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## AN OVERVIEW OF ORGANIC PORK PRODUCTION

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### INTRODUCTION

Organic food is produced using methods aimed at enhancing the environmental health of the farm ecosystem. The philosophy of organic farming is that farmers work with nature and natural systems to enhance soil, plant and animal health, which leads to a better environment and improved human health.

The market for organic food in Canada is still a niche market. Currently, the organic food market represents less than 2% of the total Canadian food dollar spent on food products. However, this market is growing at a fast pace in Canada and the rest of the world. For example, the retail market for organic foods in Canada expanded 25%–30% in 2006, compared to 2005, and the estimated current global market for organic products is over US\$30 billion. The current Canadian market for organic products is estimated at C\$1 billion; in the U.S., the estimate is US\$16 billion (2006 figures).

One of the driving forces behind the fast growth of the organic food market is increased public concern over the safety and quality of foods produced from conventional food production systems. Organic foods are perceived by some consumers as foods that are safer for consumption, better in nutrition, and healthier to the human body than foods produced by conventional production. Among the other reasons given for buying organic are:

- organic food production is better for the environment
- organic food tastes better
- consumers want to try new products

While most of these claims still remain to be proven, more and more consumers are switching to organic foods.

The market and demand for organic pork in Canada are growing. This provides opportunities for the pork industry. Certified organic meat sales in 2006 were less than 1% of the total organic food sales but grew more than 80% over 2005.

### CURRENT ORGANIC PORK PRODUCTION IN ONTARIO

It is estimated that there are about 12 organic hog producers in Ontario with a total annual production of about 12,000 market hogs. The majority of organic hogs produced in Ontario are marketed in Quebec. Current information shows that organic pork production operation sizes in Ontario range from several sows to about 100 sows.

### ORGANIC PORK STANDARDS

There is no universal standard for organic food production worldwide. Canadian Standards for Organic Agriculture have been developed by the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB). The standards provide general guidelines for organic food producers and provide the basis for certification. These standards have been aligned with standards published in the U.S. and Europe. In December 2006, Canada published regulations for organic production to be implemented over the following 2 years. The regulation will be enforced after this 2-year transition period. The lead agency is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). A Canadian Organic Office has been established, and the CFIA will provide oversight to the process of certifying organic farms and products across the country. Certified products will be permitted to carry the official Canadian organic logo on their labels.

### ORGANIC PORK CERTIFICATION

To be able to label and market pork as organic, nationally or internationally, producers must be certified by a certifying body. There are numerous certifying bodies across Canada that provide certification services for Canadian organic farms and enterprises. Not all of them provide certification services to pork producers. Some of these certifying bodies are associated with or accredited by other international organic certifying bodies or organizations. That will change once the Canadian legislation is in place. Producers who are considering organic pork production should contact a certifying body for further information on production standards, program

requirements and marketing of the products before starting the transition to organic pork. A listing of some of the certifying bodies that conduct certification of organic foods in Ontario as well as some organizations associated with organic food can be found in the Infosheet *Organic Food and Farming Certification*, available on the OMAFRA website at [www.ontario.ca/crops](http://www.ontario.ca/crops), under Organic Crops.

## ORGANIC PORK INSPECTORS

All certification bodies require an inspection of farms in the year prior to achieving certification status and annual or semi-annual inspections in following years. Like the Canadian Quality Assurance (CQA®) Program, organic pork production also requires producers to document all production activities and keep records to prove that specific standards and rules are met and followed.

## TRANSITION TIME TO ORGANIC

The transition time — time required to switch an operation from conventional pork production to organic pork production — can be as short as 9 months and as long as 3 years, depending on whether the producer will be growing organic feed crops as well. Transition time is also a major hurdle for converting conventional pork production to organic pork production because during this period, hogs can't be marketed as organic hogs even though they have to be raised according to organic production standards.

## COMMON REQUIREMENTS FOR ORGANIC PORK PRODUCTION

### Living and Housing Conditions

Generally, all facilities used to confine pigs need to meet their normal socialization, feeding and living requirements. This includes providing sufficient space (see Table 1) and regular access to outdoor pasture, sunlight and fresh air, as permitted by weather conditions. Pigs cannot be housed on 100% slatted floors or in dry sow stalls. However, farrowing stalls (farrowing crates allowing sows inside to be able to turn around) can be used. Dry bedding materials such as straw must be provided; these must be from organic sources as well.

## Breeds and Breeding

Breeds of pigs shall be selected by taking the following into account:

- adaptation of animals to local conditions
- vitality and resistance of animals to disease
- absence of disease and health problems specific to breeds

Natural breeding (breeding gilts or sows by using boars) is preferred, although artificial insemination (AI) is permitted. Embryo transplants and breeding techniques using genetic engineering or related technology are not allowed. Reproductive hormones to trigger and synchronize estrus are prohibited from use.

## Pig Sources

To meet current organic guidelines, pigs must be:

- born from organic production units
- born from parents raised under organic production conditions
- raised in an organic production system throughout their life, except for animals used for meat, which shall have been under continuous organic management from the beginning of the last third of the gestation period (38 days) of the sows
- purchased from organic production operations for animals used for breeding stocks. If organic breeding stock is not available, non-gestating breeder animals and breeding boars may be brought from a non-organic operation onto an organic operation and integrated into the organic system. However, these breeding animals must be raised as organic for 12 months or more in order to be resold as organic breeding stock.

## Health

Disease prevention is the first line of defence in an organic animal health strategy. Animal health can be maintained through good animal husbandry practices. Vaccinations are only allowed when the targeted diseases are communicable and cannot be controlled by other means. In situations where preventative measures have failed and pigs become sick or injured, they must be treated and isolated.

**Table 1.** Pig Stocking Rate

	Indoor Space	Outdoor Runs and Pens
Sows and piglets (<40 days old)	7.5 m <sup>2</sup> for each sow and litter	2.5 m <sup>2</sup> for each sow and litter
Growing pigs	Incremental increase from 0.6 m <sup>2</sup> /head at weaning to 1.3 m <sup>2</sup> /head at finishing or breeding size	Incremental increase from 0.4 m <sup>2</sup> /head at weaning to 1 m <sup>2</sup> /head at finishing or breeding size
Sows in group pens	3 m <sup>2</sup> /head	3 m <sup>2</sup> /head
Boars in individual pens	8 m <sup>2</sup> /head	8 m <sup>2</sup> /head

Source: *Organic Production Systems — General Principles and Management Standards*. Canadian General Standards Board.

Treatment of pigs with specific medicines is allowed and recommended. These medicines are subject to the standards and approval of the certifying body. However, the use of synthetic antibiotics is prohibited for animals designated for organic pork. All treatments, such as animal identification numbers, substance name, dosage, dates and duration of the treatment and the results, must be recorded in detail.

When preventive practices and veterinary biologics are inadequate to prevent or treat sickness, the wellbeing of the animal must be protected. All appropriate medications, including the use of drugs that are not acceptable to organic production, must be used. Pigs treated with prohibited substances, such as synthetic antibiotics at any stage of the production, must be removed from organic herds and cannot be marketed as organic pork. Treating pregnant sows with these drugs within the first two-thirds of pregnancy may be allowed.

### **Feed and Water**

Organic pigs should be fed with an organic feed ration balanced to meet their nutritional requirements. The feed shall consist of substances that are necessary and essential for maintaining the pigs' health, wellbeing and vitality and that meet the physiological and behavioural needs of the pigs. This includes the need for roughage, fresh/dried fodder or silage in the daily ration. All feed ingredients used must be certified as being produced, handled and processed in accordance with the standard specified by the certifying body. Pig diets must not include feed medications, growth promoters, lactation promoters, synthetic appetite enhancers, animal by-products, preservation agents, colouring agents and genetically engineered or modified organisms (GMOs) or their products. For information on substances permitted in organic pig diets, check the *Organic Production System — Permitted Substances Lists*.

### **RESOURCES**

1. Organic Food and Farming Certification. OMAFRA Infosheet. [www.ontario.ca/crops](http://www.ontario.ca/crops). Click on "Organic Crops."
2. Organic Production Systems — Permitted Substances Lists (CAN/CGSB-32.311). Canadian General Standards Board. Government of Canada, 2006. [www.pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/home/index-e.html](http://www.pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/home/index-e.html). Click on "Organic Agriculture," under *Standards on the "Net."*
3. Organic Production Systems — General Principles and Management Standards (CAN/CGSB-32.310-2006). Canadian General Standards Board. Government of Canada, 2006. [www.pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/home/index-e.html](http://www.pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/home/index-e.html). Click on "Organic Agriculture," under *Standards on the "Net."*

### **Transport and Handling**

Producers must handle pigs humanely and responsibly according to provincial and federal laws, regulations or guidelines or the requirements set by the certifying body. Pigs should be transported and handled to minimize stress, injury and suffering. This can be accomplished by using direct, short transportation routes and providing bedding and suitable shelter against inclement weather conditions.

Castration and other surgical treatments, such as tagging, are permitted and should be done at the youngest age possible to avoid any undue animal suffering. Tail-docking and cutting of teeth are prohibited unless required for herd safety and health.

The use of electrical stimulation or calming drugs is prohibited. Pigs too ill to be transported are to be humanely euthanized.

### **Other Requirements**

There are other requirements included in organic standards guidelines, such as manure management, pest management and parasite control.

### **SUMMARY**

Consumer demand for organic pork is rising. Some pork producers may wish to capture part of this niche market. The information on organic pork requirements presented here is only a general overview. For detailed information, refer to Canada's *Organic Production Systems — General Principles and Management Standards* or contact a certifying body that meets your needs for production and marketing. Organic pork production takes time, hard work, and facility and management changes to meet all the requirements. It requires research to determine whether this type of production system is appropriate for your operation. It is not for all pork producers.

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