

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
FORESTRY**

2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4912

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 7, 2016

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Betty Thompson 405-522-6105, betty.thompson@ag.ok.gov

USDA is redefining Organic

On April 7, 2016, the USDA proposed a new rule to redefine organic production through provisions on livestock and poultry practices.

According to the Organic Trade Association, "A less stressed flock is a healthier flock--that's organic..."

Actually, organic by definition is food grown without the use of artificial chemicals. This historically has pertained to fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics and pharmaceuticals in production. The recommended regulations relate almost exclusively to animal welfare practices and housing, have no relation to artificial chemicals and therefore no relation to the historical definition of organic.

These provisions specify how producers must treat their livestock and poultry for their health and well-being, which physical alterations are allowed and prohibited, and establishes a minimum indoor / outdoor requirement. The proposed rules prohibit practices such as beak trimming, caponization, cattle wattling, de-beaking, de-snooding, dubbing, mulesing, and toe-trimming. Not only are these practices no longer used in farming, but they are completely irrelevant in producing an organic product. Most ag producers will have to look up these terms, just to know what they are, but animal activists pretend they are widespread to conjure up hate against agriculture and raise money. Beyond the sensationalism, USDA is redefining organic. These terms define "animal comfort", but not organic. Ensuring animals have a "comfortable lifestyle" is not equivalent to organic production, and being outdoors in August and December do not always provide the most "comfortable lifestyle."

Furthermore, the proposed rule would eliminate the use of solid structure roofs or covered porches which subjects livestock and poultry to brutal summer heat with no shade. This comes on the backdrop of the most costly outbreak of Avian Influenza within our poultry industry in 2014-2015, where 50,000,000 birds were lost to the disease costing the industry \$3.3 billion according to Thomas Elam of the Indiana-based consulting group FarmEcon.

The National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials feel strongly "that this proposed rule is in conflict with our efforts to educate and encourage use of biosecurity actions to help minimize exposure to wild birds. The proposal eliminates an option farmers have to better protect their

flocks, while maintaining organic principles and certification. The proposed rule actually *requires* direct outdoor exposure and contact with birds and animals which is known to be contrary to sound principles of biosecurity and poultry health in general. AMS acknowledges the increased risk, so the fact that this change in the rule is even being considered is a major concern.”

On a recent teleconference on the rule, supporters of the rule suggested netting instead of porches. This is a clear misunderstanding of Avian Influenza and bio security.

Another supporter of the proposed provisions commented that this rule is really about ensuring the ”cattle are out on the dirt.” First, we call it soil. Second, cattle prefer grass to the dirt. Third, these rules concerning humanely raising animas have nothing to do with cattle being on the soil or grass.

The bottom line is USDA is redefining the word “organic” to a term that means nothing related to “organic” and is instead bringing angst and distrust between the most important parties: the ag producers and the food consumers.

###