

Organic Meat Goat Production
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Unit Objective

After completion of this module of instruction the producer should be able to interpret the standards for a certified organic meat goat operation and to review different websites to gain production information and knowledge. The producer should be able to evaluate the feasibility and economics of his/her meat goat operation becoming organic certified. The producer should know the steps required to obtain organic certification. The producer should be able to complete all assignment sheets with 100% accuracy and score a minimum of 85% on the module test.

Specific Objectives

After completion of this instructional module the producer should be able to:

1. Explain why consumers are requesting more organically produced goat meat.
2. State the name of the act that Congress passed related to organic farming and the year the act was passed.
3. State the name of the agency of the federal government that had responsibility for development of standards for organic production of food within the U. S.
4. State where the National Organic Program (NOP) is housed within the federal government.
5. Explain when states can impose stricter regulations than those provided by the federal government.
6. Discuss exemptions and exclusions from certification.
7. Explain the meaning of the term organic.
8. Explain the standards a producer must follow related to record keeping for a certified operation.
9. Describe the purpose of the organic production and handling systems plan including the components of the plan and the agency/organization that must approve the plan.
10. Explain the standards for land and seeds and planting stock within an organic production system.
11. Know the regulations on what is an “organic” goat.
12. Explain what an organic goat producer can and cannot use in the way of animal treatment products.
13. Describe the acceptable living conditions of goats within an organic production program.
14. State some of the general requirements for certification.
15. State how an organic meat goat producer becomes certified.
16. Explain when and how often on-site inspections are performed for an organic meat goat production program.
17. State the requirements for continuation of certification.
18. State when synthetic substances can be used in an organic livestock operation.

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Introduction

Interest in organic meat production has increased in the recent past and demand for organically grown meat is growing. Many consumers feel that organically grown products are safer to consume and produce and are better for the environment than conventional production due to the severe restrictions on the use of chemical, microbial, and synthetic agents. In 1990, Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) that mandated the USDA to develop standards for the organic production of food in the U.S. The National Organic Program (NOP) is housed in the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service and administers OFPA and the rules and regulations of organic production.

The rules and regulations developed subsequent to OFPA were published in the Federal Register, Vol. 65, No. 246, published on December 21, 2000, Rules and Regulations, Part IV, 7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program, Final Rule. All producers, including foreign producers, who wish to use the terms "100 percent organic" or "organic" on labeling of products marketed in the U.S. must follow these rules. Amendments have been made to portions of the Final Rule, such as allowed and prohibited substances; however, the main stipulations in the regulatory language of the Rule remain the same.



All states in the U.S. must, at a minimum, follow regulations found in the Final Rule. States are allowed to impose stricter regulations than those provided by federal government, but only if the State has a State Organic Program approved by USDA/NOP. Producers should contact their state department of agriculture or a local certifying agent for individual state regulations and to obtain the most current regulations applicable.

Where to Find This Information on the Web

The USDA's NOP website, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/>, contains all current NOP regulations, consumer information, lists of certifying agents and organic feed suppliers, as well as additional information. To find a local certifying agent, see the list of certifying agents at this site. The regulatory language of the Final Rule can also be found at this website.

Another website where the regulatory information can be found is the Alternative Farming System Information Center, U.S. National Standards on Organic Animal Production and Handling, www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/ofp/7cfrtoc.htm.

A website that has excellent information sources to assist producers in understanding and complying with the regulations is the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service website: Organic Farming <http://www.attra.org/organic.html>. In particular, see NCAT's Organic Livestock Workbook and Organic Livestock Documentation Forms under Organic Livestock.

The department of agriculture in individual states may have organic production regulations and information posted on their website. As an example, the State of Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry lists publications available to producers wishing to be certified as “organic” at <http://www.oda.state.ok.us/food-formshome.htm>.

What Can and Cannot Be Done in “Organic” Goat Production

The main stipulations as to how to produce “organic” livestock are contained in the regulatory language of the Final Rule. As previously discussed, some states may use more stringent regulations than the federal regulations and producers should contact local officials to get the most current and applicable information.

A brief description of the sections of the regulatory language most relevant to livestock production follows. The section number and title have been provided so that the reader can go back and read the original language of the regulations, if desired. This discussion is not meant to be an exhaustive interpretation of these rules and regulations; rather, it is to provide basic information to meat goat producers contemplating a switch to organic production.

§ 205.100 What has to be certified

Anyone who wishes to sell goats or goat meat that will be represented as “100 percent organic,” or “organic.”

§ 205.101 Exemptions and exclusions from certification

A producer that sells goats or goat meat as “organic” but whose annual gross income from such sales totals \$5,000 or less is exempt from certification and submitting a certification plan. However, these producers must follow all organic production requirements and regulations.

§ 205.102 Use of the term, “organic”

Goats to be sold as organic must be raised following all regulations of organic production. To sell goat meat as “100 percent organic” or “organic,” the animal must be raised in an organic manner and be processed through a meat processing facility certified as “organic.”

§ 205.100 Recordkeeping by certified operations

Full, complete records must be kept on any animals, or products thereof, sold labeled or represented as “100 percent organic” or “organic.” These records must include all activities of the operation and be readily understood. Records must be available for inspection and kept for a minimum of 5 years.

§ 205.105 Allowed and prohibited substances, methods, and ingredients in organic production and handling

There are few exceptions for synthetic or non-natural substances and feedstuff ingredients that can be used in organic livestock production. Most of these applying to livestock production are covered in subsequent sections of the regulations.

§ 205.201 Organic production and handling system plan

Producers wishing to be certified as “organic” must develop and submit a production plan that meets all organic production requirements. This plan must be approved by the certifying agent. The plan should include descriptions of all production practices, feedstuffs used and their source, monitoring procedures to be employed, recordkeeping system to be used, and practices that prevent commingling of organic and non-organic livestock, feedstuffs and other items used on farm.

§ 205.202 Land requirements

Any land on which goats may be grazed or where feed for goats, e.g., hay, grain, etc., is harvested must be organic. This means that no prohibited substances such as pesticides and herbicides were applied to the land during the past three years. There should also be distinct boundaries or zones that prevent contact with prohibited substances that may be applied to adjacent lands and that could be contained in runoff or sprayer drift.



§ 205.204 Seeds and planting stock practice standard

Any seeds planted on organic land must be organically produced if the variety and quantity is commercially available. As an example, if a producer wishes to grow and feed alfalfa to his organically produced goats, the alfalfa seed he plants should be organically produced if commercially available. The production practices in producing the alfalfa must also meet all other organic regulations.

§ 205.236 Origin of livestock

Only kids from does under continuous organic management no later than the last 1/3 of gestation can be classified as organic. Thus, if you purchase a pregnant doe to include in your organic operation, the kid born to that doe would qualify as organic if the doe is managed under organic conditions at your farm for a minimum of the last one-third of gestation. If a normal 150-day gestation period is assumed, then the doe would have to be raised in an organic manner from day 100 of gestation onwards. The doe may be purchased from a non-organic producer. A doe purchased from a non-organic producer may never be sold as “organic,” although her offspring can be “organic,” if the above conditions regarding gestation period and organic raising are met. For breeding stock to qualify as “organic,” those animals must have been born and raised under organic conditions. Records on the identity of all “organic” animals raised on farm must be kept.

§ 205.237 Livestock feed

Only organically produced feedstuffs can be fed to animals that are to be sold as “organic.” If goats are grazed, then the land must be certified as “organic” as described in § 205.202 Land requirements. There are some substances allowed for use in organic production and those are described in a later section, § 205.603 Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production. No animal drugs or growth hormones can be used in organic production. The use of urea, mammalian or poultry by-products, and all other substances outlawed by the Food and Drug Administration is prohibited.

§ 205.238 Livestock health care practice standard

Producers must supply a nutritionally adequate ration to all goats. All animals should have appropriate housing to minimize disease spread. Goats should have freedom of movement and access to exercise. Management practices such as castration, dehorning, etc., must be done in a way that minimizes pain and stress. Vaccines are permissible for use.

In general, drug treatments cannot be used and any animal receiving antibiotics cannot be labeled “organic.” Growth hormones are prohibited from use. Anthelmintics cannot be administered on a regular basis and no anthelmintics can be used on slaughter stock. Parasite treatment can be used on breeding stock if organic system plan-approved management does not control infestation. Treatment cannot occur during the last one-third of gestation if the resulting offspring is to be labeled “organic” nor can treatment occur during lactation.

It is not permissible to withhold medical treatment from an animal in an attempt to preserve its “organic” state.

§ 205.239 Livestock living conditions

Living conditions must reflect the natural behavior of goats. Goats should have access to pasture. They should also have shelter that maintains appropriate temperature, air ventilation, and does not have any potential for injury. If any bedding is used that could be consumed by the animal, then that bedding must conform to organic feed requirements. Manure must be managed in a way that does not contaminate water, soil, or plants, by any organisms or substances that the manure may contain. Animals can be temporarily confined due to weather conditions, stage of production, and health and safety issues.



§ 205.400 General requirements for certification

Persons wishing to be certified as “organic” meat goat producers must develop and follow an organic plan for their operation. This plan must be updated annually. Producers must also allow on-site inspections of all facilities and maintain records for a minimum of 5 years and make those records available for inspection. Producers must also immediately notify their certifying agent should any non-organic substance come in contact with their land or animals.

§ 205.401 Application for certification

It is best to contact your state certifying agent or a private certification firm for current application rules for your state. A list of certification agents can be found at the National Organic Program website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/CertifyingAgents/CertAgenthome.html>

As an example of certification procedures, the State of Oklahoma lists the following requirements for producers wishing to become certified, taken from Oklahoma Organic Products Act Fact Sheet <http://www.oda.state.ok.us/forms/food/ocifs.pdf>.

The basic requirements for initial certification are:

- Completion of a producer/processor application form available from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry that includes an Organic production or handling system plan.
- Descriptions of practices and procedures to be performed and maintained.
- A list of each substance to be used as a production or handling input, indicating its composition, source, and location(s) where it will be used.
- A description of the monitoring practices and procedures to verify if the plan is effectively implemented.
- A description of the recordkeeping system implemented to comply with requirements.
- A description of practices or procedures to prevent commingling of organic products and nonorganic products.
- Organic production practices verified by an on-site inspection, and exit interview of the Organic production or handling operation.

§ 205.403 On-site inspections

An initial on-site inspection must be performed by the certifying agent. Thereafter, inspections occur at least annually to determine if an application for re-certification should be granted. Interim inspections may occur to evaluate compliance with organic production guidelines. Contact local certifying agents for more detail.

§ 205.404 Continuation of certification

Certification must be renewed on an annual basis. In addition to paying applicable fees, the producer is required to submit an updated organic production plan that includes any changes or deviations from the previous approved plan, report on actions taken on any noncompliance issues, and any other information deemed necessary. As mentioned in the previous certification sections, contact your local certifying agent for more specific requirements.

§ 205.603 Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production

This section lists synthetic substances that can be used in an organic livestock operation. Many of these are disinfectants or sanitizing agents; others include items such as electrolytes, glucose, iodine, and some other treatment items. Food and Drug Administration-approved trace minerals

and vitamins can be fed, but an organic producer cannot provide feed supplements and additives in amounts above those needed by animals for adequate nutrition and health maintenance at the specific stage of production. Milk replacers without antibiotics are approved for emergency use only. Oxytocin can also be used post-partum in therapeutic applications. For a complete list, refer to this section in the regulatory language found at the websites listed at the beginning of this article.

Of main interest to many producers would be the allowed use of paraciticides, or anthelmintics, in emergency situations. However, no use of anthelmintics is allowed in slaughter stock at any time. Non-organic, pregnant does can be treated and their kids could still be considered organic if the treatment occurred prior to the last one-third of gestation. If in doubt concerning a substance, contact your certifying agent.

Considerations on Organic Production

Organic products are in demand by consumers who are willing to pay a premium price for the assurance that the product has been produced following organic principles. Producers wishing to produce and market meat goats or meat goat products as “organic” should consider both the potential profit and any added expense of organic production. Producers should be prepared to deal with animals that must receive antibiotic or other chemical treatment that renders them not “organic” and have facilities to maintain and raise those animals out of contact with the “organic” herd. If a producer wishes to market meat directly to consumers, via the internet for example, then an organic certified abattoir must be found. Finding and purchasing organic feed, or organic forage seed to plant, is another consideration. Formulating a thorough plan and taking an evaluative look at your operation and how it must be changed will assist in the decision making process.

Suggested Assignments

The following assignments will assist in increasing your understanding of organic livestock production and how feasible it may be for your farm. Completion of these assignments is optional and is not needed to complete this module.

Assignment 1 - Visit and Collect Information from the websites listed in the text.

Visit one or more of the following websites and review information of interest to you. At each site, write down specific information that was helpful in increasing your understanding of organic livestock production.

- The USDA’s NOP website, www.ams.usda.gov/nop/
- The Alternative Farming System Information Center, U.S. National Standards on Organic Animal Production and Handling, www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/ofp/7cfrtoc.htm
- The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service website: Organic Farming www.attra.org/organic.html

- The department of agriculture in your home state or look at the example from the State of Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry website www.oda.state.ok.us/food-formshome.htm.

Assignment 2 - Evaluate your Individual Meat Goat Operation to Determine the Feasibility and Economics of Converting to a Organic Certified Program

Developing an organic certified meat goat program may not be for every meat goat producer. However such a program might prove to be economical and beneficial to some producers. The purpose of this assignment sheet is to encourage you to personally evaluate your individual meat goat program to explore the feasibility and economics of converting your production program to a certified program. To assist you with this evaluation complete each of the questions posted below.

1. What is the demand for organic certified goat meat in your market area? Is the demand high, low or marginal?
2. What population group or groups are asking for organic certified goat meat?
3. What is the current market price being paid for organic certified goat meat?
4. What specific resources do you currently have that would apply or contribute to an organic certified meat goat program? List those resources and be very specific.
5. What is your current production cost of producing a 40 pound goat kid?
6. What is the market price that you can receive for the 40 pound goat kid?
7. What would your production cost be if you converted your existing meat goat program to an organic certified program? Be very specific and list each of those costs.
8. Incorporating your production cost computed in question 7 above, what would it cost you to produce a 40 pound goat kid in an organic certified program?
9. What do you believe the market in your area would pay for a 40 pound goat kid that was raised in an organic certified meat program?
10. What would your profit return be on producing a 40 pound goat kid in an organic certified meat program?
11. What would be specific advantages of converting your meat goat program to an organic certified meat goat program?
12. What would be specific disadvantages of converting your meat goat program to an organic certified meat goat program?

Information contained in this document is part of a web-based training and certification program for meat goat producers (<http://www2.luresext.edu/goats/training/qa.html>) that was developed with funding received by Langston University from USDA/FSIS/OPHS project #FSIS-C-10-2004 entitled "Development of a Web-based Training and Certification Program for Meat Goat Producers."

Collaborating institutions/organizations include Alcorn State University, American Boer Goat Association, American Kiko Goat Association, American Meat Goat Association, Florida A&M University, Fort Valley State University, Kentucky State University, Langston University, Prairie View A&M University, Southern University, Tennessee Goat Producers Association, Tennessee State University, Tuskegee University, United States Boer Goat Association, University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, and Virginia State University.