

Clearing up Standards to Earn Government's Organic Seal

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Federal officials believe a new rule will increase consumer confidence in the government's "organic" seal and allow for more uniform enforcement of standards concerning organic products.

The [Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Final Rule](#), posted Wednesday, adds specificity to existing U.S. Department of Agriculture welfare standards for livestock and poultry. It more clearly defines items such as "outdoor areas" and adds definitions for specific physical alteration methods of poultry and livestock.

The rule goes into effect in about two months, on March 20. Most of the requirements will be fully implemented on March 20, 2018.

Some items the rule intends to make clearer:

It does not allow enclosed porches to be considered "outdoor areas," and all birds must have daily access to outdoor areas that include soil and vegetation.

The rule sets indoor space requirements for broiler chickens and perch requirements for laying chickens.

Restricted physical alteration methods such as de-beaking, forced molting and use of artificial light for both poultry and livestock are now defined. More clarity is given to human handling, transportation and slaughter practices. Most of the amended standards will negate the need for dual certification, as the rule meets or exceeds private animal welfare certification standards in many instances.

One exception for the compliance date is density requirements for organic poultry producers. The requirements likely represent the area that will be the costliest for producers. Within three years of the rule's implementation, producers of broiler chickens must meet indoor density requirements. For producers of organic laying chickens, outdoor density requirements must be met five years after the implementation date.

Organic producers may continue to temporarily confine animals and birds, but only under certain conditions involving the health, safety, or well-being of the animals due to an unsuitable environment. They also can be confined if it is necessary for soil and vegetation growth. The final rule does allow for flexibility on temporary confinement.

Appropriate manure management plans must be in place for outdoor areas where animals are pastured.

Please refer to the regulatory text for specific requirements. If producers have any concerns about application of the final rule to their operations, please contact [Barley Snyder's Food & Agribusiness Group](#).

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