INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS

OGS Revision

IFOAM BENCHMARK FOR STANDARDS

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UNITING THE ORGANIC WORLD

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I. THE PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

The Principles are **not subject to consultation.** For further information see IFOAM website at: http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/principles/index.html

II. IFOAM BENCHMARK FOR STANDARDS (IBS)

Section A - Introduction

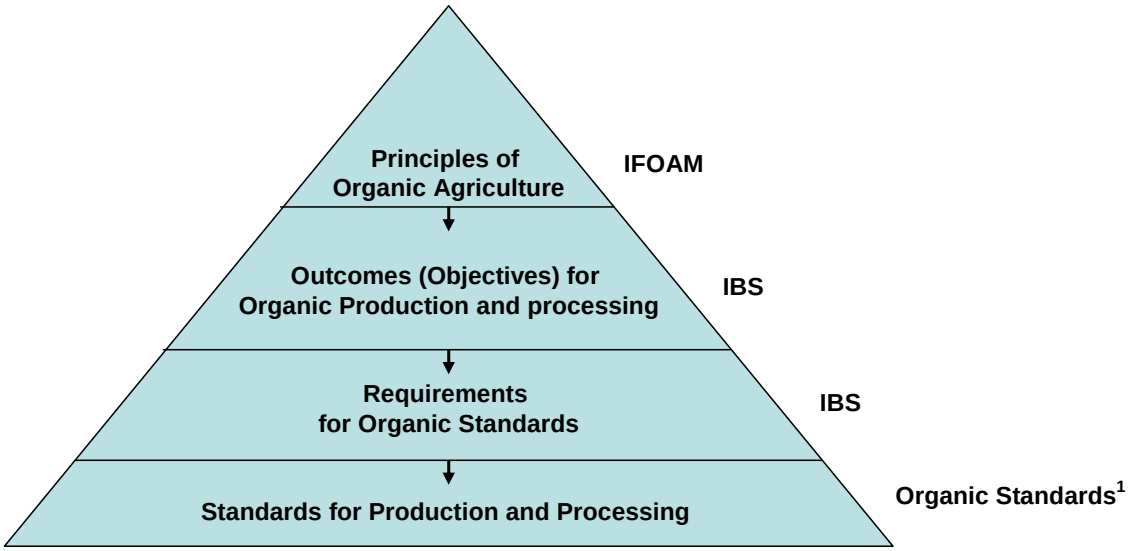
Role of the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards

The IFOAM Benchmark for Standards (IBS) provides a crucial link from the Principles of Organic Agriculture to those standards that are applied directly to organic production and processing. The IBS functions as guidance for developing and evaluating these other standards, and for distinguishing organic from not-organic systems. Therefore it is a baseline for determining which standards and practices can be called "organic".

A farm or processing plant could never be certified to this document. The document is intended for use as a tool for setting more detailed organic standards according to the Principles of Organic Agriculture. In order to link principles and standards, the IBS establishes outcomes (called "objectives in the document) that organic standards should achieve in order to meet the principles. The IFOAM Benchmark for Standards also sets requirements for what organic standards must address in order to achieve the outcomes (objectives). The requirements do not usually prescribe "how" to achieve the objective, but leave that to organic standards. They are written in language that applies to organic standards, not directly to the farm or processing operation. However, in order to clearly distinguish organic from conventional systems and practices, the IBS do sometimes specify production and processing practices that organic standards must require (called "mandatory practices" in the document), and also practices that organic standards must prohibit (called "prohibited practices" in the document).

This approach in the IBS provides flexibility for organic standards to vary according to the context in which that standard is applied to farming and processing (e.g. ecology, stage of organic development, product specialization).

Hierarchy of Requirements for Organic Production and Processing



[1] must include the mandatory and prohibited practices in the IBS, address all requirements and meet the IBS objectives

Function of the IBS

The IFOAM Benchmark for Standards functions as a guidance for organic standards setting, as a tool for determining equivalence of standards, and as one of the two norms that must be met in the IFOAM Accreditation Program.

Guidance for Organic Standards Setting

The IBS is the framework of all other organic standards setting. Standards that meet the IBS can be considered and labeled as "organic standards" because they are consistent with the Principles of Organic Agriculture, address what is required by the IBS, and comply with certain mandatory and prohibited practices that the IBS specify.

Tool for Equivalence of Standards

IFOAM develops and maintains a Family of Standards. This Family consists of private and government organic standards recognized by IFOAM as meeting the principles, objectives and requirements of the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards. Together, IBS and the Family of Standards form a tool for determining the equivalence of organic standards. IFOAM considers standards (with the same scope) in the Family of Standards as equivalent. Development of the Family of Standards is governed by IFOAM policy and procedure.

Component of IFOAM Accreditation

The IBS also function in the IFOAM Accreditation Program. This Program is a formal means of verifying that the standards employed by an organic certification body meet the IBS requirements for organic standards and also IFOAM's requirements related to the quality of certification, which is addressed in another document, the IFOAM Accreditation Criteria.

Structure of the IFOAM Basic Standards

IBS Chapters

The IBS consists of 9 Chapters, which focus on certain topics in organic production and processing. Sections within each Chapter further develop the topic of the Chapter. Each of these sections is organized in a uniform structure, and contains the following subsections:

Principles Applied

The Principles of Organic Agriculture relevant to the topic of the Section are stated. In some cases the language is taken directly from IFOAM's Principles of Organic Agriculture and in other cases the spirit and language of the Principles is adapted to the topic.

Objectives

This subsection states the outcomes that must be achieved by organic farming and processing with respect to the topic in order to be consistent with the IFOAM Principles.

Requirements for Organic Standards

This subsection presents those topics and requirements that organic standards must address in order to fulfill the objectives. Specific requirements in organic standards set by standards-setting bodies must not fall outside of the principles and must meet the objectives.

Mandatory and Prohibited Practices

The role of the IBS includes setting a baseline for differentiating organic systems from those that are not organic. In order to do this, it is necessary for the IBS to state some practices that are always necessary in organic production and processing, and others that are prohibited. Therefore, some Sections include relevant mandatory and prohibited practices.

IBS Criteria for Substances Used in Organic Production and Processing

The Principles of Organic Agriculture are designed to lead organic production and processing toward minimal and prudent use of all substances. Therefore, organic standards restrict the use of substances in organic production and processing. In order to fulfill its role as a guidance and benchmark document, the IBS addresses use of substances in general terms throughout the Chapters, and sometimes very specifically in these Chapters by prohibiting certain substances. A comprehensive set of Criteria for determining allowed and prohibited substances is provided in Section C.

Organic standards setting bodies must use these Criteria to determine which substances are allowed in their standard and they may also use the Criteria to prohibit certain substances. Lists of substances in organic standards regulated within the IFOAM Accreditation Program must meet the Criteria.

IFOAM maintains an indicative list of substances allowed for use in organic production and processing. This list is subject to change via a transparent processes administered by IFOAM. The list functions in IFOAM Accreditation and as a reference for organic standards setting. Standards setting bodies may accept the listed substances for their own standards without further evaluating them according to the Criteria. A current list is available on the IFOAM website.

Development of the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards

The IFOAM Benchmark for Standards is developed in accordance with IFOAM policies and in compliance with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Standards Setting.

Section B - Definitions, Principles Applied, Objectives and Requirements

Definitions

Accreditation Criteria: Specify what is required from the certifier (what has to be in place) and what the certifier has to require from the operator to enable third party certification.

Additive: See Ingredient.

Biodiversity: The variety of life forms and ecosystem types on Earth. Includes genetic diversity (i.e. diversity within species), species diversity (i.e. the number and variety of species) and ecosystem diversity (total number of ecosystem types).

Breeding: Selection of plants or animals to reproduce and / or to further develop desired characteristics in succeeding generations.

Certification: The procedure by which a third party gives written assurance that a clearly identified process has been methodically assessed, such that adequate confidence is provided that specified products conform to specified requirements.

Certification Body: The body that conducts certification, as distinct from standard-setting and inspection.

Contamination: Pollution of organic product or land; or contact with any material that would render the product unsuitable for organic certification.

Conventional: Conventional means any material, production or processing practice that is not certified organic or organic "in-conversion".

Conversion: The transition from non organic to organic farming.

Conversion Period: The time between the start of the organic management and the certification of crops and/or animal husbandry as organic.

Crop Rotation: The practice of alternating the species or families of annual and/or biennial crops grown on a specific field in a planned pattern or sequence so as to break weed, pest and disease cycles and to maintain or improve soil fertility and organic matter content.

Direct Source Organism: The specific plant, animal, or microbe that produces a given input or ingredient, or that gives rise to a secondary or indirect organism that produces an input or ingredient.

Disinfect: To reduce, by physical or chemical means, the number of potentially harmful microorganisms in the environment, to a level that does not compromise food safety or suitability.

Farm Holding: The total area of land under control of one farmer or collective of farmers, and including all the farming activities or enterprises. The farm holding may be divided into farm units.

Farm Unit: A sub set of a farm holding.

Good Organic Manufacturing Practice: The part of the quality assurance which ensures that organic products are consistently produced and controlled to the quality standards appropriate to their intended use.

Genetic Engineering: Genetic engineering is a set of techniques from molecular biology (such as recombinant DNA) by which the genetic material of plants, animals, microorganisms, cells and other biological units may be altered in ways or with results that could not be obtained by methods of natural mating and reproduction or natural recombination. Techniques of genetic modification include, but are not limited to: recombinant DNA, cell fusion, micro and macro injection, encapsulation, gene deletion and doubling. Genetically engineered organisms do not include organisms resulting from techniques such as conjugation, transduction and natural hybridization.

Genetically Modified Organism (GMO): A plant, animal, or microbe that is transformed by genetic engineering.

Green Manure: A crop that is incorporated into the soil for the purpose of soil improvement. May include spontaneous crops, plants or weeds.

Habitat: The area over which a plant or animal species naturally exists; the area where a species occurs. Also used to indicate types of habitat, e.g. seashore, riverbank, woodland, grassland.

Homeopathic Treatment: Treatment of disease based on administration of remedies prepared through successive dilutions of a substance that in larger amounts produces symptoms in healthy subjects similar to those of the disease itself.

Hydroponics: Crop production systems in inert media or water using dissociated nutrients as prime source of nutrient supply.

Ingredient: Any substance, including an additive, used in the manufacture or preparation of a product and present in the final product although possibly in a modified form.

Ionizing Radiation: High energy emissions from radio-nucleotides, capable of altering a food's molecular structure for the purpose of controlling microbial contaminants, pathogens, parasites and pests in food, preserving food or inhibiting physiological processes such as sprouting or ripening.

Label: Any written, printed or graphic representation that is present on a product, accompanies the product, or is displayed near the product.

Operator: An individual or business enterprise, responsible for ensuring that production meets, and continues to meet, the requirements on which the certification is based.

Operation: An individual or business enterprise producing, processing or handling agricultural products.

Organic: "Organic" refers to the farming system and products described in the IFOAM Basic Standards and not to "organic chemistry".

Organic Product: A product which has been produced, processed, and/or handled in compliance with organic standards.

Organic Quality: Product produced according to standards in compliance or equivalent to the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards.

Parallel Production: Any production where the same operation is growing, breeding, handling or processing the same products in both a certified organic system and a non-certified or non-organic system. A situation with “organic” and “in conversion” production of the same product is also parallel production.

Primary Ecosystem: Primary ecosystem or habitat: Pristine and anthropogenously undisturbed ecosystems/habitats.

Processing: The operation of slaughtering, preparation, preserving and packaging of agricultural products and also modifications made to the labeling concerning the presentation of the organic production method.

Processing Aid: Any substance or material, not including apparatus or utensils, and not consumed as a food ingredient by itself, intentionally used in the processing of raw materials, products or its ingredients, to fulfill a certain technical purpose during treatment or processing and which may result in the non-intentional, but unavoidable presence of residues or derivatives in the final product.

Sanitize: To adequately treat produce or food-contact surfaces by a process that is effective in destroying or substantially reducing the numbers of vegetative cells of microorganisms of public health concern, and other undesirable microorganisms, but without adversely affecting the product or its safety for the consumer.

Split Production: Conventional, in conversion and/or organic production, breeding, handling or processing in the same operation.

Synthetic: Manufactured by chemical and industrial processes. May include products not found in nature, or simulation of products from natural sources (but not extracted from natural raw materials).

Standards: Specify how a product should be grown and processed to be regarded as organic.

1. Organic Ecosystems

1.1. Ecosystem Management and Biodiversity

Principles applied
Organic agriculture is based on living ecological systems and cycles. Organic Agriculture should attain ecological balance through the design of farming systems, establishment of interconnected habitats and maintenance of biodiversity.

The objective is to ensure the long-term management of an organic holding. To respect, maintain, improve and complete ecological cycles, while also encouraging biodiversity and protecting the quality of the landscape. Organic agriculture deliberately maintains and enhances nature; enhances diversity in plants, animals, and micro-organisms. Biodiversity increases the resilience of organic agriculture.

Standards must require that:

1.1.1. Biodiversity is maintained, and enhanced on the farm
1.1.2. Cultivation and/or husbandry actively promotes biological and agronomical diversity within the agricultural context.
1.1.3. The management system takes into account the surrounding environment including the natural landscape.
1.1.4. Habitat and native species be preserved and enhanced wherever possible.
1.1.5. Socially significant elements of the landscape such as historic features or sacred sites be preserved with the farming system.

Mandatory practices:

1.1.6. Identify measures to contribute to biodiversity on the farm.

Prohibited practices:

1.1.7. Clearing primary ecosystems.
1.1.8. Impinging upon (negatively impacting) designated protected areas.

1.2. Resource Management

Principles applied
Organic agriculture is based on the sustainable use of resources.
Organic agriculture attains ecological balance through the design of locally adapted farming systems.

The objective is to use materials and energy efficiently, in order to improve environmental quality and to conserve resources.

Standards must require that:

1.2.1. Crop production, livestock production, processing and handling systems shall reduce, reuse, or recycle residual materials.
1.2.2. Measures are employed to prevent land degradation, such as erosion and salinization.
1.2.3. Water use does not excessively exploit and deplete available water resources.
1.2.4. Measures are employed to prevent pollution, and otherwise preserve water quality.
1.2.5. Measures are taken to maintain and improve the living soil.

Mandatory practices

None specified

Prohibited practices
None specified

1.3. Collection of Wild Products

Principles applied
Organic management sustains and prevents degradation of natural biotic and abiotic resources.

The objective is ensure that the habitats, biodiversity, air quality, waterways and visual appearance of wild collection areas are protected and benefit from the organic management system; and that the wild collection system fits within the natural cycles and ecological balance of the area.

Standards must require that:

1.3.1. Operators are thoroughly familiar with the boundaries of the collection area, which is free from prohibited inputs.
1.3.2. Products are collected only from within the boundaries of the clearly defined wild collection area.
1.3.3. The collection area is not compromised by pollutants.
1.3.4. The habitat stability and biodiversity of the collection area is not endangered.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited Practices
None specified

2. Genetically Modified Organisms

Principles applied
Immunity, resilience and regeneration are key characteristics of organic production. Practitioners of organic agriculture can enhance efficiency and increase productivity, but this should be in a precautionary manner without risk to human health and well-being or that of the environment. Given the incomplete understanding of ecosystems and agriculture, care must be taken. Organic agriculture should prevent significant risks by adopting appropriate technologies and rejecting unpredictable ones, such as genetic engineering.

The objective is to prevent contamination of organic ecosystems and organic products with genetically modified organisms (GMO) or GMO derivates and to preserve the genetic integrity of varieties and traditional ecotypes.

Standards must require that

2.1. The deliberate use of genetically modified organisms (GMO) or their derivatives is prohibited in all stages of organic production and processing.

Mandatory practices

2.2. Inputs processing agents and ingredients are traced back at least one step in the biological chain to the direct source organism from which they are produced.

Prohibited practices

2.3. The use of GMOs and GMO derivatives or products containing a GMO or GMO derivative (organic production).

2.4. The use of ingredients, additives or processing aids that are GMOs or are derived from GMOs (processed products). The use of GMOs, GMO derivatives or products containing a GMO or GMO derivative in any non-organic production activity on a farm holding with split (including parallel) production.

3. General Requirements for Plant Production and Animal Husbandry

3.1. Conversion Requirements

Principles applied

Organic agriculture attains ecological balance through the design and management of sustainable farming systems.

The objective is to clearly identify when organic practices begin and how long they must be applied before the operation and products can be considered organic, taking into consideration the balance of the ecosystem and the skills of the operator.

Standards must require that:

3.1.1. A specified date or event is identified as the point at which conversion begins.

3.1.2. A set period of time is defined that must elapse between the start of conversion, i.e. when organic management begins, and the achievement of the organic status of the corresponding land and products.

3.1.3. The date at which a product may be considered as organic is clearly identified.

Mandatory practices

None specified

Prohibited practices

3.1.4. The use of prohibited practices and substances during conversion.

3.2. Conversion of Plant Production Systems

Principle applied

Organic crop production aims to attain ecological balance.

The objective is to ensure that a suitable conversion period is set during which contaminants are reduced, and through organic management healthy soils and sustainable ecosystems are established.

Standards must require that:

3.2.1. The length of the conversion period is sufficient for improving soil fertility and reestablishing ecosystem balance.

3.2.2. The date at which a harvested crop may be considered as organic is clearly defined. Annual and perennial crops need to be handled separately.

3.2.3. The length of time that must elapse between the application of a prohibited substance or practice and being able to achieve organic status is clearly defined.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited practices
3.2.4. The use of prohibited practices and substances during conversion.

3.3. Conversion of Animal Production Systems

Principles applied
Organic animal husbandry aims at attaining a balanced farm ecosystem while ensuring the health and well-being of individual animals.

The objective is to ensure that organic production practices are applied to the entire life cycle of the animals with no routine breaks in the organic management.

Standards must require that:
3.3.1. Animals are raised organically from birth, or from early ages subject to a conversion requirement.
3.3.2. Conversion periods appropriate for each species and production type are clearly defined.
3.3.3. The conditions for simultaneous conversion of land and animals are clearly defined.
3.3.4. . There is a conversion period for the entire operation, including land.
3.3.5. In apiculture the conversion period of a bee colony is based on the time necessary for the replacement of wax.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited practices
3.3.6. Use of prohibited practices and substances during conversion.

3.4. Conversion of Organic Aquaculture

Principles applied
Organic aquaculture aims at attaining a balanced ecosystem that ensures the health and well-being of individual animals.

The objective is to convert aquacultural systems in a manner that takes into account the diversity of the environment, species and production methods.

Standards must require that:
3.4.1. All relevant requirements of chapter 3, 4 and 5 are complied with.
3.4.2. Conversion requirements take into account environmental factors and the past use of the site with respect to waste, sediments, water quality and contamination sources.
3.4.3. The conversion period of the production unit must be at least one life cycle of the farmed organism or one year, whichever is shorter.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited practices
None specified

3.5. Split Production and Parallel Production

Principles applied
Organic agriculture is managed in a precautionary and responsible manner.

The objective is conversion of the whole farm over time; and to guarantee the integrity of the organic production and products on holdings with split or parallel production.

Standards must require that:

3.5.1. The integrity of the organic farm unit must not be compromised by the management of the conventional unit.

3.5.2. Holdings with split or parallel production ensure the conventional and organic parts and products are completely, clearly and continuously separated.

Mandatory practices

3.5.3. Prohibited inputs must be stored separately from those used for organic production.

Prohibited practices
None specified

3.6. Maintenance of Organic Management

Principles applied
Organic agriculture works with living ecological systems and cycles, while emulating and sustaining them.

The objective is to maintain the ongoing organic system.

Standards must require that:

3.6.1. A production system does not rely upon switching between organic and conventional management.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited practices
None specified

3.7. Avoiding Contamination

Principle applied
Organic agriculture is managed in a precautionary and responsible manner.

The objective is to ensure that organic production is conducted in a precautionary manner that seeks to avoid contamination of the environment and the products it produces.

Standards must require that:

3.7.1. Precautionary measures are taken to avoid contamination.

3.7.2. Where there is reasonable suspicion of contamination, the relevant products are analyzed and the source of the contamination sought.

3.7.3. Restrictions are set on the use of synthetic coverings, mulches; taking into consideration the environmental impacts.

Mandatory practices

3.7.4. All mulches and coverings must be biodegradable or recyclable.

Prohibited practices

None specified

4. Crop Production

4.1. Seed and Propagation Material

Principle applied

Organic management sustains production at all crop stages.

The objective is to ensure that organic practices are implemented along the entire production chain from propagation to final product including the production of seed and propagation materials.

Standards must require that:

4.1.1. When available, seed and plant propagation material for annual crops comes from plants that have been under organic management for at least one generation.

4.1.2. When available, seed and plant propagation material for perennial crops comes from plants that have been raised organically for at least one year.

4.1.3. Treatment of seed and propagation material is restricted to substances listed on the standard setting body's list of permitted substances.

4.1.4. Seedlings are from organic production.

Mandatory practices

None specified

Prohibited practices

None specified

4.2. Soil Conservation and Crop Rotation

Principle applied

Organic crop production sustains and enhances the health of the soil and ecosystem; healthy soils produce healthy crops that foster the health of animals and people.

The objective is to practice crop rotation, soil management and suitable conservation techniques that improve the health and condition of the soil and crops, and avoids the use of fertilizers and pesticides.

Standards must require that:

4.2.1. A suitable crop rotation is included as an integral part of the management system of the holding.

4.2.2. Cover crops, plant-based ground cover are used where appropriate in the organic production system.

4.2.3. The management system includes means of conserving or improving soil fertility and structure.

4.2.4. The management system prevents erosion and depletion of soil nutrients.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited practices
None specified

4.3. Fertilization

Principle applied
Organic crop production systems enrich the living soil, creating an environment that can support the production of healthy, productive crops.

The objective is to practice a crop management system that seeks to nourish plants primarily through the soil ecosystem, enhances the natural fertility of the soil and avoids the excessive use of fertilizers.

Standards must require that:

4.3.1. The management system maintains and enhances soil fertility.
4.3.2. The management system provides an environment for healthy growing plants that produce yields appropriate for the crop and region.
4.3.3. Contamination of the environment is avoided.
4.3.4. The fertility program of a holding is based on the enhancement of the soil-ecosystem by the use of biodegradable material, green manure and nitrogen fixation from plants; and that mineral fertilizers are only used as a supplement.
4.3.5. The use of fertilizing agents must be site adapted and correspond to the need of the plants.
4.3.6. All substances used must be on the standards setting body's list of permitted substances.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited practices

4.3.7. The use of sodium (Chilean) nitrate.
4.3.8. Hydroponics

4.4. Pest-, Disease-, Weed-, and Growth Management

Principle applied
Organic crop production sustains and enhances the health of ecosystems and all living matter, from the smallest organisms found in the soil to human beings.

The objective is to improve and sustain the health of crops while maintaining productivity and the integrity of the agro-ecosystem.

Standards must require that:

4.4.1. Natural resistance of the crops is enhanced by a combination of interrelated positive processes and mechanisms capable of accounting for the management of significant pests, diseases, and weeds. These include but are not limited to a site- and crop adapted fertility and soil cultivation program, choice of appropriate varieties, the enhancement of functional biodiversity; and in case additional measures are required, a restricted use of allowed crop protectants and growth regulators.
4.4.2. All active substances used must be on the standards setting body's list of permitted substances.

4.4.3. Co-formulants in formulated products must not be carcinogens, mutagens, teratogens or neurotoxins.

4.4.4. Soil sterilization is restricted to methods that do not damage the soil's recovery capacity.

Mandatory practices
None specified.

Prohibited practices
None specified

4.5. Aquatic Plants

Principles applied
The health of aquatic plants and their communities cannot be separated from the health of the ecosystem.

The objective is to produce and harvest aquatic plants without negatively impacting the production area or surrounding areas.

Standards must require that:

4.5.1. The harvest of aquatic plants does not disrupt the ecosystem, and does not cause any degradation of the production area or the surrounding aquatic and terrestrial environment.

Mandatory practices
None specified

Prohibited practices
None specified

5. Animal Husbandry

5.1. Animal Health and Welfare

Principles applied
Organic animal husbandry is based on the harmonious relationship between land, plants and animals. It provides animals with conditions and opportunities of life that meet their physiological needs and are in accordance with their natural and social behavior and well-being.

The objective is to produce organic animal products while ensuring that animals are treated respectfully their health and welfare are assured and that environment is preserved.

Standards must require that:

5.1.1. Health care practices and medications that may be used in organic production are clearly defined.

5.1.2. Vaccinations are allowed only for known endemic disease that are likely to be a problem or when legally required.

5.1.3. Medical treatment considered necessary for the welfare of an animal is never withheld in order to maintain the organic status of the animal. Animals must not be allowed to suffer for lack of treatment.

5.1.4. The use of antibiotic and other allopathic medication is strictly limited to the treatment of illnesses and injuries.