



## Guidelines No 9 LIVESTOCK FARMING : POULTRY

TS09(NOP)v01en – January 2025

According to the USDA National Organic Program (NOP)



This document does not supersede current USDA Regulations. ECOCERT Guidelines provide a summary of the main NOP organic production requirements. For full detailed information on NOP organic production, please refer to and download NOP Regulation updates on USDA website: [www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/NOP](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/NOP)



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32600 L'Isle Jourdain

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## INTRODUCTION



This document provides a summary of the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) requirements for the organic production of poultry. It is designed as a practical reference and does not replace the official NOP regulations.

### Key points:

- These guidelines cover poultry used for meat, eggs, or other agricultural products.
- While other animals such as mammals, domesticated game, or bees may also be certified organic they are not the focus of this document.

For complete certification requirements, you may refer to **ECOCERT Guidelines n°1, TS01 NOP Certification process (part II and IV)**. The Organic System Plan (OSP) must detail how the NOP requirements are met.

## 1 CATEGORICALLY PROHIBITED PRACTICES (§205.105)

The following practices are **strictly prohibited** under NOP organic standards:

- **Excluded methods** (genetic modification): Any method that genetically modifies organisms (except for approved vaccines when applicable).
- **Cloning.**
- **Ionizing Radiation:** Use of ionizing radiation to preserve food or inputs.
- **Sewage Sludge:** Application of sewage sludge to land or crops.

## 2 ORIGIN OF LIVESTOCK (§205.236)

### A. GENERAL RULES

Poultry must be under continuous organic management **beginning no later than the second day of life**.

The producer must maintain records sufficient to keep track of the identity of all organically managed animals, and edible and non-edible animal products produced on the operation.



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## B. EXCEPTIONS (use of non-organic animals)

**Non-organic chicks under 2-days old** may be introduced into an organic operation (for egg or slaughter production). They must be under continuous organic management once introduced in the operation.

**Non-organic chicks over 2 days old may not be converted to organic poultry stock.**

## C. PROHIBITED PRACTICES

Livestock, which are removed from an organic operation and then non-organically managed, lose their organic status permanently, products from these animals may no longer be certified as organic.

# 3 LIVESTOCK FEED (§205.237)

## A. GENERAL RULES

The agricultural products of the feed ration (including pasture and forage) must be organically produced and certified.

Synthetic substances allowed under § 205.603 (vitamins, trace minerals, DL Methionine) and non-synthetic substances other than those listed in § 205.604 may be used as feed additives and feed supplements; **however, additives and/or supplements of agricultural origin must be organic.**

## B. PROHIBITED FEED MATERIALS

The following are **strictly prohibited** in organic livestock feed:

- Animal drugs, including hormones, to promote growth
- Feed supplements and additives exceeding nutritional needs
- Plastic pellets for roughage
- Feed formulas containing urea or manure
- Feed made from mammalian or poultry slaughter by-products
- Feed or forage with added antibiotics or ionophores

## C. FEED RECORDS



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Livestock producers shall maintain **records** with the description of the total feed ration for each type and class of animal as follows:

- All feed produced on-farm
- All feed purchased from off-farm sources
- The percentage of each feed type in the total ration
- A complete list of all feed supplements and additives used.

## 4 LIVESTOCK HEALTH CARE PRACTICES (§205.238)

### A. DISEASE PREVENTION (Preventive practices)

To **minimize disease and promote animal welfare**, producers must:

- Select breeds that are disease and parasite-resistant and suited to the regional environment.
- Provide healthy, balanced feed rations.
- Maintain appropriate housing, pasture and living conditions, and sanitation practices.
- Implement a parasite control plan, including pasture management, fecal monitoring, and emergency measures in the event of parasite outbreak.
- Allow conditions for exercise, movement, and stress reduction.
- Administration vaccines and other veterinary biologics when necessary.
- Use surgical procedures only to treat illness or injury, minimizing pain and stress.
- Monitoring, appropriate treatment and prevention of lameness.
- Physical alterations are permitted for identification purpose or the safety of the animals. They must be performed at a young age and by qualified personnel in a manner that minimizes pain and stress to the animal.

#### Prohibited practices:

- De-beaking, de-snooding, caponization, dubbing, toe clipping of chickens, toe clipping of turkeys unless with infra-red at hatchery,
- Beak trimming after 10 days of age.

### B. VETERINARY TREATMENT



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When preventive practices and veterinary biologics are inadequate to prevent sickness, **synthetic medication** allowed under **§205.603** can only be used to treat illness and must adhere to any required withdrawal periods.

### C. PROHIBITED PRACTICES

- ➊ Use of **antibiotics** or synthetic substances not allowed under §205.603 and non-synthetic substances listed in § 205.604 (e.g. strychnine).
- ➋ Administration of synthetic medication (except for vaccines) in the absence of illness (as a preventive action) or not to alleviate pain and suffering.
- ➌ Use of growth, production or reproductive hormones, except as permitted under § 205.603.
- ➍ Withholding medical treatment from a sick animal to maintain organic status.
- ➎ Withholding individual treatment to minimize pain and suffering for injured, disease or sick animals, including euthanasia where necessary.
- ➏ Induced molting practices

➔ Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and their products cannot be sold or represented as organic.

➔ Treatment of sick and injured animals shall be recorded in animal health records.

### D. EUTHANASIA

For sick or injured animal suffering from irreversible disease or injury, the producer must have written plans for prompt and humane euthanasia, including examination to ensure death of the animals.

The following methods of euthanasia are not permitted: suffocation; manual blow to the head by blunt instrument or manual blunt force trauma and the use of equipment that crushes the neck, including killing pliers or Burdizzo clamps.

## 5 AVIAN LIVING CONDITIONS (§205.241)

### A. GENERAL RULES



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- **Producers must establish and maintain living conditions that support the health and natural behavior of birds.**
- Year-round access for all birds (suitable to the stage of life, the climate, and the environment) must include:
  - ➔ Outdoor access, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air, direct sunlight, clean water for drinking, materials for dust bathing, and adequate space to escape aggressive behaviors suitable to the species.
- **Continuous total confinement of any poultry indoors is prohibited**

## B. INDOOR SPACE REQUIREMENTS

- **Housing** must allow birds to move freely, stretch both wings simultaneously, stand normally and engage in natural behaviors
- **Ammonia levels** must be monitored at least every week by taking measures at the height of birds' heads. Ammonia levels must be maintained below 20 ppm. Immediate action required if levels exceed this threshold. Ammonia levels cannot exceed 25 ppm.
- **Artificial lighting:**

Lighting Aspect	Requirement
Maximum light duration	16 hours of continuous light per 24-hour day
Minimum rest period (darkness)	8 continuous hours
Transition to darkness	Light intensity must decrease gradually
Prohibited practices	Manipulation of light spectrum to increase feed intake or growth rate

- **Exit areas:**
  - Poultry houses must have at least 1 linear foot (0,3 m) of exit area per 360 birds.
  - Exit areas must be evenly distributed and sized to ensure that all birds can access the outdoors
  - Egg producers must take steps to prevent stray poultry, wild birds, cats and other animals from entering poultry houses
- **Perch Requirements for layers (*Gallus gallus*):**
  - ➔ 6 inches/bird minimum (15,2 cm) for all housing types
  - ➔ All layers must be able to perch at the same time, except in aviary housing.
  - ➔ Aviary housing requires 6 inches for 55% of the flock (approximately 3.3 inches/bird overall).



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- **Indoor space** must include areas that allow for **scratching** and **dust bathing**, except for mobile housing (for which producers may meet the requirement by providing scratch and dust bathing areas outside):

- ➔ Litter or bedding such as wood shavings or straw must be provided (substances consumed by animals must be organic) and maintained in a dry condition.
- ➔ Manure excreted by birds in a poultry house alone, without additional litter material, is not sufficient to meet the requirement.
- ➔ Non mobile houses with slatted/mesh floors must provide at least 15% solid flooring with sufficient litter for scratching and dust bathing without crowding.

- **Indoor stocking density** requirements:

Housing Type	Maximum Weight (lbs/sq ft)	Minimum Area (sq ft/bird)
<b>Layers (<i>Gallus gallus</i>)</b>		
Mobile housing	4.5	1.5
Aviary Housing	4.5	1.5
Slatted/Mesh Floor Housing	3.75	1.8
Floor litter housing	3.0	2.2
Other Housing	2.25	3.0
<b>Pullets (<i>Gallus gallus</i>)</b>		
Any Housing	3.0	1.7
<b>Broilers (<i>Gallus gallus</i>)</b>		
Any Housing	5.0	2.0

➔ Note: The total area of the indoor space is calculated by including all flat areas in a house, excluding nest boxes and elevated round perches.

➔ Indoor space may include enclosed porches and lean-to type structures (e.g. screened in, roofed) provided that the birds always have access to the space, including during temporary confinement events.

## C. OUTDOOR SPACE REQUIREMENTS

- Access to outdoor space must be designed to promote and encourage **daily outdoor** access for all birds at an early age.
- At least **75%** of outdoor space must be **soil** that includes vegetative cover that allows birds to engage in natural behaviors such as foraging, pecking and scratching, it shall be maintained in a manner that does not provide harborage for rodents and other pests. The amount of vegetation depends on the season, climate, geography and must be appropriate for the species of poultry and stage of production.
- **Shade** may be provided by structures, trees or other objects in the outdoor area



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➤ **Minimum outdoor space:**

Bird Type	Maximum Weight (lbs/sq ft)	Minimum Area (sq ft/bird)
Layer ( <i>Gallus gallus</i> )	2.25	3.0
Pullets ( <i>Gallus gallus</i> )	3.0	1.7
Broilers ( <i>Gallus gallus</i> )	5.0	2.0

- An unenclosed roofed area (having a roof but no walls to contain birds) can be counted as **outdoor space** when this area allows birds to freely move between the roofed area and other outdoor spaces.

## D.TEMPORARY CONFINEMENT OF BIRDS INDOOR

Birds may be *temporarily* (\*) denied access to the outdoors and be confined under the following **exceptional circumstances**:

- **Inclement weather**, including air temperature under 32°F (0°C) or above 90°F (32°C)
- **Specific life stage** [A discrete time in an animal's life which requires specific management practices different than during other periods], including:
  - The first 4 weeks of life for broilers (*Gallus gallus*)
  - The first 16 weeks of life for pullets (*Gallus gallus*)
  - Until fully feathered for bird species other than *Gallus gallus*
- **Health, safety or well-being risks**
- **Risk to soil or water quality** (e.g. after a very heavy rainfall to help minimize soil erosion and runoff)
- **Preventive healthcare procedures or for the treatment of illness or injury.** Egg laying is not considered an illness for confinement purpose.
- **Sorting or shipping animals and poultry sales** [animals shall be maintained under continuous organic management, including organic feed during the allowed confinement]
- **To train pullets to lay eggs in nest boxes** during a period that must not exceed 5 weeks over the life of the bird.
- **Participation in a fair** or other demonstration for youth projects, confinement is possible up to one week prior to the event, through the event and up to 24 hours returning to the holding. During the confinement, birds must be maintained under continuous organic management, notably be organically fed.

(\*) *temporary and temporarily*: occurring for a limited time only (e.g. overnight, throughout a storm, during a period of illness), not permanent or lasting.



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Producers must document confinement. Records should include the reason, duration of the confinement, and the flocks affected by confinement.

## E. MANAGEMENT OF MANURE

Producers must **manage manure** in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil or water by plant nutrients, heavy metals or pathogenic organisms and shall **optimize recycling of nutrients**.

# 6 TRANSPORT AND SLAUGHTER (§205.242)

## A. TRANSPORTATION

- **Identification and traceability:** Animals must be clearly identified and traceable during transportation.
- **Fitness for Transport:**
  - Only **fit animals** may be transported. Seriously crippled and non-ambulatory animals must not be transported for sale or slaughter. Such animals may be medically treated or euthanized.
  - Adequate and season-appropriate ventilation is required during transport to protect animals against cold and heat stress.
- **Extended Transport (>8 hours):**

**Organic management** and animal welfare must be maintained (e.g. arrangement for water and organic feed).

  - Emergency plans must address possible animal welfare problems that might occur during transport.

## B. SLAUGHTER

Certified producers and handlers who slaughter organic poultry (chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, guineas, ratites, squabs,...) must comply with the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA). Notably poultry shall be slaughtered in accordance with good commercial practices in a manner that will result in thorough bleeding of the carcasses and ensure that breathing has stopped prior to scalding.

Operators that are exempt from or not covered by the requirements of the PPIA must ensure that:

- No lame birds may be shackled, hung, or carried by their legs.



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- All birds shackled on a chain or automated system must be stunned prior to exsanguination unless exempted for religious slaughter.
- All birds must be irreversibly insensible prior to being placed in the scalding tank.

## 7 POST-HARVEST HANDLING (§205.270 – §205.272)

Handling (e.g. slaughtering, eviscerating and cutting) and storage of organic animal products must be done in a manner that **avoids commingling** with nonorganic products and protects organic products from contact with prohibited substances. Special care must be taken not to use or re-use (without thorough cleaning) packing materials that have been in contact with substances which might compromise the integrity of organic products.

## 8 ALLOWED AND PROHIBITED SUBSTANCES USED IN THE NOP (§205.603 – §205.604)

All inputs used by the operation must comply with the standards for agricultural practices summarized above and as detailed on the National List. The List §205.600 to §205.606 are essentially divided into two categories of materials: synthetic and non-synthetic (natural).

Section 205.603 lists allowed synthetic materials for use in organic livestock operations, some of these materials have special annotations or restrictions on their use. Examples: vitamins, trace minerals, DL Methionine. Other synthetic materials than the ones mentioned here are not allowed.

Section 205.604 is a short list of prohibited natural materials for use in organic livestock production. Other natural materials are generally allowed.

## 9 DEFINITIONS (§205.2)

**Animal drug:** an article intended for use in the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment or prevention of disease in livestock and article intended to affect the structure of any function of the body of animals, including any drug intended for use in livestock feed but not including such livestock feed.

**Beak trimming:** The removal of not more than one-quarter to one-third of the upper



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beak or the removal of one-quarter to one-third of both the upper and lower beaks of a bird in order to control injurious pecking and cannibalism.

**Breeder stock:** Female livestock whose offspring may be incorporated into an organic operation at the time of their birth

**Caponization:** Castration of chickens, turkeys, pheasants, and other avian species.

**De-beaking:** The removal of more than one-third of the upper beak or removal of more than one-third of both the upper and lower beaks of a bird.

**De-snooding:** The removal of the turkey snood (a fleshy protuberance on the forehead of male turkeys).

**Dubbing:** The removal of poultry combs and wattles

**Feed :** Edible materials which are consumed by livestock for their nutritional value. Feed may be concentrates (grains) or roughages (hay, silage, fodder). The term, "feed," encompasses all agricultural commodities, including pasture ingested by livestock for nutritional purposes.

**Feed additive:** A substance added to feed in micro quantities to fulfill a specific nutritional need, i.e., essential nutrients in the form of amino acids, vitamins, and minerals.

**Feed supplement:** A combination of feed nutrients added to livestock feed to improve the nutrient balance or performance of the total ration and intended to be:

- Diluted with other feeds when fed to livestock
- Offered free choice with other parts of the ration if separately available; or
- Further diluted and mixed to produce a complete feed.

**Feedlot:** a dry lot (fenced area that may be covered with concrete, but that has little or no vegetative cover) for the controlled feeding of livestock

**Forage:** Vegetative material in a fresh, dried, or ensiled state (pasture, hay, or silage), which is fed to livestock.

**Indoors or indoor space:** The space inside of an enclosed building or housing structure available to livestock. Indoor space for avian species includes, but is not limited to:

- **Mobile housing.** A mobile structure for avian species with solid or perforated flooring that is moved regularly and allows birds to continuously access areas outside the structure during daytime hours
- **Aviary housing.** A fixed structure for avian species that has multiple tiers or levels
- **Slatted/mesh floor housing.** A fixed structure for avian species that has both: a slatted floor where perches, feed, and water are provided over a pit or belt for manure collection; and litter covering the remaining solid floor



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- **Floor litter housing.** A fixed structure for avian species that has absorbent litter covering the entire floor.

**Induced molting:** Molting that is artificially initiated (feed restriction, severe light manipulation, or other management practices used to rejuvenate egg production)

**Outdoors or outdoor space:** Any area outside an enclosed building or enclosed housing structure. Enclosed housing structures with open sides (e.g., open-sided freestall barns) are not to be considered outdoors or outdoor space. Outdoor space for avian species includes, but is not limited to:

- Pasture pens (avian). Floorless pens, with full or partial roofing, that are moved regularly, provide direct access to soil and vegetation, and allow birds to express natural behaviors.
- Shade structures that are not enclosed.

**Non-ambulatory disabled livestock:** Livestock that cannot rise from a recumbent position or that cannot walk, including, but not limited to, those with broken appendages, severed tendons or ligaments, nerve paralysis, fractured vertebral column, or metabolic conditions.

**Pasture:** Land used for livestock grazing that is managed to provide feed value and maintain or improve soil, water, and vegetative resources.

**Perch:** A rod- or branch-type structure above the floor or ground that accommodates roosting and allows birds to utilize vertical space.

**Pullets:** Female chickens or other avian species being raised for egg production that have not yet started to lay eggs.

**Religious (or ritual) slaughter:** Slaughtering in accordance with the ritual requirements of any religious faith that prescribes a method of slaughter whereby the animal suffers loss of consciousness by anemia of the brain caused by the simultaneous and instantaneous severance of the carotid arteries with a sharp instrument and handling in connection with such slaughtering.

**Shelter:** Structures such as barns, sheds, or windbreaks; or natural areas such as woods, tree lines, large hedge rows, or geographic land features, that are designed or selected to provide physical protection or housing to all animals.

**Slaughter stock:** Any animal that is intended to be slaughtered for consumption by humans or other animals

**Stocking density:** The liveweight or number of animals on a given area or unit of land.

**Toe clipping:** The removal of the nail and distal joint of the back two toes of a bird



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## 10 RESOURCES

**Prior to using commercial inputs, operators must ensure they are NOP compliant.**

**Relevant detailed information may be provided to ECOCERT in order to check all active and non-active ingredients are approved.**

For further information on the NOP, please visit the USDA/NOP homepage  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop>

Please check NOP input compliance on the OMRI homepage [www.omri.org](http://www.omri.org) (a Commercial Product list is available, the Generic Materials list is made available upon request).

For further information on ECOCERT, please visit [www.ecocert.com](http://www.ecocert.com) (certification, certified inputs and other activities)

Please contact your ECOCERT Certification Officer for further query.



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