

Use of vaccinations and other veterinary treatments in organic livestock farming

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Farmers who wish to certify their farm's produce as 'organic' must in the first instance meet the requirements of the National Standard for Organic and Bio-dynamic Produce. The National Standard outlines the minimum production and processing standards Australian products must comply with in order to be exported as 'organic'.

In order to be certified as organic, the farm and the production methods used must be verified as meeting organic standards through an accredited organic certification organisation.

Organic certification organisations have their own standards and these, along with the certifier's administrative arrangements, are accredited by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) for compliance with the National Standard.

Organic standards and livestock welfare

Animal welfare is a primary concern within organic livestock production systems.

Whilst organic standards state that the adoption of good management practices is the preferred method to maintain livestock health in an organic system, they also recognise that sometimes this alone is insufficient to guard against diseases and illness.

Organic standards outline specific requirements for the use of vaccines and other conventional livestock treatments.

Organic standards and use of vaccinations

Organic standards classify the use of vaccines as 'restricted'. This means that their routine use is discouraged and is only permitted when it can be

demonstrated by the organic farmer that a specific disease is endemic in the region or on the organic farm, or where their use is required by law, or in proven cases, where such a disease cannot be effectively controlled by other management practices.

Organic certifiers require written verification from a veterinarian to confirm the presence or threat of disease infection prior to approving the application of the treatment. In addition, the vaccines must not contain genetically modified ingredients or by-products.

The use of vaccines under these circumstances will not prejudice certification and does not require quarantine procedures. Full records of all treatments must be kept.

Use of non-permitted veterinary treatments

Other conditions apply to the use of veterinary treatments (such as drugs and antibiotics) or other treatments not listed or not permitted for use under organic standards.

Prohibited treatment use is only acceptable in cases of emergency; however organic standards stress that such treatments (including medicines) should not be withheld where animal welfare concerns exist.

If parasiticides and/or antibiotics are required, organic standards specify a number of management conditions which must be applied to treated livestock.

Treated stock must be excluded for a period of time from certified organic land and separated from non-treated organic stock. This means containing those livestock to be treated in a defined quarantine area during and following treatment for a period which is equivalent to three times the legal withholding period of the substance in question, or a minimum of



three weeks, whichever is longer. Following this quarantine period, treated stock are permitted to mingle with organic (non-treated) stock and range on certified organic land, provided they are clearly identifiable from the organic stock as well as traceable through farm records.

If organic livestock are treated with parasiticides and/or antibiotics a period of de-certification follows and the livestock and/or their products cannot be sold as 'certified organic'.

The meat or eggs from treated livestock can never be sold as 'certified organic'. The offspring of treated livestock, however, may attain organic certification status for meat or eggs if managed in accordance with organic standards. This may occur provided the offspring's parent is managed in accordance with organic standards from the last trimester of pregnancy onwards, including throughout the lactation period. This means that any treatment applied to a breeder must occur prior to the start of the last trimester of pregnancy and full organic management must be sustained from this point onwards in order for the offspring's meat or egg products to be certified as organic.

Wool regains its certified organic status 18 months following treatment and milk 180 days following treatment.

Organic standards and use of anaesthetics

The use of anaesthetics does not result in the loss of certification status, but does require the treated livestock to be withheld from sale or killing for a period three times the legal withholding period of the substance in question or a minimum of three weeks, whichever is longer.

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