

# Making The Leap To Organic Dairy Production

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states with a growing population of organic farms have similar learning opportunities available.

## Animal Husbandry and Management

Organic dairy production requires a number of animal husbandry and management practices that may require extensive change for conventional dairy farms. The cost, challenge, and time required for transition in animal husbandry will vary depending upon the current type of management; an intensive grazing farm will have fewer changes to make than a total confinement operation.

Animal health can be another challenging transition depending upon the farm. No antibiotics, hormones, or most other conventional pharmaceuticals can be used except in case of emergency, which will then require the removal of the treated animal from the herd. Standards now require one year of organic health care before a herd can be certified plus several other practices in place:

Grazing and outdoor access is required for all animals over six months of age. Calves must be fed organic milk; conventional milk replacer is allowed only in an emergency and then must be bST-free. Tails cannot be docked.

Organic feed must be fed. During the transition

year, 80 percent organic and 20 percent conventional feeds can be fed for the first nine months of transition, and then the ration must be 100 percent organic for the last three months and thereafter. Feed supplements and additives must pass organic standard muster.

The number one tenet of organic herd health management is to provide an environment that supports, fosters, and engenders healthy animals that rarely need treatment.

In my mind, the cornerstone to providing this positive environment is plenty of high quality pasture. Pasture provides many, many positive health benefits - the exercise it provides gives cows good body condition in terms of physical strength and endurance; the green grass, legumes, and other pasture plants provide high levels of Vitamin E which is essential for healthy immune systems — plus supplying many other high quality nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. Rotationally grazed pastures provide exposure to lots of sunshine and fresh air, which is not only healthy for animals but helps sanitize the environment that the cows are in; the walking involved in the use of pastures provides for natural hooftrimming. Most years, we are able to provide

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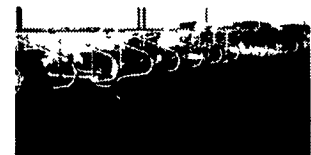
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