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gether with the participants there was some great brainstorming around the benefits of annual forage and small grains and experiences in understanding new production practices. This was a very practical discussion that should have been recorded for many others to benefit from.

The NOPDA Field Days concluded with a tour of Morvan Allen's Farm in Sheffield Massachusetts. Attendees were able to see how Morvan manages his pasture and hear a great story about why good fences make good neighbors. The additional information to this story is; when the fence isn't adequate, quickly mend the relationship by paying the \$5000 worth of damage your cow did to the swimming pool. Other aspects of the farm tour included a look at Morvan's calf rearing system, the fencing and water system, laneways and a recently finished manure handling system, cost-shared by NRCS.

The updated website will display a Field Days page complete with photographs, speaker handouts and other resources shared. NODPA would like to thank all its sponsors as well as the host farms for making the 7th Annual Field Days such a great success. ♦

FOOD Farmers Sends Letter to USDA Protesting Consent Agreement with Aurora

By Kathie Arnold

The Federation of Organic Dairy Farmers (FOOD Farmers) sent a letter to the USDA Secretary of Agriculture on September 19 protesting the Consent Agreement between the USDA and Aurora Organic Dairy (AOD). FOOD Farmers is the umbrella organization for the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), the Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association (MODPA), and the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA).

The letter:

► Thanked the National Organic Program (NOP) for having investigated the complaints regarding AOD and having publicly released the Notice of Proposed Revocation, Violations by Aurora Dairy, and the Consent Agreement.

► Expressed that FOOD Farmers are extremely disturbed by the Consent Agreement made between USDA and AOD for many reasons:

- It does not bring closure to this situation.
- It sets an unacceptable precedent for the USDA organic seal, that alleged major, multiple violations occurring over several years time and affecting multiple operations are not met with certification revocation but can be negotiated away without penalty.
- The Consent Agreement does not address all the alleged violations and inconsistencies raised in the Violation by Aurora Organic Dairy document nor does it fully and fairly remedy all the ones it does address. For example:

1. Cows at the Dublin, TX that were improperly transitioned are not required to be removed from the herd.
2. Requiring AOD to remove their 80/20 transitioned cows from their Platteville farm, rather than all the other subsequent livestock brought in that were not organic from last third of gestation as required, is the opposite of what should be required.
3. The 4 to 5 cows per acre pasture stocking rate allowed AOD goes against every recommendation of the National Organic Standards Board.

► Disagrees with USDA's claim that the Consent Agreement is in the best interest of the program.

► Notes no known legal justification in OFPA, the law

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authorizing the NOP, or in the NOP regulation to support USDA's negotiation of the Consent Agreement.

► States that although this case shows that current NOP regulations do require pasture for ruminant animals and that there are standards for dairy replacement animals, it is more important than ever for USDA to swiftly move forward and publish rulemaking that will clarify the access to pasture rule and provide a technical correction to the rule governing organic dairy herd replacements.

► Noted the apparent conflict of interest between AOD and their certifiers, given the laudatory public statements of AOD made by their certifiers.

► Requested that AOD's certification by the Colorado Department of Agriculture be declared null and that AOD be immediately instructed to contract with a new certifier, other than CDA or QAI, to ensure ongoing certification by a certifier that understands the requirements that must be met by organic dairy farms.

► Calls on the USDA to continue to enforce the Consent Agreement with AOD with monthly surprise visits to the AOD operations by NOP investigators, paid for by AOD. Asked that if there is one indication that the terms of the Consent Agreement "are not being reasonably complied with," that USDA immediately follow through with the April 16th Proposed Revocation of Aurora Organic Dairy's production and handling certification under the NOP.

► Concludes with the following paragraph:

"The continued health and growth of organic farming, handling, processing, and retailing rests upon the credibility of the National Organic Program system. The Consent Agreement between USDA and Aurora Organic Dairy has no transparency and the "Q and A" posted on the NOP website compounds the confusion and lack of logic rather than explaining the reasons for reaching the agreement. The strength of the Organic seal and the financial sustainability of family farms rely on the ability of the NOP to enforce the organic standards universally and unequivocally. This Consent Agreement does not do that and leaves a situation that is open to many interpretations by producers and certifiers further aggravating controversy and disillusionment within the National Organic Program."

No response from USDA has been forthcoming. The USDA documents on AOD can be viewed at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/TodaysNews.html> under August 30, 2007 news. The full FOOD Farmers letter to USDA can be read at www.nodpa.com/LetterToSecretaryConner92507.pdf or go to www.nodpa.com and look under Press Releases. ♦

Organic Dairy Farmers Support Consumers Right for Organic Dairy Products that Meet All of the Organic Regulations

The Federation Of Organic Farmers (FOOD Farmers) today announced their support for consumers who have filed a class action lawsuit against Aurora Organic Dairy that alleges the company misled them by selling milk under a USDA Organic Seal while not following the required farm practices. The lawsuit is based on the result of a two year investigation by the USDA that Aurora allegedly violated 14 provisions of the Organic Food Production Act. The validity of the violations was never legally confirmed as the USDA and Aurora Organic reached a consent agreement that directed Aurora to stop organic production at one facility and make numerous changes in its operations but allowed them to continue selling organically certified dairy products. FOOD Farmers shares the frustration of consumers that this issue was not satisfactorily resolved by the USDA and leaves a situation that is open to many interpretations by producers, consumers and certifiers, further aggravating controversy and disillusionment with the National Organic Program (NOP).

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