

Organic Dairy Policy and Production Trends

By Kathie Arnold

Pasture Rule?

Every time another issue of NODPA News rolls around, I'd like to be able to report that progress has been made on the pasture regulations, but once again, the proposed rule has yet to be published. Additionally, no action has yet become visible on fixing the dairy replacement dilemma.

NOSB Issues

The NOSB will be meeting November 28-30 in Washington, DC, with aquaculture being the main topic as the NOSB wrestles with writing organic standards for fish. Expert presentations on the topic of aquaculture will precede the NOSB meeting November 27th and is open to the public. The one topic related to dairy on the agenda is a presentation on "Animal Health and Welfare: Results from a Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Funded Study" by Kathleen A. Merrigan, PhD and Willie Lockeretz, PhD from Agriculture, Food and Environment Program at Tufts University.

Another issue on the NOSB agenda concerns Multi-Site Operation Certification. This idea came from what was initially a system for very small scale growers (mainly in less developed countries) to come together in associations when they are growing the same crops in the same way. The group must have an internal control system to ensure organic compliance, but each individual small grower, many who are often in very remote locations, is not required to be inspected every year by their certifier.

Now, the NOSB Compliance, Accreditation, and Certification Committee wants to expand the allowance to the whole supply chain, such that retailers, distributors, processors and other corporate entities who have multi-site facilities operating under one certification, with an internal control system in place, would not have to have all sites inspected annually. The recommendation of the committee (which was by no means unanimous) would require inspections of all sites for the initial certification, but not thereafter. No mention of minimum percentage of sites to be inspected is included in the recommendation so it seems conceivable that if a retailer had 100 sites, only one per year may be required to have an annual inspection if this recommendation is passed by the full NOSB.

So far, most organic initiatives are receiving support [in the Farm Bill], such as certification cost share funding, organic transition assistance, organic research funding, and prioritizing classical plant and animal breeding.

With these businesses having a myriad number of employees who may turn over frequently; dealing with large numbers of ever changing products including both organic and non-organic; given the chances for misla-

beling; with change a constant in the distribution, retail and processing sector, this is a faulty idea that should be nixed by the full NOSB. OFPA, the law governing the NOP, does require an "annual on-site inspection of each farm and handling operation" so it seems there is no basis for this change and the reasoning given, to lower costs, is another example of chopping away at the integrity of the system to promote 'affordability'. Most all certifiers, except QAI (who has an employee on the NOSB, chairing the

committee in question), are against the idea as they see the need for more inspections, not less.

Farm Bill in Process

The Farm Bill continues its tortuous way through Congress. So far, most organic initiatives are receiving support, such as certification cost share funding, organic transition assistance, organic research funding, and prioritizing classical plant and animal breeding. Unfortunately, conservation continues to be the poor stepchild to commodity crops, and funding to expand the Conservation Security Program, which rewards farmers for conservation efforts on working farmland, is most doubtful. The Senate is currently hammering out their version of the Farm Bill and then it will be on to a Conference Committee to work out the differences between the House and Senate versions. Only then will we know the final outcome of the Farm Bill, which will set Federal Government farm policy and programs for the next five years.

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