

Organic Dairy Farming and Animal Welfare Fact Sheet

High standards of animal welfare are essential to organic dairy farmers. Organic cows enjoy a natural forage based diet and are not fed GM, solvents or animal based feeds. Organic farmers believe that the stress imposed on animals by unnatural and intensive regimes such as feeding high levels of inappropriate protein to stimulate rapid growth or milk production, intensive housing or the routine use of antibiotics and other drugs can all cause health problems. Organic dairy farming reduces the pressure on cows to produce ever-higher amounts of milk, resulting in a less stressful and more natural existence.

Welfare Friendly Farming

What?

- Organic farming has the potential to offer the very highest standards of animal welfare¹

Why?

- Organic farms stock fewer cows per hectare than non-organic cows, giving the cows the maximum space to roam and graze.
- The zero grazing system (when cows are kept indoors all year) is banned on all organic farms – organic cows can always graze when conditions are right.
- Organic cows have a minimum of six square metres per milking cow and plenty of fresh bedding so they can lie down and move around in comfort.

Natural Diet

What?

- The cows are fed mainly on grass and clover. The amount of concentrate (cereal) feed is restricted.
- Organic calves are reared on natural cow's milk – their mother's or a nurse cow's - for at least 12 weeks.
- There has never been a case of BSE in an organically born and raised dairy cow.

Why?

- The more natural diet of organic cows better suits the cow's digestive system and physiology, enhancing good health and ensuring a longer life.

- Rearing calves on cows milk helps give them a stress-free, natural start in life and helps boost their immunity to disease. Non-organic farms' calves can be quickly separated from their mothers and fed re-constituted milk, often containing additives.
- No GM, urea, solvent or animal derived foods are permitted. BSE is thought to have resulted from the feeding of animal products.

Natural Product – Less Intensive Farming

What?

- Synthetic chemical pesticides and fertilisers are prohibited on organic farms helping to protect the environment and human health.
- Organic farms use grass and clover pastures for less intensive farming.

Why?

- Organic cows are fed on grass and red clover, these can be grown by organic farmers without the use of synthetic chemical fertilisers and pesticides.
- Less intensive organic farming is a more natural system, so the cows are not pushed beyond their natural limits to produce the maximum amount of milk possible.

Healthier Cows

What?

- Organic cows live longer than non-organic cows.
- Organic dairy farmers use less antibiotics than non-organic farmers.

Why?

- More grass and clover and less concentrated cereal feed helps to protect the health of the cows, and suits their digestive system better so they enjoy healthier longer, lives.
- Organic cows are only treated with antibiotics to help cure an illness, non-organic cows are given antibiotics on a routine basis.

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