Embracing Sustainable Practices: The Importance of Organic Livestock Farming

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ABSTRACT

Organic livestock farming offers numerous benefits for the environment, animal welfare, and human health. By avoiding the use of synthetic pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics, organic farmers promote a more natural and sustainable approach to animal husbandry. This not only reduces the environmental impact but also ensures that the livestock are treated humanely and that the resulting products are free from harmful chemicals. Furthermore, organic meat, dairy, and eggs are often richer in essential nutrients, providing consumers with a healthier alternative to conventionally produced animal products. In addition, organic farming practices often involve rotational grazing and the integration of diverse plant species, which help to maintain healthy soil ecosystems and promote biodiversity. This holistic approach to agriculture not only benefits the animals but also the surrounding environment, contributing to the overall sustainability of the food system. By supporting organic livestock farming, consumers can make a positive impact on the planet while enjoying high-quality, nutritious animal products.

INTRODUCTION

Animal production is an important part of organic farming that aims at achieving a balanced relationship between the soil, the plants, and the animals in a farming system (Vaarst *et al*., 2006). Organic livestock farming is an integrated system of farming based on ecological principles. The principle of organic farming is to support

the conservation and promotion of local resources including species and breeds. It uses environment-friendly methods of crop and livestock production without the use of synthetic fertilizers, growth promotors, chemical drugs, synthetic pesticides, or gene manipulation.

Organic livestock farming relies on organic and biodegradable inputs like organically grown food for animals, good management practices, animal housing, and breeding (animals should not be caged, tethered, or confined in buildings, clean bedding, etc.). Synthetic inputs like chemicals, drugs, antibiotics, and feed additives should be avoided as much as possible in organic livestock farming (Chander *et al.*, 2011). According to IFOAM (2000), the end goal of organic farming is sustainability which includes social, economic, and ecological components and social justice and social rights that are integral parts of organic farming. In organic livestock farming, animals are reared on loose housing or free-range systems to limit stocking densities, potentially promoting good foot and hoof health.

Status of Organic Livestock Products

India rank 6th in terms of the world's organic agricultural land and 1st in terms of the total number of producers as per 2021 data (FiBL and IFOAM, 2023). According to FAO, livestock contributes to nearly 40% of total agricultural output in developed countries and 20% in developing ones, supporting the livelihoods of at least 1.3 billion people worldwide. India produced around 2.9 million MT (2022-23) of certified organic products including organic livestock products (APEDA, 2023).

Developing and applying the principles of organic animal husbandry at all times requires a thorough analysis of the problems and opportunities involved and existing local knowledge. Some key considerations in organic animal husbandry that producers and other stakeholders need to take into account are listed below:

1. **Breeds and breeding strategies**: All animals (and their products) marketed, labeled, or advertised as organic must be raised under continuous organic management beginning in the latter third of gestation or hatching. Appropriate choice of breeds is of most important. Pure indigenous breeds are preferred for organic farming due to high disease resistance, better adaptability, better fertility, and low nutrient requirements. Selective up-grading of the native breeds would be the only choice for improving animal productivity.

2. **Organic Livestock feed**: The total rations of livestock that are produced under organic management must consist of agricultural products that have been organically produced and handled organically. This includes pasture, forage and crops. Certain non-synthetic and synthetic substances may be used as feed additives and supplements. Twenty percent of the feed for dairy cattle that is under nine months of age is allowed to come from non-organic sources. Plastic pellets, urea, manure, and by-products from mammalian or poultry slaughter are not allowed.

3. **Housing system**: An organic livestock producer must design and maintain living circumstances that promote health and allow for the animal's natural behavior. These living circumstances must include outdoor access, shade, shelter, fresh air, direct sunlight appropriate for the species, and access to ruminant pastures.

Farm animals	**EU-Regulation on Organic Livestock Farming**
Dairy cattle	
Locomotion area per animal	6.0 m^2 indoor + 4.5 m^2 outdoor

Floor Characteristics	Lying space with bedding
Husbandry practices	Keeping tethered is forbidden
Calves	
Locomotion area per animal	1.5 m^2 indoor + 1.2 m^2 outdoor
Floor Characteristics	Dry bedding
Husbandry practices	Reared in groups.

4. **Waste management**: Organic livestock producers are mandated to manage manure so that it does not contribute to the contamination of crops, soil, or water and optimizes the recycling of nutrients.

5. **Disease prevention**: Organic livestock production requires producers to establish preventive health care practices. It strictly follows the common proverb 'prevention is better than cure'. A few commonly used herbs like Tulsi, Giloy, Turmeric, and Garlic. The vaccine must not contain genetically modified ingredients or by-products like recombinant and DNA vaccines.

6. **Livestock welfare concern**: Animal welfare organizations support organic livestock farming as a means of alleviating the suffering of farm animals. Parasitic infestations can be regarded as a risk factor for animal welfare. Organic farming supports animal welfare as animals are being raised with sufficient space in natural conditions without using any chemical drugs.

7. **Record keeping**: Organic livestock operations need to maintain records for a number of reasons. Certainly, records are important for the financial management of any organic livestock enterprise. However, records are also important to verify the organic status of the animals and the production, harvesting and handling practices associated with them and their products.

CONCLUSION

In summary, organic livestock farming emphasizes sustainability, animal welfare, and responsible resource management. It avoids the routine use of synthetic inputs, promotes natural behaviors, and adheres to strict record-keeping requirements. By prioritizing holistic practices, organic livestock production aims to deliver high-quality, ethically sourced animal products while minimizing environmental impact. The growing demand for organic livestock products reflects a broader shift towards more sustainable and ethical agricultural systems that balance productivity, animal welfare, and environmental stewardship.

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