



CHAPTER 11

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NAMIBIAN SPECIFIC PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS



Generally speaking, the most significant considerations for Namibian livestock farmers wishing to convert to organic production are the chemical control of bush encroachment, the use of urea and other synthetic nitrogen sources, supplemental feeding, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), use of seed pods from various trees and age restrictions during conversion defined in the standards.

Then too, there are the advantages that Namibian farmers have over their colleagues in other countries, the most significant of which is the use of antibiotics, or rather the non-use of them, which is increasingly coming under the spotlight in countries such as Australia, the USA and the UK.

Authorities are becoming increasingly alarmed at the increasing incidence of antibiotic drug resistance arising from the routine use of antibiotics in non-organic livestock production.

11.1. Bush encroachment and Arboricides

Arboricides are synthetic herbicides and as such may not be used on organic farms. Any lands which have been cleared through the use of arboricides will have to undergo the minimum prescribed 3-year conversion period. However, it is reasonable to expect that the certifier may extend the conversion period given the persistence of the arboricides in the environment, or they may ask for residue analyses to be conducted before granting certification.

Farmers are also encouraged to look at the causes and resolution of bush encroachment, both the “mainstream” thinking as well as alternative approaches, based on the science of Soil Health, as explained by Holistic Management practitioners, researchers such as the Australian Soil Scientist, Dr. Christine Jones, Elaine Ingham and the United State Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Mechanical means of bush encroachment are allowed by the standards, as with weed control in crops.

11.2. Urea

The urea used in licks and feeds by non-organic livestock farmers is prohibited in certified organic agriculture. A livestock farmer who traditionally uses urea and now wishes to convert to certified organic practices will have to find alternatives.

Supplemental feeds, while providing the sought-after protein, are themselves expensive and if the certifier requires that they be certified, can be very difficult to find. The threat of these feeds containing GMOs adds to the overall complexity faced by the organic farmer.

11.3. Genetically Modified Organisms

Certified organic livestock farmers may not use any feeds containing GMOs. This is a significant challenge as “GMO-free” is not necessarily guaranteed by suppliers, especially those importing feeds and feed ingredients from South Africa. Therefore organic farmers have to either purchase certified organic feed, which is their best option, or buy feed which is guaranteed by the supplier to be GMO-free.

South African experience has shown that even this latter option is not fool-proof. Certified livestock farmers should therefore always first communicate with their certifier if they are unable to source certified organic feed and wish to use non-organic feed. It is reasonable to anticipate that the certifier will request an analysis of the consignment

of feed to be purchased in order to make sure that it is GMO-free. The crops which are the greatest GMO-risk for Namibian farmers are maize, cotton, soybeans and canola. Internationally, alfalfa/lucerne and sugar beet also carry GMO risks.

Organic livestock farmers are advised to keep abreast of the developments in the Namibian National Biosafety Regulations in order to be informed of the presence of and threats posed by GMOs in Namibia.

11.4. Seed pods

The seed pods of various trees, such as Camel Thorn (*Acacia erioloba/Vachellia erioloba*), Prosopis species, and Ana Boom (*Acacia albida/Faidherbia albida*), make good cattle feed. They have been successfully used by Namibian certified organic livestock farmers instead of urea. Generally the pods are hammer milled and incorporated into feed supplements.

The pods must be collected from areas where there is no risk of them having been contaminated by agro-chemicals or other pollutants. Similarly they must be stored in a manner which ensures that they do not become contaminated in any way.

11.5. Supplemental feeds

Commercial livestock feed manufacturers base their feed formulations on the best combination of a range of ingredients to obtain desired nutritional levels. The actual ingredients may differ between batches as well as originating from different sources.

Given that Namibian feed manufacturers

import feed from South Africa and other countries, and the fact that there is no separation of non-GMO from GMO grains and labelling thereof by most suppliers, it is very difficult for a manufacturer to give a guarantee that a particular supplement will always be acceptable for use by certified organic farmers.

The mineral ingredients in feeds are also of concern. Firstly, they must be from natural sources. Some, like monocalcium and dicalcium phosphate, which undergo defluorination to make them safe for consumption by livestock, are acceptable for use in certified organic livestock production. Furthermore, minerals may not undergo chemical processes to make them water soluble and lastly, they may not be synthetic. Feed supplements used in certified organic livestock production may not contain ingredients such as urea and other non-protein nitrogen sources such as mono ammonium phosphate.

It is thus understandable and acceptable that feed supplement manufacturers cannot give hard guarantees that a particular feed which they manufacture will always satisfy the organic requirements – some batches may and others may not. It is therefore essential for the certified livestock producer to have an insight into the complexities and if necessary, consult the manufacturer directly regarding the suitability of a particular feed supplement batch. The manufacturer will have to consult the livestock standards, which will include a list of ingredients which may be used in supplements, in order to answer your questions.

The farmer will do well to request a written statement confirming the ingredients in a particular batch, and to then consult with the organic certifier to ensure the acceptability thereof. Only then should the livestock farmer purchase that batch of

feed supplement. It is a process, one of the bigger challenges a certified producer may face, but it is better to do so and to ensure continued compliance with the standards and thus certification, than to take the risk of using products which may not be acceptable according to the organic standards, leading to the loss of organic certification.

Purchasing commercially manufactured supplemental feeds therefore is a high risk action for organic farmers.

11.6. Establishing a herd or flock – conversion and age of development

Livestock farmers may well be surprised with the weaning and slaughtering ages the standards request when establishing a herd or flock for the first time and the animals have to undergo conversion (Chapter 3.1.3.3).

We must bear the Eurocentricity of the standards in mind – animals develop faster in the temperate climates compared to the arid Namibian climate. Ages will also differ according to locality within Namibia and managerial philosophy and schools of thought. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that the corresponding Namibian weaning ages will be older than in Europe and may differ between farms.

Thus it is reasonable to request the certifier to grant an exception to the standards to cater for your particular Namibian conditions and management practices, using animal welfare arguments together with regional differences.

Experience has shown that European certifiers may find this difficult to understand and

appreciate and may therefore not grant an exception. A Southern African certifier on the other hand will have a much better understanding of Namibian conditions and can be reasonably expected to grant the necessary exceptions. Therefore it is absolutely imperative that producers develop their conversion plans, highlighting aspects where they justifiably cannot satisfy the requirements of the standards and negotiate a solution with the certifier, before entering into any contract with them.

11.7. “Acts of God” and other emergencies

Droughts, fire and locusts are most probably the most severe natural disasters which Namibian farmers face. In all instances the certified farmer is urged to engage his/her certifier to discuss the situation, the planned actions and the certification consequences thereof.

When engaging a certifier it is advisable to discuss these real prospects before becoming a client, thereby eliminating the need for these negotiations at a time of crisis. Instead, when the crisis arises, the farmer can then implement pre-planned (as far as possible) responses and inform the certifier thereof.