

AS2 A Guide to the Development of Organic Health Plans**Ultimate Objective**

Ideally, an organic farm should not need to use any chemically synthesized veterinary treatments. An organic health plan should have this as its ultimate aim.

For a farming system to achieve the **ultimate objective**, it is essential that the right management paths are taken.

All stages of the livestock production system must be assessed for providing an environment that protects and enhances both the health and welfare of the animals. (See A below).

From the assessment a plan must be developed, using professional advice where necessary; a plan that addresses both the best of the current practice and also all perceived risks to health and welfare, and then lays down management rules and guidelines that would lead to an optimum environment for the livestock. This will form the basis of the **organic health plan**, the principle upon which the farm operates (see B below).

In practice, the ultimate objective may not be achievable on many farms, or it may take several years of organic management to eliminate the need for vaccines, wormers and the occasional antibiotic. Therefore the health plan should also include criteria for the proposed use of veterinary products; i.e. what justification is required before the use of vaccines? What degree of intestinal worm infestation will require an anthelmintic treatment? (See C below).

A. Assessment of Livestock Production System.

All livestock production systems have both strengths and weaknesses. It is as important to recognise the positive elements of the current system as it is to identify where there are problems. These strengths should form part of the overall assessment.

The vast majority of threats to the health and welfare of the livestock are already known on the farm, so these areas should be addressed as part of the assessment:-

- a. Current health problems.
- b. Historical health problems.
- c. Health threats from neighbours or new diseases in the region.
- d. Risk of injury through poorly maintained buildings and fences.

B. Management Principles to Minimise Incidence of Health and Welfare Problems.

In order to lay out this basis of the Organic Health Plan, it is important to recognise what has already been achieved, i.e. what management practices are already working to reduce health problems on the farm. It is also necessary to understand the diseases and health issues that are to be addressed, as identified at A above. e.g. Why do the weaned calves get pneumonia? What causes joint ill? What is the lifecycle of the lung worm organism?

It may be necessary to take veterinary advice at this stage.

Having identified the threats and understood how and why they might occur, each one should be addressed so that guidelines can be written on how they should be prevented from developing.

e.g. Improve ventilation in youngstock building. Ensure lamb navels are treated at birth. Do not graze susceptible youngstock on infected pastures.

There are likely to be several management practices that should be adopted for each health threat, and new practices will be developed as experience in the system grows. An organic health plan should be regularly reviewed and updated in the light of experience.

C. Criteria for the use of Veterinary Products.

Having put in place the management principles for the protection of health and welfare, it is necessary to address the occasions when treatment with a veterinary product will be made. It is important to involve the veterinary surgeon at this stage. For each potential health threat it is necessary to decide at what level of infection a treatment programme should be started and to justify any vaccinations.

e.g. Body temperature. Faecal egg counts. Somatic cell counts.

Treatments that are considered to be routine or preventative will be permitted in an organic system only in exceptional circumstances where the farm veterinary surgeon considers it necessary and where animal welfare is at risk.

When deciding whether or not to treat an animal, its welfare is of paramount importance. If an animal is suffering unduly it must be treated even if it means that it loses its organic status. Veterinary advice should always be observed in such cases.

The statutory withdrawal period must be doubled before the sale of organic meat or animal product.

Assessment of Organic Health Plan

QWFC will assess the health plan during the organic conversion period then every year at the annual inspection. It will firstly be assessed for suitability to the farming system and compliance with the QWFC organic standards, then the annual visit will ensure that it remains relevant, it is reviewed regularly and confirm that the actual practice on the farm is a true reflection of the aims of the health plan.