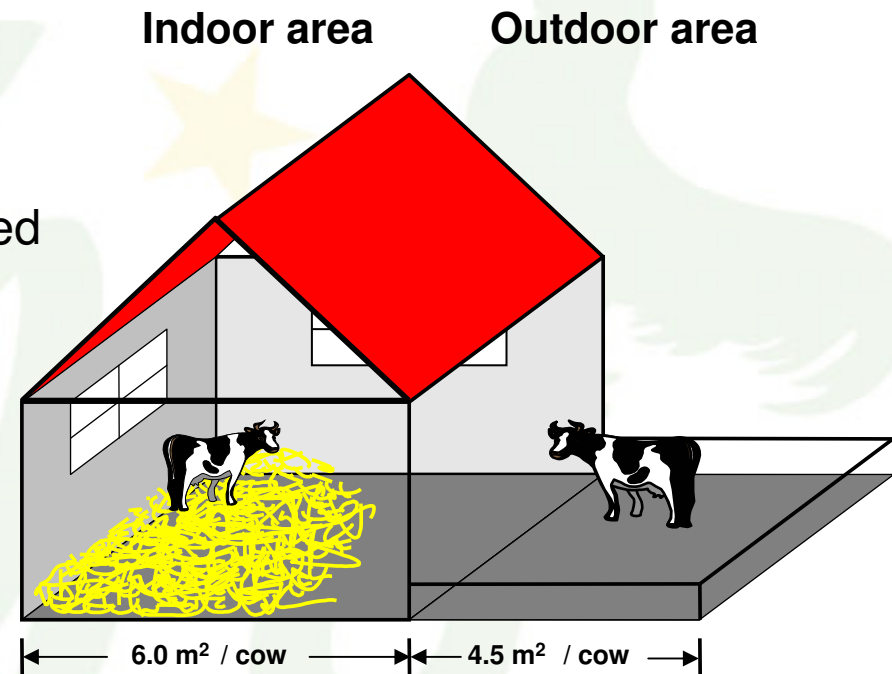
- Feedstuffs, feed materials, compound feedstuffs, feed additives, processing aids for feedstuffs and certain products used in animal nutrition must not have been produced with the aid of GMO or products derived therefrom.
- Feed materials of animal and mineral origin, trace elements and vitamins can only be used if listed in the regulations.

Feeding in organic livestock production

- In case of essential need, or for a particular nutritional purpose, there is a list of feed additives, enzymes, micro-organisms, binders and processing aids that are permitted for use in organic farming.
- To ensure a high quality of the products, additives such as antibiotics, coccidiostats, medicinal substances, growth promoters or any substance intended to stimulate growth or production may not be used in organic animal feeding.

Housing in organic livestock production

- at least half of the total floor area must be solid
- Comfortably littered areas must be provided
- Access to pastures or exercise areas
- Easy access to feeding and watering
- Keeping livestock tethered is forbidden



**Appropriate housing conditions are a relevant precondition
 for good animal welfare and health.**

Housing in organic livestock production

- All animals must have access to pasture or an open-air exercise area which may be partially covered, and they must be able to use those areas whenever the physiological condition of the animal, the weather conditions and the state of the ground permit.
- From an ethological point of view regular access to outdoor areas is seen as an essential need for livestock.
- Permanent outdoor access is considered to be better for animal health.

Housing in organic livestock production

- Outdoor pasture must be of sufficiently low stocking density to prevent poaching and overgrazing.
- EU regulations restrict the maximum stocking rate to an equivalent of 170 kg N/ha.
- Minimum indoor and outdoor surface area, and other characteristics of management in the different species and types of production, are defined in EU regulations.

Housing in organic livestock production

- Periodic changing or of switching the outdoor area is recommended since it reduces the risks of parasite infections.
- The final fattening phase of adult bovines reared for meat production may take place indoors, provided that this indoor period does not exceed 1/5th of their lifetime and, in any case, for a maximum period of 3 months.
- Housing for livestock is not mandatory in areas where climatic conditions allow the animals to live permanently outdoors.

Housing in organic livestock production

- Keeping animals in conditions which promote anaemia, or subjecting them to a diet which promotes anaemia, is prohibited.
- Calves more than one week old to be housed in group pens, individual boxes are prohibited.
- Keeping poultry in cages is prohibited
- Waterfowl must have access to a watercourse, pool, lake or pond

Sources:

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