

Chapter 7

Animal health and nutrition in organic farming

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Introduction

Animals are important in organic farming systems, both as a part of the concept and in practice, where there is great weight on forming an integrated system with harmony between the land, the animals and the people, involving local recirculation of feed and manure. Good animal health and welfare is an important goal for organic husbandry. In contrast to crops, animals are not just parts of the farming system, they are also sentient creatures and as such they deserve special moral consideration. They are individuals that need to be cared for, they can suffer, and they can interact with each other and with the humans and environment around them. Animal management is, therefore, very different from crop management. Humans have a moral obligation to treat animals well and to intervene before they suffer or die, as this is unacceptable. Organic farming principles go much further than promoting animal welfare in terms of avoiding suffering. One of the basic principles of organic farming refers to access to ‘natural’ behaviour for organically managed animals, which substantially broadens the concept of ‘welfare’. These perspectives are presented and discussed in *Chapter 8*, where Lund emphasises the importance of integrating naturalness into the concepts and practical application of animal welfare in organic animal husbandry.

The animal welfare goal of avoiding suffering allows the use of synthetic medicines for treating sick animals. This is the only circumstance in organic agriculture where use of ‘chemicals’ is allowed and even recommended in Europe. In the United States of America (USA), antimicrobial treatments are completely prohibited. Some farmers, therefore, change their disease treatment patterns and turn to so-called alternative or complementary methods, sometimes in combination with anti-inflammatory drugs (‘pain-killers’). No matter how diseases are managed, the most sustainable way to avoid suffering and the need for disease treatment is to make more fundamental changes in husbandry methods, such as breeding for increased disease resistance and introducing more species-appropriate housing, and a well-balanced diet. Hörning (see *Chapter 6*) discusses aspects of breeding and housing, and we will discuss the aspects of feeding and disease management.

Organic farming in a global context is emphasised in this book, and therefore we touch on perspectives of non-certified organic farming, in the way it exists in many regions of the world.