

# Factsheet



## Cattle health welfare and housing management

### What veterinary drugs can I use?

Under organic livestock management, preventative husbandry and management practices must be introduced to avoid and minimise pest and disease problems – and minimise reliance on chemical treatments. The standards make allowances for the use of [licensed](#) veterinary medicines when preventative methods have failed; in order to avoid suffering and distress.

Full records of all treatments must be kept and made available at inspection – a [veterinary treatment sheet](#) is available from Soil Association Certification.

### Are there longer withdrawal periods for veterinary drugs?

Extended meat and milk withdrawal periods apply to most veterinary products used in organic beef or dairy systems. If you treat your animals with any allopathic veterinary medicinal products you must wait **twice the legal withdrawal period** as referred to in *Article 11 of Directive 2001/82/EC*, or in a case in which this period is not specified, 48 hours, before you can sell your livestock products as organic. The organic withdrawal periods are specified in the [Soil Association organic standards](#)

### Will stock lose organic status if treated with antibiotics?

Any organic animal which receives more than three courses of treatment by chemically-synthesised medicines in one calendar year – or any animal which receives more than one course of treatment if it is killed for meat at less than one year old – *may* lose its full organic status in the case of meat production, or have to go through a 're-conversion' period for milk.

However, under organic management this rule should not cause too much concern. Producers should note that one 'treatment' would be considered as the full course of treatments required to cure the animal of that specific ailment. For example, an animal may require a course of two injections and one pessary in order to cure a specific ailment or disease: this would be considered as one treatment, not three. Also certain treatments, including vaccinations, parasite treatments (such as wormers and external parasite products) and compulsory eradication orders are excluded from this rule.

Full records of all treatments must be kept and made available at inspection – a [veterinary treatment sheet](#) is available from Soil Association Certification.

### Can I use vaccines?

Vaccines can be used where there is a known disease risk on a farm – or neighbouring farm – which cannot be controlled by other means.

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Date Produced: June 2018

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A vaccination programme should be developed as part of the animal health plan, following advice from your vet (see more details on animal health plans below).

Single vaccines are preferred, unless multiple problems exist. The development of natural immunity should never be discouraged.

**Permission from your certification body must be obtained before introducing a vaccination programme.**

## **I've been told that I will have to submit an animal health plan – what is it?**

High levels of husbandry and prevention of pest and disease issues are key to successful organic livestock systems. The organic standards require all producers to submit an animal health plan during the early stages of their conversion. Producers are strongly encouraged to get advice from their veterinary surgeon in developing the plan.

Basically, an animal health plan is a written strategy for the management of animal health *specific to your farm*:

- Identify all persistent mineral deficiencies, disease and parasite health problems that occur on the farm
- Outline how you intend to prevent their occurrence where possible: identify husbandry changes that will be needed in order to remedy problems, such as the adoption of a clean grazing system, appropriate stocking levels, improved hygiene practices and improved housing ventilation
- Outline what treatments will be used should they occur
- Identify how you intend to improve overall herd health and reduce reliance on veterinary treatments; identify different management practices for all ages of stock including the feeding regime, housing details, medication procedures, grazing policy and the management practices that will develop immunity (for example, selection for breeding, choice of pasture for young stock and so on)
- Identify record keeping procedures and systems. Producers are expected to keep detailed records and invoices of all brought-in-feeds, livestock movements and veterinary treatments (including reason for treatment and organic withdrawal periods), along with your field and crop records

The animal health plan should not be seen as a 'one-off' document: provided the plan is revisited and revised on a regular basis (as a minimum once a year) it can become a useful management tool for monitoring parasite, disease and mineral problems in the herd, identifying what has/hasn't worked in the past - and any key problem areas. It should also be updated (preferably with your vet) according to the progress or problems that you have experienced.

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The animal health plan should be drawn up so that if you suddenly had to leave the farm for a short-period, a relief worker could step in and maintain the livestock to organic standards for a short time.

## **If routine worming is not allowed, how can I control worms?**

The control of internal worms can be achieved through good livestock management practices. Recommended methods of internal parasite control include:

- Grazing management and pasture rotation (understanding and observing the life-cycle of the parasite) e.g.
  - giving grazing priority for 'clean' or 'safe' pastures to youngstock
  - rotating cattle with other livestock and forage areas
  - sowing new pastures and making use of 'clean' hay and silage aftermaths.
- Breeding (and the use of breeds) for stock that is resistant to infection
- For lungworm control: allowing suckled calves to develop natural immunity by grazing grass with their dams
- Monitoring the situation by use of faecal egg counts and post mortem information from the abattoir

Under organic standards if individual animals become infected with worms and show clinical symptoms then producers can use certain wormers (anthelmintics) to treat these individuals. There are several different groups of wormers that treat parasites in different ways. Among other resources, the AHDB publish a [parasite control product guide](#) every year that shows brand names, categories and stages of parasites that can be controlled. General information is also available from [Control Of Worms Sustainably](#) and [NADIS](#).

Consult your vet to select the right wormer for the job, bearing in mind:

- As avermectin products leave residues in the faeces that can affect soil micro-organisms, they should only be used when absolutely necessary
- Your vet can test how effective different wormers are on your farm
- Wormer boluses cannot be used under organic standards
- Organic withdrawal periods must be observed

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## **My clean grazing system has failed and I need to treat the whole herd what can I do?**

If the clean grazing system breaks down and individual animals become infected (showing clinical symptoms) then producers are permitted to use certain wormers to treat these individual animals.

A drench or injection that will eliminate the specific identified internal parasite should be selected from the levamisole/morantel or benzimidazole group of wormers. Permission may be granted to use avermectin products if evidence of need is demonstrated - for example, resistance to other wormers. Consult with your vet to select the right wormer for the job.

If a group of animals requires treatment, your certification body would need to agree to the treatment. You will be required to get evidence to support the treatment, such as faecal egg counts or blood analysis results.

In such cases a parasite reduction programme must be developed with your vet. This should identify improvements to existing practices to reduce or, wherever possible, eliminate the presence of unacceptable worm infestations. You should carry out adequate monitoring of the effectiveness of the programme; this might include the introduction of faecal egg counts.

While Soil Association can confirm whether or not a particular product is suitable under the standards, you should always consult your vet to ensure that wormer will actually treat the parasite concerned.

## **Is there anything I can do for hoof problems?**

Good husbandry and management is the key to preventing foot problems such as digital dermatitis and foul in the foot. Careful trimming of the infected hoof in conjunction with use of iodine, zinc sulphate or copper sulphate foot baths is recommended. The restrictions on using formaldehyde are specified in the [Soil Association organic standards](#).

The use of terramycin aerosol for spot-treatment of individual animals may be permitted as part of your animal health plan.

**Note – Link to the record-keeping template, withdrawal period section and loss of status for antibiotics sections above.**

## **What do I do if I have mastitis problems?**

Good management, selection of animals and breed types that are less susceptible to mastitis and optimisation of production levels are key in avoiding mastitis. As part of the health plan you must detail the known causative agents, how they are monitored and identified plus the trigger level for treatment and which treatment will be used. Details of cell count monitoring, hygiene at housing, the parlour routine, cow identification and management of dry cows, nurse cows and replacements are also required.

If you get mastitis in the herd the recommended treatments include:

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- Frequent stripping of the affected quarter
- Cold water treatments
- Licensed herbal udder creams
- Effective homoeopathic treatments (for further information see [Homeopathy at Wellie Level](#))
- Use of teat sealants at drying off to prevent new infections.

Antibiotics can be used in clinical cases where no other treatment would be effective. The purpose of whatever treatment is used must be to assist the affected quarter to clear infection as rapidly as possible. You must always consult your vet when drawing up a mastitis control plan

## Can I use dry cow therapy?

The use of dry cow therapy as a preventative treatment on your whole herd is prohibited under the organic standards. If you have an individual animal that requires dry cow therapy then it can be used. Individual animals could be identified based on lactation period, somatic cell count recordings, mastitis incidence and bacteriology during the previous lactation and cow characteristics (bag size, teat condition, age of the cow, earlier mastitis history and so on.).

Improvement of dry cow management, particularly during the first two weeks of the dry period when the cows are vulnerable, is important. This could include clean and dry housing conditions with daily bedding, avoiding putting recently dried off cows on contaminated paddocks etc. The cows should be dried off individually, considering their yield and mastitis/SCC history. Abrupt drying off has been shown to be more effective, but requires the ability to separate the dried off animal from the sight and sound of the milking herd, on a limited diet. Non-antibiotic teat sealants and teat plugs at drying off should be considered to prevent infection in the first two weeks.

**Note – Link to the record-keeping template, withdrawal period section and loss of status for antibiotics sections above.**

## How do I control flies?

Keeping cattle clean and providing shade are important in fly-control. Preventative measures are always encouraged but any problems must always be attended to right away. Good hygiene in cattle yards and fields will minimise the environments in which flies breed, such as uncovered animal or vegetable matter or poorly drained field areas.

While there are no 'organic' ectoparasiticides, a range of herbal repellent preparations are available which may provide a safe, environmentally-benign and effective deterrent, albeit on a short-term basis. Essential oil-based repellents, such as citronella or lavender, may also act as repellents (but may produce milk taint).

In problem areas, products containing deltamethrin are permitted for control of head flies and the destruction of maggots. Other pyrethroid-based products may be used following prior permission from SA Certification where further control is needed. In all instances, organic withdrawal periods affect the status of the milk.

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Iodine and Stockholm tar can be used to treat minor attacks and for discouraging further problems. Organic withdrawal periods must be observed and full records of all treatments must be kept and made available at inspection – a veterinary record sheet is available from SA Certification.

**All organophosphate (OP) products are prohibited under Soil Association standards.**

## **Can I still disbud and castrate my calves?**

It is possible to disbud and castrate calves within the organic standards but you will have to justify the need to do so and explain how you will carry out the procedures in your animal health plan (see 'I've been told I have to submit an animal health plan' above).

You may use rubber rings for castration without anaesthetic only during the first week of life.

You must not disbud calves over three months of age or castrate calves over two months of age. Only a vet can carry out these procedures on calves over these ages.

## **Is it possible to house animals in the winter or in order to finish them?**

All organic livestock systems must be based on grazing but it is permitted to house cattle in the winter. In addition finishing beef cattle may take place in well-bedded, spacious yards for a short period.

Organic beef cattle cannot be housed for finishing for more than one fifth of their lifetime, with an absolute maximum of three months. This is in addition to any normal winter housing period. You must, of course, still comply with the full standards concerning veterinary treatments and feed. Please refer to the *Soil Association organic standards* for the space that must be provided for each animal.

Horned cattle must be housed apart from hornless cattle and given additional lying and feeding space.

## **Do I have to use organic straw for bedding?**

Organic management requires ample dry bedding in the rest area. Organic straw for bedding is recommended, but non-organic straw for this purpose is permitted. If you are giving cows straw as part of their ration then this would need to be organic.

## **Can organic cows be housed in cubicle sheds?**

Stalls or cubicles can be used for housing organic animals provided the cows have free access to them and there is an adequate lunging area. Unless otherwise agreed with the certification body there should be 5% more cubicles than cattle.

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