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1. Got grass? USDA releases strong organic pasture rule

A new federal rule guarantees that organic dairy cows and other ruminants, such as goats and sheep, will be raised on pasture. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rule will put an end to the near life-long confinement of organic cows that was standard practice at many dairies, where cows were kept in cramped feedlots with little or no access to grass. Now all dairy cows and other ruminants must be on pasture for the entire grazing season, a minimum of 120 days, in order to be certified as organic. During the grazing season, these animals must receive at least 30 percent of their dry matter intake (the amount of food they consume, minus the moisture) from pasture. The rule requires producers to provide all organic animals, including cows, with year-round access to the outdoors—not necessarily pasture—and eliminates exemptions that producers have used to deny animals access to pasture. More than 14,000 UCS activists submitted comments to the USDA on the rulemaking process. The organic community praised the new rule, which will go into effect in June. [Read the rule in the *Federal Register*](#) (pdf).



"Consumers expect organic cows to be raised on pasture and now they will be. This rule will build the trust between organic producers and consumers that is essential for the organic enterprise." ~ Margaret Mellon, Food & Environment Program Director

2. USDA funds healthy urban food initiative

The USDA has established a national center to increase access to healthy, affordable, local foods in low-income communities. The Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Center in Little Rock, Arkansas, will provide training, technical assistance, and funding to community organizations, entrepreneurs, and small businesses working to build local and regional food systems across the country. Promoting the production and distribution of food within a local "foodshed" opens new markets to small- and mid-sized farmers, fosters social connections between urban and rural residents, and can improve health in inner-city neighborhoods where fresh fruits and vegetables are often scarce. The project was authorized in the 2008 Food and Farm Bill. [Read more.](#)

3. Antibiotic resistance featured on Oprah, CBS News

Millions of Americans tuned in to recent news coverage of antibiotic resistance. Oprah talked with food expert Michael Pollan about the documentary *Food, Inc.*, food labels, organic food, and antibiotic overuse in livestock as a leading cause of antibiotic resistance. [See the highlights of the January 21 show.](#) Then CBS Evening News with Katie Couric investigated the growing problem of antibiotic-resistant illness on [February 9](#) and [February 10](#). The shows explored how the overuse of antibiotics in the feed and water in CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations) contributes significantly to antibiotic resistance. [Learn about legislation to address this problem.](#)

4. Organic community is united against GE alfalfa

Organic farmers, nonprofit groups, and consumers flooded the USDA with letters urging the agency not to approve Monsanto's genetically engineered (GE) Roundup Ready alfalfa variety. The alfalfa is engineered to tolerate the herbicide glyphosate. The letters cited the virtual certainty that GE alfalfa would contaminate non-GE alfalfa, potentially disqualifying animals who consume the feed from being sold as organic. Although organic standards allow for inadvertent contamination, consumers may not tolerate it, and independent testing by organic certifiers may cause sellers to lose their organic premiums.

"If GE alfalfa is approved, it will contaminate non-GE feed supplies, including organic feed; could increase herbicide use; and could put a substantial financial burden on alfalfa farmers who don't grow it due to contamination of their product." ~ Doug Gurian-Sherman, Senior Scientist

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