

## From The NODPA Desk

By *Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director*

Believe it or not we are into the last two months of the year and we've only just had our first frost. The last few months have zipped by with plenty to keep those sitting in the hot seat at the NODPA desk busy. We had excellent weather for the NODPA annual Field Days and many thanks to our hosts Rick Segalla and Morvan Allen for opening up their farms to the critical eyes of fellow farmers. The workshops were excellent and Sam Fromartz gave an insightful talk about the future of organics which encouraged a healthy dialogue between the author and audience. The event of the day was the miniature golf tournament with Cindy Masterman, Dave Johnson, Kathy Soder and the Allen boys (Morvan and son Ian).

The organic dairy world never seems to stay quiet for long and the controversy over access to pasture has spilled over into class action lawsuits after the ill conceived consent agreement between the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) and Aurora Organic Dairy that Sam Fromartz chronicles so well on page 1 of this newsletter. Mark Kastel and Will Fantle have been doing some great investigative advocacy work with their Cornucopia Institute and they need to be congratulated on their perseverance and dedication in ensuring that any violations of the organic regulations are exposed and punished. The NODPA Board has been working with Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association (MODPA) and Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA) under the umbrella group Federation of Organic Dairy Farmers (FOOD Farmers) and many other partners, especially within the National Organic Coalition, to highlight the inadequacy of the consent agreement in addressing the results of the USDA investigation and the consequences for the future of organic certification. With many late night conference calls, FOOD Farmers been working together democratically to show their support for those seeking solutions to the many problems that this controversy has generated. FOOD Farmers sent a letter to the then acting USDA Secretary of Agriculture detailing the criticism of the consent agreement, a summary of which can be found on page 14 of this newsletter and in the press release section of the NODPA website. FOOD Farmers also actively supports different initiatives by individuals and groups of consumers in their mission to ensure that products labeled as organic satisfy all the

regulations for organic production and that the certification system works from "farm to table."

The NODPA Board has been meeting regularly and heard from many farmers who have expressed their anger and frustration, plus their very real fear for the future economic sustainability of their family farms. Kathie Arnold, who continues to do some fantastic work for NODPA and organic dairy farmers everywhere, expresses the frustration and anger of many organic dairy farmers across the country in her commentary piece on page 32 of this newsletter. The Aurora Organic Dairy situation has caused a very public exposure of the weaknesses of the National Organic Program, still in its infancy, and is eclipsing many of the achievements made in this last year in building consensus within the organic dairy industry that NODPA led, regarding access to pasture and dairy herd replacements. The alleged violations by Aurora and the way it was dealt with by certifiers and the USDA raises very important questions that need to be answered, not just around access to pasture and dairy herd replacements, but about how the NOP functions as an accreditor. NODPA is working with its partners in the National Organic Coalition and others to address this question and develop a strategy that will achieve measurable change rather than "business as usual in DC." Although not an investigative, advocacy organization, NODPA is committed to pursuing change of the USDA NOP program that will maintain a high level of integrity and commercial marketability of the USDA organic regulations.

NODPA is on the MOOve!! The NODPA News will be published six times a year beginning January 2008 with a change in design and possibly a move to newsprint to make it less expensive to print and mail. After six years, the NODPA website will have a facelift to make it easier to navigate and allow us to post more information more regularly. We are also exploring different ways to make the information on ODAIRY more accessible on a message board perhaps.

The next National Organic Standards Board meeting is coming up at the end of November and has an interesting agenda and plenty of time for public comment. While there is justifiable frustration with how slowly the NOP program moves, the NOSB provides one of the main opportunities for farmers to voice their concerns about the program. The NODPA Board encourages everyone to comment in person, if you are able to travel to DC right after Thanksgiving, or by email or mail before then. By mail, comments should be sent to Valerie Frances, Executive Director, NOSB, USDA-AMS-TMP-NOP, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Room 4008-So., Ag Stop 0268, Washington, DC 20250

### 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.

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“We need the USDA and their accredited certifiers to enforce the rules equally and consistently”, said Darlene Coehoorn, Wisconsin farmer and President of MODPA. “The USDA should always act decisively to enforce the organic regulations and protect the many family farms and businesses that rely on the USDA Organic seal for their livelihood not leave it to consumers to file lawsuits.”

The continued health and growth of organic farming, handling, processing, and retailing rests upon the credibility of the NOP 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. Consumer confidence in 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. The Consent Agreement does not do that.

While this case shows that the current NOP regulations do require pasture for ruminants and do have standards for dairy replacement animals, now, more than ever, it is important for the 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.



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“The USDA has delayed too long in publishing a proposed rule to clarify what is meant by “access to pasture” and define one easily understood and enforced standard for organic dairy replacements. The minimum mandated standard should require that milking dairy cows graze pasture that provides an average 30% of dry matter for 120 days,” said Steve Morrison, a Maine farmer and president of NODPA, “This position was reaffirmed at our annual conference in East Canaan, CT in August 2007.”

California organic dairy producer and WODPA President Tony Azevedo echoed similar sentiments, “At our recent conference in Corvallis, Oregon, we unanimously passed resolutions supporting the FOOD Farmers position on access to pasture and dairy herd replacements. The rulemaking is long overdue, and producers and processors need the clarity in the rule to plan for the future and to continue ensuring the integrity of organic certification for the consumer.”

**Federation Of Organic Dairy Producers (FOOD Farmers)**  
*The Federation of Organic Dairy Producers is an umbrella group for the three regional organic dairy farmer organizations: Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (MODPA), and Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA) and represents over 800 organic dairy farmers across the country.* ♦

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–0268. If you want to travel to DC and make a comment in person you should email or call Valerie Frances either at 202-205-7808 or [valerie.frances@usda.gov](mailto:valerie.frances@usda.gov). If you are comfortable using a computer and want to submit a comment ahead of time by email go to the NOP website, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>, and follow the instructions. If you are not good on computers, email or fax it to me and I'll put it on their new site for you. The NODPA Board suggests that you continue to ask about when the publication of the access to pasture regulations will happen. NODPA's other priority is to request that a speedy rulemaking process take place for the organic dairy replacements and any proposed rule follow the recommendation of NODPA, MODPA, WODPA and many of the processors. If you need any help with formulating a letter, just call or email.

If you are an organic dairy farmer then we want to hear from you either directly to me, Ed Maltby or to your Board members or State Reps. There are many things happening as we move away from a surplus in organic milk supply but into rapidly rising prices for grain and other inputs. Lastly, if you value the work that NODPA does, especially our expansion in the New Year, we ask for any contributions that can help us continue the work we are doing to support the future sustainability of organic dairy farmers.

Ed Maltby, 413-772-0444 or [ednodpa@comcast.net](mailto:ednodpa@comcast.net) ♦