ORGANIC LIVESTOCK FARMING

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INTRODUCTION

Organic livestock farming is a means of food production with a large number of rules directed towards a high status of animal welfare, care for the environment, restricted use of medical drugs. It promotes the use of organic and bio-degradable inputs in terms of animal nutrition (organically grown, good quality food & species-specific diets), animal health (good management, prevention & stress-free environment), animal housing and breeding (animals not to be confined in buildings, clean bedding, natural light, adaptable breeds chosen).

Origin of Livestock

All livestock and its products that are sold and labelled as organic must be raised under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation or at hatching.

Livestock Feed

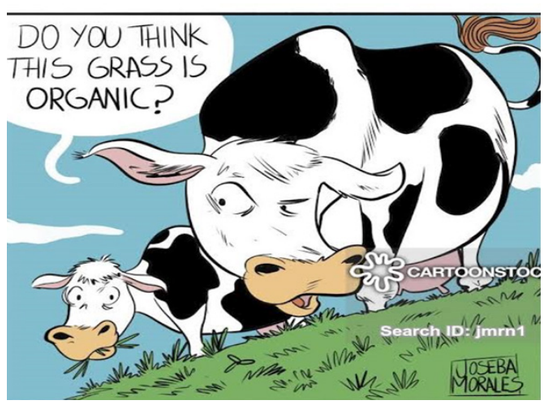
Rations must consist of pasture, forage and crops. Certain non-synthetic and synthetic substances may be used as feed additives and supplements. Also, dairy cattle under nine months of age are allowed 20% of non-organic feed. Plastic pellets, urea, manure and by-products from mammalian or poultry slaughter are not allowed.

Living Conditions

Livestock should not to be caged, tethered in buildings. They should be provided with enough area to graze and allow sufficient movement. Maximum amount of fresh air & daylight is needed. They should be reared in herds or flocks of appropriate size. Dry litter material must be used as bedding.

Breeds and Breeding

Reproduction should be natural but artificial insemination can sometimes be used. Embryo transfer techniques and genetic engineering shall not be used. Weaning periods (pigs) are longer, tail, teeth and beak clipping are prohibited. Broiler systems use slower growing breeds.



Disease Prevention

The indigenous breeds are more resistant to diseases. Good value feed strengthens the natural immune system. Avoidance of overcrowding can help prevent health problems. Administration of vaccines and veterinary biologics is to be done.

Treatment

In severe conditions, antibiotics can be used, but treated animals cannot be labelled as organic. There should be emphasis on non-allopathic medicines, herbal methods, including homoeopathy, ayurvedic and acupuncture.

Record Keeping

It is done in order to verify the organic status of the animals. Some important records are livestock register, source of purchase, breeding and feeding register, health register.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANIC LIVESTOCK FARMING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Some developing countries are successfully exporting livestock products to developed countries. India and Nepal currently export certified organic honey, sourced mostly from forests and small-scale producers. Increase is seen in the production of non-food livestock products, such as organic textiles and garments, including materials of animal origin such as hides, leather, and wool. Indigenous technical knowledge, available in poorer and developing countries, may provide an effective substitute for veterinary care. Native breeds of livestock are less susceptible to stress and disease, so the need for allopathic medicines and antibiotics is much lower. Literacy is on the rise and informed consumers are ready to pay additional for organic products. Awareness & technical assistance is provided among the communities of both urban & rural areas.

The time between the start of organic management and certification of crops or animal husbandry is known as the conversion period. The whole farm, including livestock, should be converted according to the standards over a period of three years. Duration of conversion period for meat is 12 months (for sheep, goat and pig meat is 6 months), for dairy is 90 days and for eggs is 42 days.

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

It is a certification procedure for producers of organic food & other organic agriculture products. Certification is basically aimed at regulating & facilitating the sale of organic products to consumers and also prevents fraud. Some of the certification bodies in India are Agricultural Processed Foods Export Development Authority (APEDA) under the Ministry of Commerce and 12 accredited agencies have been authorized under National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP).

CERTIFICATION PROCESS

First step includes registration of producers and the processing industries where producer first has to submit organic management plan. This is verified and inspected by certifying agency time to time. Then, provision of basic information on the crops and farm is done. Inspection and verification of farm and processing unit is done by the inspector appointed by the certifying agency like APEDA , NSOP.

A trademark-India organic will be granted with the basis of compliance with the national standards for organic production (NSOP). This will help in communicating the genuineness as well as the origin of the product, this trademark is owned by the government of India. Only exporters, manufacturers and processors whose products are duly certified by the accredited certification bodies, will be granted the license to use the logo.

Steps taken by government of India to promote organic livestock production

- Launching of National Programme of Organic Production (NPOP) in 2000.
- Indian National Standard for Organic Production (NSOP) developed and published in 2001 and revised in 2002.
- National Centre for Organic Farming established in 2003.
- Allotment of 100 crores in 10th plan outlay for organic development.
- A network project on organic farming sanctioned by I.C.A.R. (2004-07) involving four ICAR institutes and nine SAUs.
- A pilot study on organic milk production system undergoing at National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal.
- Declaring Sikkim as organic state.

BENEFITS OF ORGANIC LIVESTOCK FARMING

There are various benefits obtained through organic livestock farming. Some of the environmental benefits include genetically modified organism de-emphasize biodiversity, pasture-based diets develop ruminants' digestive health and reduce veterinary expenses, nutrients are returned to the soil through manure & compost and animals can be used to graze out weeds on crops or pastures. Some of the social and economic benefits are employment opportunities, livable wages, safe and healthy working conditions. Also, rural farmers can become self-sufficient as this requires less inputs. Consumers get benefited as there is no use of synthetic inputs in terms of allopathic drugs, fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. With low input costs and disease and drought resistant species producers also get a good return.

CONCLUSION

Organic farming is not only profitable for farmers but has benefits for consumers, environment and to society. During conversion period there may be less production but in long run it is only way to be sustainable, and to get healthy and poison free food. It is one of the best ways to make our farmers self-sufficient and saves them from drowning in debts and from attempting suicides. More research is needed to be done on the effects of alternative treatments. There should be no use of vaccines in diseases that can cause sudden outbreaks and prohibition on use of synthetic amino acids in poultry whose natural sources are not fully known should be done.