



Organic Pasture Rule Variance

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About Us

Vermont Organic Farmers LLC (VOF) is a USDA accredited certification body owned by the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT).

VOF certifies farms and facilities in Vermont to the USDA's organic regulations. VOF currently certifies about 800 organic farms and food producers.

NOFA-VT is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization promoting organic practices to build a food system in Vermont that is economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just.



Organic Pasture Rule Requirements

- Applies to organic ruminant livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats)
- Requires *meaningful* access to pasture during the grazing season
- Grazing season must be *at least* 120 days per year, based on regional conditions (VT-150 days is typical)
- Animals must receive an average of at least 30% of dry matter intake (DMI) from pasture during the grazing season
- Pasture must be managed as a crop
- Includes grazing management, rest and recovery periods, reseeding, and soil fertility practices



Pasture Rule Requirements

Can *temporarily* confine animals for specific reasons including:

- Inclement weather
- Animal health or safety
- Protection of soil or water quality
- Certain life stages (e.g., milking)

Producers must maintain required records, including:

- Pasture management plan
- Stocking rates
- As fed rations per animal group

Purpose of the rule:

- Ensure grazing is central to organic systems
- Support animal welfare, soil health, and environmental sustainability



Temporary Variances

- The regulations allows the NOP to grant temporarily variances for specific sections of the regulations (including the pasture rule) for the following reasons:
- Natural disasters declared by the Secretary;
- Damage caused by drought, wind, flood, excessive moisture, hail, tornado, earthquake, fire, or other business interruption; &
- Practices used for the purpose of conducting research or trials of techniques, varieties, or ingredients used in organic production or handling.



Requesting a Temporary Variance

- Certifiers cannot grant or deny a request for a temporary variance.
- Only the NOP Administrator has the authority to grant a temporary variance.
- Requests/recommendations for a variance must be in writing and routed through the certifying agent, who in turn, must submit the request to the Administrator.
- Certifiers must recommend whether the request is granted or denied.
- Producers may not send requests for variances directly to the NOP.
- [Current Temporary Variances | USDA](#)



2025 Temporary Variance Request

- VOF requested and received a pasture rule variance for the 2025 drought for producers in the following counties:
 - Addison, Bennington, Caledonia, Chittenden, Lamoille, Orange, Orleans, Rutland, Washington & Windham.
- In addition the following conditions must be met:
 - 30% DMI from pasture for no less than 90 days (shortened from 120).
- Variance only applies to the 2025 grazing season.
- The justification for granting this variance was based on the USDA Secretarial Disaster Designation in Vermont.





Thank you!

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