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Respectful treatment of animals is a central tenet of Organic Valley's philosophy. One of the mission statement's 7 goals is to "promote a respect for the diversity, dignity, and interdependence of human, animal, plant, soil, and global life." In furtherance of this goal, Organic Valley has developed and mandated humane treatment standards that exceed those of the USDA's organic requirements.

Our mission statement defines organic as a "philosophy and system of production that mirrors the natural laws of living organisms with an emphasis on the interdependence of all life." In practice, this means that we follow the precautionary principle: we oppose both cloning and injecting bovine growth hormone, which harm animals; the foundation of all our livestock production is to minimize illness by providing low-stress environments, promoting robust immune systems, practicing preventive medicine, and using natural remedies as needed. Our farmer members can rely on some of the nation's foremost holistic animal husbandry experts who are affiliated with the cooperative.

Our farmers provide living conditions that permit their livestock to carry out their natural behaviors as much as possible. This includes providing a healthy environment, fresh air, access to the outdoors, clean water, 100% organic feed, and clean, dry, roomful bedding. Organic Valley animals are raised on small to mid-size family farms. Our grazing standard sets an upper limit on farm size, as well as a limit on the number of animals per acre in order to create a healthy, sustainable system. As part of maintaining animal health, Organic Valley and Organic Prairie farmers do not "push" their animals. For example, a dairy farmer may be satisfied with 50 pounds of milk per day from a cow, rather than the 70 pounds per day expected by a conventional farmer, because this reduces the stress on the animals and increases longevity.

Our pasturing requirements are more stringent than the USDA's. We require farmers to pasture their cattle for as much of the year as a region's seasonal climate permits, providing organic grain as a supplement, when needed, to grass or dry forages. The amount of time depends on location, season, weather, and farmers' individual feeding programs. Most of our farmers are in the northern USA, where pasture is available for approximately half of the year.

Confinement operations are prohibited in our cooperative. Animals cannot be forced to live on concrete. Living quarters must allow enough space for animals to get up, lay down, groom, and interact with other animals. Inhumane practices like tail docking, white veal production, and debeaking are prohibited.

Organically raised hogs must have access to the outdoors, and, for sows, farrowing crates and housing with wire or slatted floors are prohibited throughout the animals' lifetime.

Female calves are very valuable and are raised as herd replacements or sold to other dairies. Our farmers can raise male calves as steers for the organic meat market or they can sell them to other farmers that specialize in beef. Organic farmers pay a higher price for organically raised calves, since they will receive a higher price for the meat at the end of the process. We encourage our farmers to go through the Organic Prairie meat program to raise their cattle for organic meat production.

Organic hens are never caged, with natural sunlight in the hen house, no forced molting, and free access to the outdoors, weather permitting. Shelter must allow 1.75 square feet of floor space per hen, and pasture must allow 5 square feet of space per hen.

Organic Prairie works exclusively with processing (slaughter) plant partners that are certified for organic processing and federally inspected. Most importantly, all our slaughter plants undergo an annual rigorous third party Animal Welfare audit, which audits to measurable standards that are over and above USDA-FSIS requirements. This third party animal welfare audit ensures that the animals are handled humanely, and that their last day is as painless and stress-free as possible.

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