

REGIONAL SUMMIT MEETING OF ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS

February 16, 2001, Congregational Church, Waterbury, VT

Present: 21 Farms from the northeast, and 3 state NOFA's were represented. Of these farms, 11 ship to Horizon, 7 to CROPP, 2 to Butternut and 1 processes milk on the farm (Jack Lazor, Butterworks Yogurt).

- 1) Travis Forgues of Alburg, Vermont called the meeting to order, noting this was a "landmark" meeting, the first of its kind to bring organic milk producers together. He explained the purpose as dual: to work together to maintain a base price and to become more informed on relevant issues, including the federal organic standards and alternative markets for organic milk.
- 2) **Price discussion:** Oscar Robinson spoke about Butternut Cooperative, with 23 members, said their goal was to be paid \$22 per cwt. At this time, 20% of their milk goes to making organic cheese and the rest goes to spot sales to Horizon or other buyers OR as a blend price (\$11-\$12/cwt). Horizon was paying \$21, and is dropping the price to \$20. Travis said CROPP pays based on location, with the range being \$19.75 (PA) to \$21.10 (ME), based on 3.5% BF.
- 3) **Feed Costs:** Kevin Brussell of Illinois talked about OFARM (Organic Farmer's Agency for Relationship Marketing) whose mission statement is to "Coordinate Efforts of Producer Marketing Groups to Benefit and Sustain Organic Producers". OFARM is a consortium of organic grain cooperatives that is interested in adding a northeast dairy division to their group. OFARM serves to help farmers set prices, and to learn more about production, marketing and costs. They hold marketing conference calls every two weeks. For more information about OFARM, you can call Kevin at (217) 923-2702. His email and regular mail address is on the enclosed attendance list.
- 4) A motion was made and passed to form an association of organic dairy farmers from the northeast, including New England, New York and Pennsylvania. A tentative name will be the **Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance**. (a naming contest was proposed)

The goals of the Alliance are:

- A) stabilize the milk price by agreeing on a base price across the Northeast (may include supply management)
- B) Require that farms are pasture based – This needs to be more defined and it is the responsibility of the state reps to get feedback from their farmers. Some suggestions were to
 - 1) recommend a volume of dry matter consumed (as a % of daily ration)
 - 2) # animal units per acre (1000# = 1 animal unit)
 - 3) Qualify the use of pasture such as: reduce fossil fuel usage, improve the health of the animals, improve the quality and the quantity of grassland

through proper management, cow comfort, (other philosophical), profit,
Conjugated Linoleic Acid

- 4) Submit proposed pasture standards to the NOSB (National Organic Standards Board) to be considered in the federal standards
 - C) Educate consumers and new/transitioning farmers
 - D) Good Communication: Create alliances with quality reliable feed sources (OFARM)
 - E) By working together, the organic producers can hold a price, and can help to mentor farmers as they transition to organic. The group will be in a position to more easily affect the federal standards, through cooperative efforts.
 - F) The group may adopt a set of standards that reflect their philosophy about organic farming; i.e. there is a relationship between animal numbers and acreage.
- 5) **Organizational Strategies:** Travis Forgues agreed to serve as an interim chair, and two representatives from each state were named. These are: Travis Forgues and Ginny Welch (VT), Dan Tilley and Kathie Arnold (NY), Elvin Ranch and Roman Stoltzfoos (PA), Steve Morrison and Steven Russell (ME). Alternates will be named at a later date.

6) **Timeline:**

- A) Information about this meeting will be mailed within one week (by February 23rd, 2001), and within one month (by March 16, 2001) a conference call will take place between the state representatives.
 - B) The State Reps will need to get feedback from their farmers before this time so that any additions or changes can be made to the Association goals as well as a final decision on the base price.
 - C) The State Reps need to collect names, addresses, phone #'s (and email) of all their certified producers AND all their certifiers so that a database can be created.
 - D) One or two Alternates need to be chosen from each state
- 7) NOFA-VT offered to assist with administrative work, mailings, etc., for the interim until this group has its own budget. Lisa McCrory is the NOFA-VT Staff person who will provide this assistance. You can reach Lisa at her home office: RR1 Box 169, Randolph Ctr, VT 05061, (802) 728-4416, email: lmccrory@together.net.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Russell, Montpelier, Vermont
Lisa McCrory, Randolph Ctr, Vermont

* Enclosed are names and address of all the farmers attending.