

**Report:**  
**Thought for the day; Eat more pasture - do less work**  
**Access to Pasture Recommended Standards**

*August 13, 2007*

*Report from the Federation of Organic Dairy Farmers' (FOOD Farmers) Ad Hoc Committee recommending pasture standards and clarifying the measurement of pasture consumption. The committee was chaired by Kevin Brussell and included Kathy Soder, ARS; Kathie Arnold, NODPA Policy Committee; Arden Nelson, WODPA Vice President; Lisa McCrory, Grazing Consultant and NODPA News & Web Editor; Jim Gardiner, past NODPA Board Member, and Dr. Juan Velez, Aurora Organic Dairy. Administrative support provided by Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director.*

1. Organic dairy livestock over 6 months of age must graze on pasture during the months of the year when pasture can provide edible forage.
2. The grazed feed must provide significant intake for all milking-age organic dairy cows. At a minimum, an average of 30% of the dry matter intake each year must come from grazed pasture during the region's growing season, which will be no less than 120 days per year.
3. Temporary exemption from pasture may be allowed because of:
  - a. Conditions under which the health, safety, or well-being of the animal could be jeopardized, including to restore the health of an individual animal or to prevent the spread of disease from an infected animal to other animals.
  - b. Short term inclement weather.
  - c. Temporary conditions which pose a risk to soil and water quality.
  - d. In no case will temporary confinement and exemption from this pasture standard be allowed as a continuous production system.

The consensus of the group was that the estimation of the consumption of dry matter from grazed pasture should be made looking at the *average dry matter intake for the lactating herd each year from grazing*. The following is to try to answer some of the questions and concerns that have been raised, providing guidance for the certifier and producer in how they might measure the consumption of dry matter from grazing.

1. Will a producer get de-certified with one year at 25% DM consumption?
  - a. The measurements can not be that precise and are an accumulation of many different calculations including: pasture logs; daily record of TMR provided; tracking refused TMR; weather; time of calving.
  - b. Every farm is different and precipitation may vary greatly over short distances
  - c. The whole farm plan should be geared to a goal of easily meeting the 30% minimum with sufficient margin for usual weather variances;
  - d. As with other situations within the organic certification, the inspector will be looking at many different aspects of production and management to assess the reasonableness of the farm achieving an average minimum of 30%, which will determine the level of warning and censure for a one year below an average minimum of 30%.
2. Would there be any situation where an irrigated pasture in an arid climate be allowed an exemption based on "inclement weather"?
  - a. The source of the irrigation (snow or catchment area) can be subject to weather changes:
    1. For ditch irrigation there is third party data available to show yearly variance in availability.
    2. For center pivot or other irrigation there may be limited third party information but good management would record water usage.

- b. Climatic data for different regions is easily available over the internet and regional information can be used to assess if weather conditions were a factor in poor quality pasture.
- c. It takes longer to establish a productive, balanced pasture in arid areas, which make the establishment more susceptible to weather changes. This extended timeline would need to be included within the whole farm plan and realistically appraised with the initial certification. In order to meet the requirement, cow numbers will likely need to be initially adjusted downward from final planned herd size if a new operation does not have already established pasture.

3. What is the role of management?

- a. A realistic appraisal of the number of cows the pasture can support.
- b. Layout of farm to maximize access to pasture.
- c. Seeding of annual forage crops as a balance for extremes of weather or as a permanent rotation to recognize repeated weather patterns.
- d. Good record keeping to build an accurate picture of the productivity of the pasture to be able to do forward budgeting and to adjust cow numbers, calving pattern or other controllable areas.

4. Is there enough understanding of calculating dry matter and testing of feed by producers?

- a. It is only critical when the producer starts to be within 10% of the average minimum of 30% over a year's grazing season(s), probably most that do it on an "as-fed" base would be above this level.
- b. A work sheet has been developed that will assist producers in calculating and recording the feed consumed by their dairy herd.
- c. Information is attached on how to calculate dry matter and other factors affecting consumption of feed.
- d. The certifier would have cause to require testing of feed for volume (i.e. weight of bales) and dry matter from any producer who came close to the 30% minimum rather than requiring them from every producer.

5. Should allowance be made for micro-variations such as the increased energy used when cows have to walk further, stress from being in heat, housed because of veterinary needs?

- a. The words "average" and "minimum" when applied to a whole herd of lactating cows over the grazing season(s) during a calendar year gives enough room for these small day to day variances.
- b. If these small variances affect achieving the **minimum**, the producer should be looking at management and changes to the pasture system to determine how s/he can easily reach the average of 30%.

Elsewhere on NODPA's Pasture Rule Resource page, you will find links to working documents including the following pieces, which were attachments with this historical report.

1. Feed Calculation worksheet (legal size)
2. Dry Matter calculation by Kathy Soder, USDA ARS
3. Walking Energy requirements by Kathy Soder, USDA ARS
4. Pasture consumption calculation by Lisa McCrory