



# FOOT ROT IN ORGANIC CATTLE

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## Guidance

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Foot Rot (also known as interdigital necrobacillosis) is a contagious and painful infectious hoof disease that originates between the claws on the hoof and is characterized by swelling, lameness and a foul odor.

Foot rot is a bacterial disease that is frequently caused by *Fusiformis necrophorus*. This bacterium may build up in barnyards, pastures, mud holes, etc. Foot rot results when the interdigital skin is injured and the bacterium gains entry to the skin. Contact with mud and manure as well as injuries from ice, field stubble or rocks are often contributing factors to foot rot. While foot rot is more common during wet periods like mid-winter and early summer, it can affect cattle at any time of year.

### NOP REGULATIONS AND PCO POLICY

The National Organic Program (NOP) regulations require that livestock producers establish and maintain preventive livestock health care practices. When preventive practices and veterinary biologics are inadequate to prevent a sickness, such as foot rot, a producer may administer synthetic medications, provided that such medications are allowed according to the NOP regulations. If allowed medications fail, you must not withhold a medical treatment from a sick animal in an effort to preserve its organic status. All appropriate medications must be used to restore an animal to health when methods acceptable to organic production fail. Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and shall not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced. §205.238

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

#### SYMPTOMS OF FOOT ROT

Symptoms of Foot Rot include:

- Lameness, usually on one leg
- Foul smelling odor
- Swelling above the hoof (may extend to the hock) and spreading of the toes/dewclaws
- Cracks and fissures in interdigital space
- Fever
- Loss of appetite

#### BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Focusing on practices that reduce the likelihood of injury to the skin can help to prevent foot rot. Minimizing time cattle spend standing in wet and muddy conditions is also important because the bacteria thrive in warm and moist conditions. Managing nutrition and stress levels is important for prevention of foot rot. The trace minerals copper, zinc, and iodine are important for hoof health. Keeping feet clean and dry is important.

In order to prevent foot rot and other hoof issues, stock coming onto the farm can be treated with an approved footbath and kept separated for two weeks before being foot bathed again and mixed with the existing herd. All possible hygiene measures should be taken to ensure against cross contamination.

## TREATMENT PRACTICES

Footbaths containing antibiotics cannot be used without removing the cow from organic production. Nonantibiotic treatments include footbaths containing copper sulfate or limestone (wet: 5% copper sulfate), (dry: 1 part copper sulfate: 9 parts lime). For optimal effect, the hooves of the cows should be washed thoroughly before entering the footbath. All footbaths must be approved prior to use.

In advanced cases, individual treatment may be needed. The foot, especially the interdigital area, should be thoroughly cleansed and trimmed. Any abscesses should be drained. A single dressing containing an approved treatment such as an iodine/sugar paste or a copper sulfate paste can be applied carefully to the infected tissue and protected by a waterproof bandage. Amputation of the toe may be necessary if severely infected. All pastes must be approved prior to use.

## APPROVED INPUTS

*All inputs must be reviewed and approved by PCO prior to use, so be sure to check with us or consult a current PCO Approved Materials List, OMRI, or WSDA list prior to purchasing or using a product. PCO does not endorse any of the products listed in this guidance document. This is not an all-inclusive list and other inputs may be allowed. Please contact PCO if you have any questions on materials or restrictions.*

- **Foot Salve** by Dr. Paul's Lab
- **Hoof Healer** Cream by Dr. Sarah's Essentials
- **New Hoof Concentrate** by Bomac Vets Plus, Inc.

PCO is not endorsing the efficacy of any of the approved treatments, and producers should work with a trained professional to treat any distressed animals.

## RESOURCES

- <https://articles.extension.org/pages/67229/organic-dairy-herd-health:-hoof-health-and-lameness>
- <http://articles.extension.org/pages/11201/prevention-and-control-of-foot-problems-in-dairy-cows>