

From The NODPA Desk

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

Welcome to 2008, a “year of change,” or so the presidential candidates tell me. The weather is definitely turning into a traditional New England winter, fulfilling the old adage that if you wait a day the weather will change, going from a minus temperature to 50 + degrees all in one day, not healthy for man nor beast.

No change in the snail-like speed of the legal system.

As expected, the class action lawsuit reported so well by Sam Fromantz in the last issue of NODPA News, progresses slowly through the courts. A hearing is set this month on motions seeking to consolidate nearly a dozen lawsuits filed against Aurora Organic Dairy for labeling milk as organic without meeting federal organic standards. The Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation will hear arguments about the motions on January 30th in Phoenix, as lawyers seek to consolidate the lawsuits in one court either in Colorado or Missouri. Sandie Regan, an organic consumer from Crown Point, Indiana, and a party to one of the lawsuits, commented that, “I am willing to pay more at the grocery store for organic milk.” This typifies the support that consumers have for organic producers and organic milk that is produced following the letter and intent of the organic regulations. NODPA supports consumers in their dedication to ensure the continued integrity of the USDA Organic Seal.

No change in clarifying and defining the access to pasture rule. USDA NOP Deputy Administrator Barbara Robinson assured the NOSB in November that the USDA lawyers have approved the regulatory text of the proposed rule. Once the preamble text is finished, the new rule will travel over to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Natural Resource Division, Agriculture Branch for final approval prior to publication. As of January 9th, it hasn't yet reached the OMB, so don't hold your breath for any publication before St Patrick's Day. NODPA, partnering with the National Organic Coalition, will meet with OMB in the next week to highlight the importance of the rule to the future economic sustainability of family farms.

No change in pay price! As reported in the front-page article there has been no significant increase in the base pay price and market adjustment premium for 2008 and no clear idea, and information on, how the price is being set. What we do know is that organic dairy farmers are hurting and failing to “make it,” with some leading producers changing processors or returning to conventional production. Many dairy farmers looked to organic production as a way to save their family farms, sold on the promise of predictable and fair farmgate prices that would give them and their families an adequate net income for a reasonable lifestyle and the ability to reinvest in their farms. That promise is failing to materialize. The price of farm inputs is spiraling out of the

control with increases of 20% and 30% in grain and fuel. However processors have offered the equivalent of less than an annual 4% increase. Producers are “sucking it up” and have looked to their own self sufficiency; cutting back on grain feeding; delaying essential repairs and equipment upgrades; working longer hours to save on non-family labor, and changing whatever practices they can to “become more efficient.” While these band aids may allow families to stay in business, or survive until they can turn their cows back out to pasture, a 4% increase is neither sustainable nor a fair return on time and investment. This issue is not, and never has been, producers against one brand or another, it needs to be addressed by the whole industry. Producers across the nation, who sell to many different brands, have determined that there

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.

is a need for a 20% increase in pay price in 2008 to return their farms to the level of net income they had in 2006. FOOD Farmers sent that message privately to all processors, Aurora Organic Dairy, DMS, and DFA in November 2007. It was ignored. Now the message needs to be taken, with one voice, to the retailers and consumers before we see bankruptcies and dairies returning to conventional milk production, which would be devastating to the sustainability of the organic dairy community.

What is changing is NODPA! We have increased the number of newsletters to 6 per year and are revitalizing our web page, www.nodpa.com. We are increasing our cooperative relationship with MODPA and welcome many organic dairies in the Midwest as readers. We hope that this relationship will grow and benefit us all as we work together for the benefit of a sustainable and viable organic dairy community. 2008 will see increased activity with both MODPA and WODPA under our FOOD Farmers banner with greater representation in Washington with our NODPA's membership of the National Organic Coalition. NODPA has also received funding to improve the very popular and active Odairy listserv, work on issues surrounding the sustainability of organic dairy producers and investigate some of the many legal questions that we receive from producers.

WOW look out 2008, here we come! ♦



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