

# GET THE FACTS

## ABOUT ORGANICS IN ALBERTA



### HOW DO ORGANIC FARMERS AVOID ANTIBIOTICS?

There's no doubt about it: antibiotics are life-saving medications that play an important role in the lives of humans and animals alike. They're used to treat disease and illness caused by bacteria.

Animals also need to fight off certain diseases and illnesses with antibiotics. They're used to help prevent, treat, and control diseases on conventional farms.

However, according to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, there is an increasing concern about antimicrobial resistance in humans. When we develop resistance to antimicrobial medications (such as antibiotics), they no longer work against bacterial disease. This can happen as a result of the overuse of antibiotics in human medicine, as well as in veterinary medicine.

To combat these concerns, the Government of Canada closely regulates which antibiotics are used for farm animals, when and how they're used, and how much time passes between antibiotic treatments and the sale of animals and their by-products for human consumption.

When it comes to certified organic animals, the rules surrounding antibiotics are even more strict. In general, certified organic animals in Canada are not treated with antibiotics.

#### **WHAT ARE THE RULES ABOUT ORGANIC ANIMALS & ANTIBIOTICS?**

The rules surrounding antibiotics are different depending on the type of animal and its intended purpose. Animals that are sold for meat, or produce eggs can't be given antibiotics at all.

Dairy animals are an exception to the rules about antibiotics. In emergencies, dairy animals can be treated with antibiotics, but only when following strict guidelines, including a withdrawal period of 30 days from milk production. They can only be treated twice in one year. If they're treated more than that, they will lose their organic status. All of this information and more can be gathered from the Organic production systems: General principles and management standards.



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## PREVENTION IS THE BEST MEDICINE

One of the main principles of organic farming is sustainability. Organic farmers aim to create a healthy life cycle for animals that more closely resembles their natural state of being. Taking preventative steps toward animal health helps organic livestock farmers avoid treating disease with antibiotics and other restricted veterinary medications.

The first preventative measure happens before the animals even arrive at the farm. Farmers have to make choices about the breeds of animals they'll raise. Finding appropriate breeds for the climate is particularly important in places like Alberta, where we have harsh winters.

Just like humans, proper housing, feed, and exercise keep animals healthy. Organic farmers set up proper housing and pasture, and use sanitation practices to guarantee clean living spaces. Access to the outdoors and living spaces with freedom for movement help keep animals in shape. Organic animals are also fed 100% organic feed with balanced nutrients.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN ORGANIC ANIMAL GETS SICK?

The first thing a farmer will do when a certified organic animal gets sick is treat them quickly using organic-approved methods and substances. The Canadian Organic Standards includes a list of permitted substances that can be used to treat sick or injured animals.

Unfortunately, it's not always possible to avoid antibiotics. Although organic farmers want to avoid giving their animals antibiotics, they also don't want to let a sick animal suffer or die unnecessarily. So, in many cases, farmers have to give sick

animals antibiotic treatments, even though it means the animal can't remain on the organic market. The Canadian Organic Standards mandates that animals can't be denied medications when they need them.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ANTIBIOTICS ARE GIVEN TO ORGANIC ANIMALS?

When an organic animal needs to be treated with an antibiotic, the administration of the medication is recorded, and the animal loses its organic status (except for dairy cows). After this, animals are sold on the conventional market.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ANTIBIOTICS ARE GIVEN TO ORGANIC ANIMALS?

Restrictions on antibiotics aren't just for organic livestock. Conventional farmers also have rules to follow when it comes to giving antibiotics to their animals. For example, all Alberta beef is free of antibiotics. Although cattle can be given antibiotics, there's a withdrawal period before they can be sold or slaughtered. The withdrawal period is based on maximum residue limits (MRLs) set by Health Canada's Veterinary Drug Directorate. Similar rules apply to other animals raised for meat, eggs, and dairy.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency regularly tests for antibiotic residue in food products. So, whether or not you choose Canadian Certified Organic products while you're in the grocery store, you can rest easy knowing the food you bring home to your family is healthy and nutritious!

## WAYS TO LEARN MORE

Do you want to learn more about what organically-grown means in Alberta? Would you value monthly updates on Alberta's local organic sector – including legislation, farming practices, GMO regulation, and more? Now you can receive it the way you want to:

- **By Email** – Become a member of Organic Alberta and we'll deliver our latest article directly into your inbox.
- **By Facebook Messenger** – Be the first to read the latest information.
- **By Browser Notification** – Receive convenient notifications of new content the next time you're online.

