

From The NODPA Desk

By *Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director*

I'm writing this in mid July when my Anglo-Saxon and Irish blood are under severe stress from excessive weather conditions of heat and humidity, which brings us to the NODPA Field Days and Annual meeting which always seems to be held during a heat wave. This year we tried to change the time to the fall to take advantage of the cooler weather but arriving at a date that was convenient to farmers, not within peak autumn vacation season and a good venue that would be both cost effective and provide local and organic food brought us back to August.

Field Days will be held on August 17th and 18th (Friday and Saturday) at Freund's Farm Market in East Canaan, CT. We will have plenty of good food, good conversation and good company. If you run into difficulty with finding somewhere to stay, possibly a problem with the date and location, then give us a call and Nora and I will try to help out. One of the changes that we have made to the agenda for the Field Days is to have an open, facilitated discussion on the future direction for NODPA and its role in supporting organic farming in the northeast. This agenda change, following the annual dinner on Friday evening, was the result of listening to comments from many different folks and recognizing that as organic dairy grows it requires a proportionate growth in organic feed, seed, support services, research and technical advice.

Historically NODPA has provided support to organic dairy farmers and others with farm tours, Field Days, workshops, education and advocacy on the USDA NOP, moderating Odairy, a dynamic website and the regular publication of a quarterly newsletter. With the growth of organics there are now many more organizations providing workshops, presentations, farm tours, twilight meetings and websites with many links that organic dairy producers can access. What will NODPA's role be in the future when supply contracts with dairy producers devolve into focusing on production practices and business organizational structures that are then used as marketing tools for the end user? What will NODPA's role be in protecting the long term differentiation of organic milk that provides the basis for a higher farm gate price? These are just some of the questions that we should be anticipating and I'm look-

ing forward to hearing many points of view both at the Field Days and directly from those who can't attend.

The Organic Dairy Summit that took place in Boulder was a great opportunity for some key folks in the organic dairy community to meet each other and debate many of the issues and ideas that provide the backbone to the integrity of organic dairy. While there were certainly many "old" disagreements and personality conflicts hovering below the surface, there was a positive effort by all concerned to bury, or perhaps just ignore those and move forward for the sake of the future integrity and sustainability of the organic dairy industry. The meeting was well facilitated and the overwhelming majority of invitees participated very respectfully and positively, essential when passion and philosophy meet with economic sustainability and market share. While the devil is always in the detail, in the follow-up to these meetings everybody was able to recognize that chasms are not separating producers and processors, or among processors and other brands on pasture and herd replacement standards. There is a need for clear rulemaking so that basic organic standards do not become the prerogative of marketing departments as brands compete for market share.

It was also noted at the organic dairy meeting and the larger organic summit convening that it is time for the organic community to stop operating like a circular firing squad and work together to promote the advantages of organic rather than highlighting the problems. If we promote organic there is also the necessity to police our industry better ourselves, from certifier through processor and producer. If you are a producer, it should never be enough to "just satisfy the certifier" that best meets your situation or, if you are the certifier, to put the blame on the NOP, or if you are the processor/brand owner, blame the other processors, play follow-the-leader, or not do anything until negative media attention forces change.

Organic farming isn't for everyone. The organic community worked with Congress and the USDA to design standards to reward those that followed them and de-certify those that didn't, following a short allowance for remedying the deficiency. With the increasing number of imitators and different standards entering the market, organic certification needs to be held to a high standard. Those who do not meet these high standards should be de-certified, rather than allowed to live on in a limbo of possibly achieving the prescribed standards sometime in an undefined future. As we move forward, it's important to hold these ideas central to our work together as we focus on the details that must be the basis for a clear understanding of standards and for a level playing field for all. ♦

NORTHEAST ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS ALLIANCE

MISSION STATEMENT: To enable organic family dairy farmers, situated across an extensive area, to have informed discussion about matters critical to the well being of the organic dairy industry as a whole.