



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
 DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Deputy Director General, in charge of Directorates A, B and C

Brussels,
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Thank you for your email of 11 February 2016 in which you ask about the criteria for qualifying as organic when it comes to egg farming.

The most important starting point is to adhere to the principles of organic farming and to respect the rules and requirements of the European legislation. Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007¹ and Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008² lay down the basic rules that organic farmers have to apply.

Organic farming is an overall system to manage a farm and produce food, while ensuring the following: best environmental practices, high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources, high animal welfare standards. These main principles have to be translated into concrete production methods such as multi-annual crop rotations, the use of livestock manure as a fertiliser and growing only what the farm can naturally yield. It is also essential to encourage natural resistance to pests and diseases in both crops and livestock. It is encouraged to have suitable habitats for the benefit of the animals to help control pests in a natural way. It is also important to provide access to quality feed and free-range pasture to maintain the health and welfare of the animals.

If you decide to start farming organically you must notify your activity to the competent authority for organic production in your country. Your premises and production methods have then to be inspected and acknowledged by a control body or authority.

The control bodies and/or authorities are entitled to run controls on each organic farm and investigate whether the production is according to the standards.

Organic farmers are controlled once a year to make sure that the rules are respected and if they are, the products may be labelled as organic and bear the organic logo of the European Union.

To be certified as organic, all the rules relating to organic livestock production in general and to organic poultry production in particular that are laid down in Regulations (EC) No 834/2007 and (EC) No 889/2008 will have to be complied with.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 of 28 June 2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91, O.J. L 189, 20.07.2007, p. 1

² Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of 5 September 2008 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products with regard to organic production, labelling and control, O.J. L 250, 18.09.2008, p. 1

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Organic farms have to undergo a conversion period, before they can sell their products as organic. The land, the animals and their products may be deemed organic after compliance with this conversion period. The length of the conversion period is fixed in the above mentioned legislation and depends on the way in which this conversion is conducted.

As organic farming is soil related, you will need to respect the requirements regarding land attached to the egg production. This may involve acquiring or renting agricultural land. The size of the area depends on the requirements that are fixed for laying hens. For all animals, the stocking density cannot lead to exceeding the maximum excretion limit of 170 kg of nitrogen per year and per ha which is equivalent to 230 laying hens per hectare (or a figure fixed by the national competent authority).

In Articles 10 and 12 of Regulation (EC) No 889/2008, there are specific rules on housing conditions and husbandry practices for livestock and for poultry including laying hens, in particular. Annex III of Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 fixes the minimum surface area indoors and outdoors for the different species and types of production. In particular, for laying hens, the minimum outdoors area is 4 m² per head (provided that the above mentioned limit of 170 kg of N/ha/year is not exceeded).

There is a limit on the number of animals in a poultry house: 3000 for laying hens. The minimum indoors area is 6 animals per m², 18 cm of perch per animal and 7 laying hens per nest or, in the case of a common nest, 120 cm² per bird.

Regarding access to open air areas, Article 14(5), (6) and (7) of Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 says the following:

"Article 14

Access to open air areas

...

5. Poultry shall have access to an open air area for at least one third of their life.
6. Open air areas for poultry shall be mainly covered with vegetation and be provided with protective facilities and permit fowl to have easy access to adequate numbers of drinking and feeding troughs.
7. Where poultry are kept indoors due to restrictions or obligations imposed on the basis of Community legislation, they shall permanently have access to sufficient quantities of roughage and suitable material in order to meet their ethological needs."

There are requirements relating to feed. For instance, Article 19(2) of Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 reads as follows for poultry:

"Article 19

Feed from own holding and other sources

...

2. In case of pigs and poultry, at least 20 % of the feed shall come from the farm unit itself or in case this is not feasible, be produced in the same region in cooperation with other organic farms or feed business operators.


..."

The above mentioned selection of rules is not exhaustive but shows some of the requirements that organic egg producers have to comply with.

In order to be certified organic, in addition to the "organic" rules relating to poultry production in general, all the other general requirements regarding production of laying hens also have to be respected: animal welfare, food safety.

Before starting the organic activity, we would advise you to contact the competent agricultural authority in the country where you intend to carry out your egg production because they can provide information on which support measures are available and give advice in general. If the country is Malta, then you should contact:

The Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority
Standards and Metrology Institute
Mizzi House,
National Road
Blata l-Bajda HMR9010
Malta
Tel: + 356 23952000


Website: <http://mccaa.org.mt/>

I hope that you find this information helpful. If you have further questions don't hesitate to consult our website at

https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/index_en ; where you will be able to find a lot of useful information on organic production.

Yours sincerely,

