

Regulations that will ensure organically certified production practices

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently finalized regulations that will ensure organically certified production practices are in keeping with the spirit of what an organic label means to consumers.

The organic rule already required that producers afford access to pasture to receive certification, but the new rule will clarify vague language about how much grazing is enough and the limited circumstances under which animals can be denied pasture access. Previous requirements, for instance, allowed some products to receive the certified organic label although the animals rarely set foot outside a confined animal feeding operation (CAFO).

To obtain the label under the new rule, producers will have to give livestock access to the outdoors year-round and graze animals throughout the grazing season, which must be at least 120 days. In addition, the rules ensure that minimum amount of an animal's food come from pasture. A report by the Union of Concerned Scientists found that grazing animals on pasture is not only less damaging to the environment than raising animals inside confined operations, but that meat and milk from grass-fed cows can contain higher levels of good fats that may provide health benefits.

USDA's new rules will remove ambiguity for producers in meeting organic standards and give consumers greater confidence that milk and meat bearing the organic label have been produced in ways that truly benefit people, animals, and the environment.