

Fact Sheet:

Organic Poultry and Egg Production



Why raise organic poultry?

Organic poultry production emphasizes animal welfare, organic feed, and antibiotic-free management. The demand for organic chicken and eggs continues to rise, making it a profitable option for producers. Organic poultry farmers benefit from premium pricing, growing consumer demand, and improved flock health through sustainable management practices.

Requirements for organic poultry production

- ✓ **Origin of poultry.** Chicks must be under continuous organic management beginning no later than the second day of life.
- ✓ **Organic feed.** Poultry must consume only certified organic, non-GMO (genetically modified organism) feed with no synthetic amino acids.
- ✓ **Outdoor access.** Birds must have access to the outdoors, fresh air, and sunlight. Outdoor areas should include vegetation and encourage natural behaviors.
- ✓ **Space requirements.** Adequate space must be provided for dust bathing, perching, and other natural behaviors. Stocking densities should support bird welfare and prevent stress-induced behaviors.
- ✓ **Prohibited treatments.** No antibiotics, synthetic hormones, or growth promotants are allowed. If a bird requires antibiotics for health reasons, it must be removed from the organic program.
- ✓ **Vaccination and disease prevention.** Some vaccinations are permitted in organic poultry to prevent common diseases. Farmers must maintain records and use organic-compliant vaccines. Always check with your certification agency before administering any product to your livestock. Disease prevention should be managed through strong biosecurity practices, proper nutrition, and low-stress environments.

Housing considerations

- **Natural light and ventilation.** Housing systems must provide sufficient ventilation and natural light to support bird health and welfare.
- **Space requirements.** Birds must be allowed to engage in natural behaviors such as dust bathing, perching, and foraging.
- **Enrichment activities.** Organic poultry farmers should provide natural enrichment, such as straw bales, perches, and outdoor foraging areas, to encourage natural behaviors and reduce stress.
- **Litter management.** Clean, dry bedding must be provided and maintained to prevent disease outbreaks.

Biosecurity and flock health management

- **Prevent disease introduction.** Implement strict sanitation, low-stress handling, and regular health monitoring to prevent disease outbreaks.
- **Rodent and pest control.** Prevent infestations using non-synthetic methods such as traps, biological controls, and environmental management.
- **Quarantine for new birds.** Any new flock additions should be quarantined before integrating with the main flock.
- **Manure management.** Poultry manure should be composted or applied to fields in compliance with organic regulations to prevent contamination.

Transitioning poultry and egg production



Non-organic hens cannot be transitioned.
Only poultry raised under organic management from day one can produce organic-certified eggs or meat.



Chick brooding requirements.
Chicks must be raised in conditions that support welfare, including access to clean water, proper nutrition, and appropriate heat sources without synthetic heat lamps or chemicals.



Molting considerations.
Forced molting through starvation is prohibited under organic standards.



Market and financial support for organic poultry

- U.S. Department of Agriculture Organic Poultry Standards
- Organic poultry cooperatives and buyer contracts
- Natural Resources Conservation Services Environmental Quality Incentives Program grants for pasture improvements
- Farm-to-table and direct sales opportunities for organic poultry and eggs

For comprehensive guidelines, refer to the USDA's "Guidelines for Organic Certification of Poultry."

