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Working Group:

Poultry Outside Access

9.30.2009

Organic Poultry Production Guidance Document

The Accredited Certifiers Association Poultry Outside Access Working Group has drafted the following guidance on **Organic Poultry Production** for producers and certification agents in order to provide consistency in the certification of organic poultry. We have reviewed many guidance documents and certification standards in developing this document. Particular attention was paid to harmonization with the EU requirements and the soon to be implemented Canadian Standards.

We are aware that the current level of organic poultry production practices may not be in compliance with this guidance, especially in the areas of outdoor access and space requirements. The Working Group believes that organic poultry production practices must be consistent and in line with consumer expectations, therefore this document attempts to “raise the bar” for organic poultry production. In addition, the NOSB Livestock Committee has indicated it will be addressing this issue in the near future.

The Working Group solicited comments from ACA members and received comments from ACA members, their clients, inspectors, and poultry industry specialists and representatives. The comments were reviewed by the working group, and suggestions incorporated.

Note: While the Working Group wholeheartedly supports the use of pasture in organic poultry production, we are not making a recommendation for a pasture requirement at this time. As the National Organic Program does not require pasture for poultry, and operations have been certified without the requirement of pasture, a change of this nature would have a severe economic impact on existing producers who do not currently utilize pasture. We have provided guidance on the management of pasture if a pasture based system is used.

The Working Group believes that the guidance provided in this document will be supported in order to provide guidelines for enforcement, as noted in the following comments from the Preamble of the Regulation:

Livestock Production - Changes Requested but Not Made

(5) Delineation of Space Requirements for Animal Confinement. The proposed rule did not establish space requirements for livestock living conditions but stated that a producer must accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals under his or her care. Some commenters stated their preference for space requirements because they are more uniform and enforceable. These commenters stated that some existing certification standards include space requirements in standards

for livestock living conditions and that Codex guidelines support this approach. While not disagreeing that space requirements could be an effective certification tool for organic livestock production systems, we have not incorporated any such provisions in the final rule. We anticipate that additional NOSB recommendations and public comment will be necessary for the development of space requirements. At its June 2000 meeting, the NOSB agreed that it would be premature to include space requirements in the final rule.

The Working Group would like to see all ACAs make use of this document to assess new applicants for compliance to § 205.239. Additionally, we would like to see all ACAs utilize this document to assess the compliance of currently certified operations to § 205.239 with the recommendation that five years be granted for potential redesign of infrastructure.

The members of the Poultry Outside Access Working Group consisted of representatives of the following ACA members:

CCOF	PCO
MOFGA	QCS
MOSA	WSDA
OTCO	

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I. Origin of livestock (§205.236)

Poultry or edible poultry products must be from poultry that has been under continuous organic management beginning no later than the second day of life.

II. Feed Requirements (§205.237)

All requirements of the National Organic Program §205.237 Livestock Feed must be met. Fresh water must be available at all times.

III. Living Conditions (§205.239)

A. Allowance for natural behavior including:

- (1) access to materials for dust bathing
- (2) adequate floor space areas, and outdoor run areas to escape from predators and aggressive behavior
- (3) perches must be provided for all laying hens at not less than 6" per hen. Perch area can include the alighting rail immediately in front of next boxes. Multi-tier operations are required to provide perch space for 55% of birds at one time.

B. Access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air and direct sunlight suitable to the age of the poultry, climate and the environment.

C. Ventilation must be adequate to prevent buildup of ammonia. Ammonia levels of 10 ppm are considered acceptable while 25 ppm is considered to be high.

D. For layers and mature birds, artificial light may be used to prolong the day length up to 16 hours. Light intensity should be lowered gradually to encourage hens to move to perches or settle for the night. Natural light should be sufficient indoors on sunny days so that inspector can read/write when lights are turned off.

E. Suitable Flooring

- (1) Mesh or slatted flooring under drinking areas to provide drainage;
- (2) Houses with slatted floors must have 30% minimum of solid floor area available with sufficient litter available for dust baths;
- (3) Litter must be provided and maintained in a dry manner.

F. Birds must have sufficient exit areas, appropriately distributed around the building, to ensure that all birds have ready access to the outdoors. Exit areas must allow the passage of more than one bird at a time.

- G. Complete clean out of a poultry house is required if there have been adverse health issues with the previous flock; otherwise litter should be refurbished between flocks to maintain a sanitary environment.

H. Space Allowance

Poultry housing must be sufficiently spacious to allow all birds to move freely, stretch their wings and engage in natural behaviors. Perching areas and nest boxes may not be used in the calculation of floor space. Slatted/grated floors may be considered floor space.

	Pullets	Layers	Broilers	Turkeys/ Large Birds
Permanent Houses				
Indoor Floor Space	1 sq. ft./bird ^a	1.8 sq. ft./bird ^a	1 sq. ft./bird ^a	7.5 lbs. / sq. ft. ^b Examples: 15 lbs. = 2 sq. ft. 22.5 lbs. = 3 sq. ft. 30 lbs. = 4 sq. ft. 37.5 = 5 sq. ft
Outdoor runs (associated with permanent house)	1 sq. ft./bird	1.8 sq. ft./bird	1 sq. ft./bird	4 sq. ft / bird
Perch Space	--	6" per bird ^b	--	16" per bird ^b
Mobile Pens (without free range access to pasture)				
Structure Area	.7 sq. ft./bird ^c	1.8 sq. ft./bird ^a	.7 sq. ft./bird ^c	3.6 sq. ft./bird ^c

a Canadian Standards

b Humane Farm Animal Care

c Soil Association

IV. Access to Outdoors

- A. Outside access and door spacing must be designed to promote and encourage outside access for all birds on a daily basis, weather permitting. Producers must provide access to the outdoors at an early age in order encourage (train) birds to go outdoors.

Pullets must be provided with outside access from the age of 6 weeks providing they are fully feathered and weather permits. Broilers must be provided with outside access from the age of 4 weeks providing they are fully feathered and weather permits.

Once layers are accustomed to going outdoors, a brief confinement period to allow for nest box training is permitted.

- B. Birds may not be confined to the house due to a “threat” of an outbreak of disease. There must be a documented occurrence of an outbreak in the region or relevant migratory pathway, or state or federal advisory in order to confine birds.
- C. Producers must maintain records documenting periods of confinement. Producers must identify in the OSP how they plan to protect birds from disease and predators.
- D. For pasture based systems birds must be provided with access to a variety of vegetation. Management of pasture areas must be in compliance with §205.203 – §205.206. Birds must be protected from natural predators.

V. Health Care (§205.238)

- A. All requirements of the National Organic Program §205.238 Livestock health care practices must be met.
- B. Minimal beak trimming is allowed for protection of the flock and must be done in a manner that minimizes pain and stress, no later than 10 days old. Debeaking (severe beak trimming) is prohibited.
- C. Toe clipping or other surgical alterations are prohibited.
- D. Forced molting of poultry is prohibited. Withdrawal of feed to induce molting is prohibited.

VI. Euthanasia

- A. Producers must have plan for prompt humane euthanasia for sick or injured birds.
- B. The following methods of euthanasia are permitted¹:
 - (1) Hand held electrical or percussive stunning followed by neck cutting;
 - (2) Cervical dislocation must involve stretching the neck to sever the spinal cord and cause extensive damage to the major blood vessels.

¹ Based on American Veterinary Medical Association guidelines

(3) Carbon dioxide or a mixture of nitrogen and argon gases, delivered in an appropriate container at acceptable concentrations.

(4) Decapitation

C. The following methods of euthanasia are not permitted²

(1) Suffocation

(2) Blow to the head by blunt instrument

(3) Equipment that crushes the neck including killing pliers or burdizzo clamps³

VII. Carcass Disposal

Carcass disposal, whether from daily mortality or emergency euthanasia, must be promptly addressed, both to reduce the incidence of disease transmission, and to avoid degradation of soil and water.

Following a euthanasia procedure, birds must be carefully examined to ensure that they are dead. Producers must maintain carcass disposal records to include flock identification, type of euthanasia, where disposed of.

Carcass disposal can be either on or off the farm, but must be in accordance with state and local laws. If disposed of on farm, process must not degrade soil and water quality. On farm composting of carcasses is permitted. Incineration of carcasses is permitted.

² Animal Welfare Approved, 3.2

³ Humane Farm Animal, H 13.c