

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance Organizes It's First Summer Conference

By Lisa McCrory

It was a beautiful August morning at Spring Wood Farm. The cows were enjoying a fresh paddock of grasses and legumes, the chickens were foraging for bugs and grass near their mobile chicken house, swans were swimming lazily in the pond and 2,000 young turkeys were chirping a contented chorus that could be heard all the way to the farm house. On this hot summer day, new activity was brewing at the Stoltzfoos family farm.

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA) organized their first Summer Conference on August 22nd, 2001. Over 120 organic dairy producers from Maine to Pennsylvania got together with processors and other industry representatives. The purpose of the meeting was to build the Alliance, discuss critical issues, and plan strategies to strengthen the organic dairy infrastructure

Participants and exhibitors gathered under a huge tent to discuss soil health, animal health, organic certification, sustainable farming, dairy genetics, organic seed, the importance of whole foods & traditional diets, and how to reach the consumer audience. A panel of organic dairy farmers shared their knowledge and experience on pasture management. Experts spoke on holistic alternatives in the care of land and animals, and everyone joined Roman Stoltzfoos for a pasture walk and tour of Springwood Farm.

Discussion focused on the importance of good relations with processors, the need to be involved in consumer education, maintaining the quality of organic milk, and implementing grazing standards as a policy for NODPA.

Strategies developed regarding the role for NODPA included: improving communication between states, cataloging the various contracts drawn up by northeast processors, and pooling information about geographic concentrations of organic milk production, processing, and distribution. Other topics included the importance of providing information to transitional farms and establishing a sustainable base price for organic milk.

The Alliance hopes to strengthen the organic dairy industry by keeping farmers aware of current events by way of a newsletter and other media. In addition, collaborating with other organizations that share NODPA's concerns would create a web of networks that could offer more stability for the organic industry's infrastructure.

A petition was sent to the National Organic Standards Board concerning the establishment of a national list of acceptable livestock and crop materials for use in organic production. The following message was approved and signatures gathered. *"We sincerely request that the National Organic Standards Board consider the following proposal: The USDA's National Organic Program make allowance for livestock and crop materials which have been "traditionally" allowed under state and private certification agency jurisdiction to be considered, "Allowed, under review" until the NOSB can review the various commodity or product. This provision allows the organic producer to utilize materials historically allowed until they are approved, found unacceptable or a viable alternative can be found."*

The NODPA Summer conference will be remembered as an important point in time. In just six months, this new organization has been instrumental in bringing people together to collaborate on issues vital to the growth and strength of the organic industry. Members of NODPA have demonstrated the interest and drive in representing the needs of producers, sharing information between states and educating the public on the benefits of organic milk coming from family scale, grass based enterprises. NODPA has already had a positive impact on the dairy industry by bringing together farmers from differing regions, creating a framework of communication not only between farmers but to include processors, and offering a system to help educate and assist transitioning producers. This conference was the result of the work of concerned farmers, and it highlighted how important farmer leadership will be in order to keep NODPA strong, healthy and effective.

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance Mission Statement

To enable organic dairy producers 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 floor price for their product at the wholesale level*
- 2) Promoting ethical, ecological and economically sustainable farming practices (e.g. strict pasture requirements for organic livestock)*
- 3) Developing networks with producers and processors of other organic commodities to strengthen infrastructure within the industry (e.g. grain growers, meat packers, etc.)*
- 4) Establishing open dialogue with organic dairy processor/retailers to better affect producer pay price and contribute to marketing efforts.*

Thank you to all our supporters for making the NODPA Summer Conference a success: (listed in alphabetical order) Aaron Groff & Son (Impro Products), ABS Global, Agri-Dynamics, Butternut Farms, Cabot Creamery, Inc, Clark Veterinary Clinic, CROPP Cooperative/ Organic Valley, Fertrell, Genex Cooperative, Inc, Heaven Bound Farm, Horizon Organic Dairy, Homestead Nutrition, Inc., Homestead Organics Immuno-Dynamics, Independent Dairyman's Association, Liberte, MOFGA, Natural by Nature, Neptunes Harvest, NOFA-MASS, NOFA-NY, NOFA-VT Dairy Technical Assistance Program, Normande Genetics, Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI), Organic Unlimited, Inc, Penn Dutch Cow Care, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), Pennsylvania Certified Organic, Semex USA, Seven Stars Yogurt, Spring Wood Farm, Stonyfield Farm, The Farmers Diner, Twin Oaks Dairy, Vermont Organic Milk Producers Association, Washington Homeopathic Products, Weston A Price Foundation

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