



## **Drought Relief for Australian Organic Livestock Operations**

Throughout the past few months, Australian Organic Ltd (AOL) has been considering the ongoing impact of drought on numerous farming families and their livestock. We have been reviewing the best options to ensure we look after our organic farmers, consider animal welfare and balanced nutrition, while continuing to provide consumers with the choice of organic products during these trying times for many.

While some operations are reporting stores of grains for a period ahead, and there is some future prospect for the importation of some certified organic grain sources, many are flagging a dire situation of running out of appropriate stores of feeds to keep their current herds or flocks. This situation puts in jeopardy not only years of hard work and investment for our farmers, but also the welfare of the animals in their care.

AOL supports a submission put forward by the country's two largest certifiers to

DAWR (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources) to permit diets to be supplemented with a portion of feeds from non-certified organic sources, to get through this period. While most trading partners do not permit this provision, there are precedents for this in overseas markets to ensure the interests of organic farmers and their livestock are looked after.

Most of the non-beef livestock operations are Australian market oriented, with some trade into the China market. The submission to DAWR has been made with this in mind. Assessment of this submission may take some time, and will most likely defer a decision back to the industry in relation to domestic market matters (as it has previously and in similar circumstances).

The delay in assessment is simply unworkable for most farmers in these circumstances, and as such, AOL has put into effect the following derogation to the Australian Certified Organic Standard (ACOS), effective immediately:

***In extenuating circumstances, such as prolonged drought, up to 25% (by mass) of the daily agricultural origin dry matter feed intake may be from non organic sources, where suitable risk management procedures, such as GMO and pesticide residue testing, has been conducted on the non organic feed component, and with approval from the Certification Body. This derogation continues to meet the consumer's expectations of organic livestock products - that is produced without the use of synthetic chemicals, antibiotics and hormones, and under free range conditions.***

#### ***Who can access this drought relief derogation?***

This derogation is open to any livestock operation that is certified by a Certification Body who is an approved Australian Certified Organic Standard (ACOS) licensee, and whose products **do not enter the export market stream. Utilisation of this derogation will render animals and their by-**

**products ineligible for certification under the National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce, and all organic export markets, requiring a conversion period prior to regaining organic export market status.**

***How do I access this derogation?***

Please submit a written request and justification to your approved ACOS licensed Certifying Body's office seeking this derogation and noting your personal situation in relation to drought, availability of certified feeds, and how you plan to manage the resultant change of status of your products (from organic export eligible, to domestic market only).

***How long will this be in effect for?***

At a minimum, this derogation will be available until the 2019 winter crop. An assessment of the situation will be made in December 2019 to determine if sufficient volumes from this harvest are available to cover through until the next summer crop. A three month notice period will be given to certified operators utilising the derogation prior to it being terminated.

***Why is AOL allowing this drought relief derogation?***

The Board of AOL sees this derogation as a critical support measure to assist farming families survive a particularly severe drought situation. The Board considered the following points in its decision:

1. It will assist these operations in surviving the current drought such that they remain on shelf and in business throughout the drought;
2. It will ensure ongoing animal welfare is addressed by allowing animals access to a balanced diet during this time;

3. It will not impact the market for organic grain producers – in fact it will ensure the current markets remain viable in the short term so that they are there to purchase grain longer term;
4. AOL will commence an education program focused on the organic consumer to ensure they understand the desperate times faced by these farming families;
5. Affected livestock will still be on a majority organic diet, and all other aspects of organic production (stocking densities etc) will remain unchanged;
6. The non organic feed component will be confirmed non-contaminating, to ensure the integrity of the final product – organic consumers in Australia will still be delivered an organic product with full integrity;
7. This is a short-term solution with a definite end once the drought breaks.

If you have any queries or concerns regarding this derogation, please direct them to our

Head of Standards, Owen Gwilliam, [owen@organicadvice.com.au](mailto:owen@organicadvice.com.au) or 0425 291 942.

Regards



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