

2007 NODPA Field Days

By Lisa McCrory and Ed Maltby

The 7th Annual NODPA Field Days covered two Northeast states this year. Straddling Connecticut and Massachusetts, Organic Dairy producers Morvan Allan and Rick Segalla opened their farms to a large group of organic dairy producers and resource people for a wonderful two-day event. In addition to these two farms, the Freund's Farm and Market provided the central meeting location, supplying delicious local meals to the attendees, a venue for our producer meeting, member meetings, exhibitors and workshop sessions.

The event started with a field trip to Rick Segalla's farm where he gave everyone a tour of his grazing system, his feed storage and his cows. Discussions ranged from pre-clipping pastures and the estimated cost (fuel and time) in doing this as well as

when it may be beneficial, pasture density, running heifers behind cows (leader-follower) and plant species ideal for grazing. Kathy Soder also shared insights into animal behavior and grazing preferences depending upon what is being fed in the barn. One thing that everyone agreed was that Rick's pastures were beautiful,



Samuel Fromartz talking to attendees at NODPA Field Days.

with dense stands of leafy grasses, and legumes. There was a lot of grass-envy happening on this farm – especially since many were experiencing drought conditions on their farms.

A wonderful dinner was provided at the Freund's Farm and Market followed by a welcoming address by NODPA President, Steve Morrison. In previous years, this would have been followed by a closed producer-member meeting, but NODPA decided to try something more inclusive this year by continuing the

evening with an open forum for all to participate. This worked well as the wonderful discussion provided fod-

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der for the closed producer meeting that followed early on Saturday morning but also gave a context that all of us in the organic community need to work together for the benefit of each other. Discussions included broadening NODPA's coverage to include the Southeastern states which received strong support as NODPA has always been inclusive and the greater the number of farmers the more impact NODPA can have. There was some concern about the need to recognize regional differences to prevent a split but NODPA can provide resources for Southern farmers so they don't have the overhead costs of their own organizations. There were plenty of ideas around raising funds through increased subscriptions, more farmers signing on to the check-off program and applying to the Organic Valley Farmer Advocacy Fund. Building membership, being more visible at events and becoming better known to organic and conventional producers was seen as a priority as NODPA is the only organization that can represent the farmers views with authority and commitment. A summary of NODPA's recent activities were shared and there was agreement that NODPA needs to be even more aggressive at get-

Consumers hear about factory farms, family farms and the pasture debate and they often get confused; mixing pasteurization with pasturing.

ting the pasture and livestock replacement rules passed.

Saturday morning started with a producer only meeting where there was a great exchange of information and ideas about how NODPA can provide a sustainable market with a pay price that recognizes the increasing costs of production. **Samuel Fromartz**, author of "Organic, Inc" started the morning

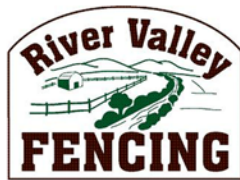
proceeding sharing his perspective on the future of organics. One of the strong messages from Samuel's talk was the importance of connecting consumers (or 'eaters', if you will) with producers; there is an expansive disconnect from how food is produced and how it gets to our plate. "People are seeing the connection between our own health and the nutritional value of our food", said Sam. He continued by talking about how the organic market is continuing to grow and milk is one of the entry points for consumers as they start to make organic food purchases; kids drink it and parents want the healthiest food product for their children. The catch is keeping our customers *adequately informed*. Consumers hear about factory farms, family farms and the pasture debate and they often get confused; mixing pasteurization with pasturing. Sam stressed that NODPA should be proactive in advocating for farmers as they are the only authentic "farmer voice" and should communicate directly to consumers.. The history around the use of pasture and how this issue has been dragged through the mud for years is covered well in Sam's article "What Makes A Cow Organic?" on page 1 of this issue. Through the implementation of a USDA National Organic Program, the word 'organic' is very clearly defined and sets a hurdle we need to jump over. Sam contended that the word 'local' is yet to have a solid definition – and we need one if we want the local initiative to move in the right direction. The rest of what Samuel talked about circled around the pasture standard (or lack thereof), the need for standards around humane treatment and management of our organic livestock and livestock replacements. Samuel has a blog, which can be found at www.chewswise.com where he talks about books, ethanol, the Farm Bill, food safety, local, humane, organic and much more.

Dr Kathy Soder of the USDA Agricultural Research Station (ARS) followed, giving a presentation titled 'Think Like a Cow - Understanding Grazing Behavior'. Here she covered some very interesting discoveries about the types of forages that ruminants prefer and what times of day cows eat their largest meal.. Research findings have shown that ruminants eat the largest meal in the morning and, if they have a choice, they will pre-

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fer clovers over grasses in the morning meal and switch to grasses over clovers for their second largest meal - which is at dusk. There are a lot of theories as to why these preferences seem to be the norm; maybe the grasses fill them up more for the long night fast, or maybe the forages taste better in the afternoon when their sugar content is at its highest.

Kathy also discussed the benefits of having a diverse pasture stand, using an older cow as a model to train your heifers to graze, plus identifying physical traits in a good grazing cow and breeding for those qualities.

Why do cows raised in confinement do poorly when put out on pasture? Some of this is learned behavior, of course, but another reason may be that the rumen capacity is not as great. Generational improvements can be made on a herd through genetic selection, providing good quality managed pasture, and making sure you are



Morvan Allen's calves at NODPA Field Days

training the cow and not the reverse. Many of the fact sheets on grazing management, animal behavior, pasture plant diversity and more can be found at the following website:

www.umaine.edu/grazingguide/Main%20Pages/Table%20of%20Contents.htm

The Organic Grain Panel, represented by Vermont Extension Agronomist **Heather Darby**, Maine Extension Dairy Nutritionist **Rick Kersbergen** and organic grain dealers Lakeview Organic Grain (**Klaas and Mary-Howell Martens**) and Green Mountain Feeds (**Rick Dutil**) was a wonderful, thoughtful

discussion on the future of organic grain and what we can do as farm managers to reduce our costs in purchased feeds while improving livestock health and longevity in the herd. It was very impressive to see the level of expertise, insight and consensus provided by this panel of experts. The panel took many questions about the availability of feed and what prices farmers should expect and how available feed would be. To-

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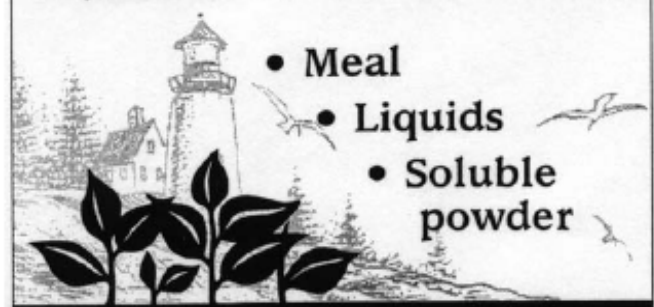
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gether with the participants there was some great brainstorming around the benefits of annual forage and small grains and experiences in understanding new production practices. This was a very practical discussion that should have been recorded for many others to benefit from.

The NOPDA Field Days concluded with a tour of Morvan Allen's Farm in Sheffield Massachusetts. Attendees were able to see how Morvan manages his pasture and hear a great story about why good fences make good neighbors. The additional information to this story is; when the fence isn't adequate, quickly mend the relationship by paying the \$5000 worth of damage your cow did to the swimming pool. Other aspects of the farm tour included a look at Morvan's calf rearing system, the fencing and water system, laneways and a recently finished manure handling system, cost-shared by NRCS.

The updated website will display a Field Days page complete with photographs, speaker handouts and other resources shared. NODPA would like to thank all its sponsors as well as the host farms for making the 7th Annual Field Days such a great success. ♦

FOOD Farmers Sends Letter to USDA Protesting Consent Agreement with Aurora

By Kathie Arnold

The Federation of Organic Dairy Farmers (FOOD Farmers) sent a letter to the USDA Secretary of Agriculture on September 19 protesting the Consent Agreement between the USDA and Aurora Organic Dairy (AOD). FOOD Farmers is the umbrella organization for the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), the Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association (MODPA), and the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA).

The letter:

► Thanked the National Organic Program (NOP) for having investigated the complaints regarding AOD and having publicly released the Notice of Proposed Revocation, Violations by Aurora Dairy, and the Consent Agreement.

► Expressed that FOOD Farmers are extremely disturbed by the Consent Agreement made between USDA and AOD for many reasons:

- It does not bring closure to this situation.
- It sets an unacceptable precedent for the USDA organic seal, that alleged major, multiple violations occurring over several years time and affecting multiple operations are not met with certification revocation but can be negotiated away without penalty.
- The Consent Agreement does not address all the alleged violations and inconsistencies raised in the Violation by Aurora Organic Dairy document nor does it fully and fairly remedy all the ones it does address. For example:

1. Cows at the Dublin, TX that were improperly transitioned are not required to be removed from the herd.
2. Requiring AOD to remove their 80/20 transitioned cows from their Platteville farm, rather than all the other subsequent livestock brought in that were not organic from last third of gestation as required, is the opposite of what should be required.
3. The 4 to 5 cows per acre pasture stocking rate allowed AOD goes against every recommendation of the National Organic Standards Board.

► Disagrees with USDA's claim that the Consent Agreement is in the best interest of the program.

► Notes no known legal justification in OFPA, the law

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