

NEWS RELEASE

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New federal guidance will impact organic livestock producers

Rule clarifies how and when organic livestock must graze

ST. PAUL, Minn. – Minnesota’s organic livestock producers are expected to benefit from a new federal rule that more clearly defines pasture requirements for organic ruminant animals such as cattle, sheep, and goats.

The National Organic Program Final Rule that went into effect in 2002 specified that all organic livestock must have access to the outdoors and ruminants must have “access to pasture,” a phrase that turned out to be vague and unenforceable.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture organic specialist Meg Moynihan says the new pasture regulation assures that all organic producers are being held to the same standards.

“The new rule is more specific, and that’s what farmers wanted,” said Moynihan. “Dairy farmers, in particular, are welcoming the clarification. We also expect it will increase consumer confidence in organic foods like meat, milk, and other dairy products.”

The rule requires that organic livestock must get 30 percent of their dry matter feed intake from grazing on pasture for at least 120 days per year. Organic livestock producers must also have a pasture management plan that protects soil and water quality. And there is a provision to allow grain finishing of beef and other meat animals.

Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Gene Hugoson submitted comments on draft organic pasture standards in late 2008, at the recommendation of the Minnesota Organic Advisory Task Force. The final rule becomes effective 120 days after publication, June 17, 2010.

Copies of the final rule and additional information are on display on line at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP>.

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