



Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Contact: Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director
Tel: (413)772-0444; Email: ednodpa@comcast.net

Access to Pasture Rule for Organic Livestock supported by organic dairy farmers as providing hope for organic family farms and a guarantee of integrity for the organic consumer

For Immediate Release

Deerfield, MA: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP) held a listening session at the NODPA Annual meeting in Auburn, New York on the proposed rule to clarify the access to pasture requirement for organic livestock. The session was attended by organic dairy farmers from the Northeast, Louisiana, Colorado, and Wisconsin and representatives from the Organic Trade Association, Accredited Certifiers Association, four organic dairy processors, five organic certifiers, and non-profit groups who have been closely following the issue for the last four years. Congratulations to Richard Mathews, USDA NOP, was widespread on writing a comprehensive and very specific proposed rule as was thanks to the NOP for holding the first listening session at an organic dairy farmer conference.

“As farmers, we very much appreciate the fact that this proposed rule includes the kind of minimum requirement for pasture intake that we have long been advocating for,” said Kathie Arnold, NY State organic dairy farmer and immediate past President of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA). “This will provide the basis for enforcement to ensure that all organic dairy cows will receive a significant portion of their food needs from fresh, green, growing pasture. We are also thankful that, during the listening session, Mr. Mathews invited us to provide specific suggestions during the 60 day comment period for the spots in the proposed rule that do need a bit of tweaking to ensure practical application on our farms.”

The proposed rule gives an excellent assessment in the supplementary information section of the document which clearly identifies the careful and thorough deliberations of the National Organic Program (NOP) and the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), acknowledging the many comments sent to USDA from farmers, processors, consumers, and environmental and other NGO's.

During the listening session, Pennsylvania organic dairy farmer and NODPA State Representative, Roman Stoltzfoos said, “I would like to see all farmers rally behind this Proposed Rule and think outside the box in doing the right thing for animals and the soil. We need to grow the organic dairy industry right, not fast.”

“The NOP has done an excellent job of listening to the advice and comments of organic dairy farmers while drafting this proposed rule,” said Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director. “The rule clearly defines what is required for organic certification and provides exact definitions for farmers and certifiers to understand what is necessary to satisfy the requirement for access to pasture. NODPA will work with the organic dairy community to respond to the NOP's request for comments containing data and constructive suggestions to be included in the final rule”

The proposed rule provides measurable and verifiable pasture grazing standards, clearly prohibiting drylots and feedlots, and strengthening the role that the organic systems plan plays in

organic certification. The proposed rule clearly states that pasture has to be managed as a crop and that farmers shall provide “year round access for all animals to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas...” and during the growing season, farmers shall provide not more than 70% of cow’s diet from fed feeds and at least 30% from pasture. Growing season is defined as from the last killing frost in the spring to the first killing frost in the fall or early winter.

“Overall this rule puts the consumers first and requires a high standard for organic dairy products labeled as organic,” said Henry Perkins, Maine organic dairy farmer and President of NODPA, “This proposed rule has the specificity that family farmers asked for and we welcome the opportunity to work with the USDA to formulate a final rule. We are continuing to work with the NOP for the publication of a proposed rule on the origin of livestock.”

##

For more information on the Access to Pasture Proposed Rule go to: <http://nodpa.com/rule.shtml>

NODPA – website www.nodpa.com or www.organicmilk.org

The mission of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance is to enable organic dairy family 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, with particular emphasis on:

1. Establishing a fair and sustainable price for their product at the wholesale level.
2. Promoting ethical, ecological and economically sustainable farming practices.
3. Developing networks with producers and processors of other organic commodities to strengthen the infrastructure within the industry.
4. Establishing open dialogue with organic dairy processors and retailers in order to better influence producer pay price and to contribute to marketing efforts.

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 Association (MODPA), and Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA). FOOD Farmers represents over 1,000, or two thirds of organic dairy farmers across the country.