

USDA declines to investigate alleged violations at major organic farms

By Peter Whoriskey, Washington Post

Aerial photographs taken last summer of some of the largest organic egg and dairy farms in the United States showed few animals outside on pasture, but the USDA will not investigate whether these operations are violating rules for organic agriculture, officials wrote last week.

The photographs of the 14 operations, according to the watchdog group that had them taken, is evidence that these large farms were not really “organic.” Under USDA rules, organic farms must allow animals to engage in their natural behavior and have free access to the outdoors. Cows, goats and sheep are supposed to be able to get to pastures for grazing.

While the investigations will not go on, the photography presented by the group belied the picturesque images of red barns and green fields that organic brands often present to consumers. The photographs show industrial-scaled operations, a distinct contrast to advertising. The farms – five dairies and nine chicken operations – supply well-known store brands such as Walmart, Target and Costco, according to the group.

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