

NODPA NEWS

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

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Organic Industry News

Organic Dairy Processors & Farmers Meet to Protect Organic Integrity

By Ed Maltby

The Federation Of Organic Dairy Farmers (FOOD Farmers) hosted the first Organic Dairy summit in Boulder, CO, on the morning of Wednesday June 20th. The summit was attended by organic dairy producers representing three regional groups from across the United States — Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association (MODPA), Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA), and major organic dairy processors and handlers including Organic Valley, Straus Family Creamery, Stonyfield Farm, Horizon Organic, Humboldt Creamery, HP Hood, Clover Stornetta, Dairy Farmers of America, Dairy Marketing Services, Aurora Organic Dairy, Radiance Dairy, and Wisconsin Organics.

The meeting happened immediately prior to the Organic Summit sponsored by Organic Farming Research Foundation and New Hope Media to economize on participants' travel expense and to give an opportunity for increased, cross-commodity dialogue following the meeting. The Organic Dairy Summit was a great opportunity to meet face to face and explore the many ideas that have made the organic dairy community so alive, vibrant and dynamic. The meeting, facilitated by Bill Capsalis of the Fresh Ideas Group, opened a constructive dialogue that has allowed producers and

processors to increase their work in cooperating to strengthen the organic dairy and pasture production standards. Everyone at the dairy summit agreed that the USDA National Organic Program's standards remain the most comprehensive organic dairy regulations in the world. What was no surprise was the level of agreement around the room that future profitability for everyone, at all levels of organic dairy, lies in working together to ensure the integrity of the organic label in the eyes of consumers. "I'm proud that the organic dairy community is committed to constructive dialogue, to taking steps to further strengthen the USDA National Organic Standards, and to assure that consumer expectations are met," said Kelly Shea, Vice President of Organic Stewardship for Horizon Organic.

Discussions during the four hour meeting, and subsequent networking after the

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Don't Miss...

NODPA's 7th Annual Field Days Event and Annual Producers Meeting

**August 17 & 18, 2007
Freund's Farm Market
324 Norfolk Road
East Canaan, Connecticut**

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meeting, covered topical questions that have dominated the organic dairy community over the past few years.

Following the meeting, the Organic Dairy Summit attendees issued a joint press release urging the USDA National Organic Program to immediately publish the proposed rule detailing access to pasture. Summit meeting attendees acknowledged that this long delayed notice is needed to provide the necessary clarity and a level playing field that producers and processors need to ensure the economic sustainability of their businesses, and consumer confidence in the USDA organic seal.

California organic dairy producer and WODPA President Tony Azevedo summed up the view of producers that attended the meeting, "It was long overdue for producers and processors to sit down together and work on these issues of great importance to us all. I was pleased that we were able to meet and acknowledge just how much we were in agreement with each other on how to maintain the integrity of organic dairy and pasture standards."

The Organic Dairy Summit participants are continuing to work together to build on the positive steps taken at this initial meeting. This will expand the discussion to other areas of interest and importance to organic dairy via email and conference calls with a strong possibility for another meeting later in the year. FOOD Farmers, as the host of the meeting, is committed to

"FOOD Farmers...are actively working to increase communication between the different sectors of organic dairy."

working with all summit participants individually and as a group, to bring clarity, fairness and consistency to organic dairy and pasture production standards as promoted by individual processors and enforced by the National Organic Program.

FOOD Farmers met as a group in Boulder prior to and again following the Organic Dairy Summit and are actively working to increase communication between the different sectors of organic dairy. FOOD Farmers represent the views of the three regional groups plus many independent groups and their position is outlined below:

A. Access to Pasture

The access to pasture rule, as a matter of policy, should be:

- 1) Organic dairy livestock over 6 months of age must graze on pasture during the months of the year when pasture can provide edible forage.
- 2) The grazed feed must provide significant intake for all milking age organic dairy cows. At a minimum, an average of 30% of the dry matter intake must come from grazed pasture during the region's growing season, which will be no less than 120 days per year.
- 3) Temporary exemption from pasture may be allowed because of:
 - a. Conditions under which the health, safety, or well-being of the animal could be jeopardized.
 - b. Short term inclement weather.
 - c. Temporary conditions which pose a risk to soil and water quality.
- 4) Instances of temporary confinement must be the minimum time necessary. In no case can temporary confinement be allowed as a continuous production system.

Dairy animals – replacement stock

Once a dairy herd has been converted to organic production, all dairy animals shall be under organic management from the last third of gestation. [Note: this wording is from the 2003 NOSB origin of livestock rule change recommendation.]

Proof of origin for all fluid milk and dairy products

The consumer has the right to know the locality from where the raw milk used in organic fluid and dairy products they purchase, originated, either directly on the packaging or with minimal research. ♦





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