

NODPA News

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

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KT Organic Farms, Kewaskum, Wisconsin

by Sonja Heyck-Merlin

Travel about thirty minutes north out of Milwaukee into the village of Kewaskum, Wisconsin, population 4,000, head east on State Road 28, cross the East Branch of the Milwaukee River, continue past the town office and St. Michael's church, and then bear left into the barnyard of long-time Organic Valley producers, Kevin and Lynn Thull. Continue past the driveway and arrive at the southern entrance of Kettle Moraine State Forest - nearly 30,000 acres of

rolling hills, lakes, forests and grasslands created 15,000 years ago during the last ice age when the area lay under the grip of colossal ice sheets. The glacier's mark upon the land is impressive; the product a rolling terrain, a mixture of agricultural, commercial and recreational activity. A concoction of conventional and organic, from here and away, young and old, new ideas and old, coalesce into the face of a modern American community.

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Hydroponics: What's The Big Deal?

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

For most of us hydroponic production is not organic production, similar to the fact that confinement dairy operation where cows don't graze grass is not organic either. The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) agreed with that in 2010 when they made the following recommendation about hydroponics: "Observing the framework of organic farming based on its foundation of sound management of soil biology and ecology, it becomes clear that systems of crop production that eliminate soil from the

system, such as hydroponics or aeroponics, cannot be considered as examples of acceptable organic farming practices. Hydroponics, the production of plants in nutrient rich solutions or moist inert material, or aeroponics, a variation in which plant roots are suspended in air and continually misted with nutrient solution, have their place in production agriculture, but certainly cannot be classified as certified organic growing methods due

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

From the NODPA President

With last month's Field Days behind us, I wanted to again thank everyone who helped make it another great event. It is the participation of so many people that makes these meetings valuable, whether you attended as a sponsor, speaker, exhibitor, or participant. It was great to see all of you who could make it, and we look forward to next year! If you have comments or suggestions for a host farm for next year, please contact me or any board member soon (phone numbers and email addresses are just below!).

As the last of the harvesting winds down and the equipment gets moved into the sheds for the winter, we can pause and feel thankful as another year comes to a close. I hope one of the things you can feel good about is helping to support NODPA's mission in keeping organic dairy farmers informed and connected. You will be receiving a fundraising letter in the mail this month asking for your support. I sincerely hope you will join in supporting NODPA. We keep costs as low as possible, but there are always bills to pay. Your help will directly

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support our work publishing the NODPA News (6 times a year), the monthly e-newsletter, hosting the ODairy listserv, maintaining the website, organizing the annual NODPA Field Days, and our advocacy work for organic farm families.

We wish you and your family a blessed Holiday season!

Liz Bawden, NODPA President

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NODPA MISSION STATEMENT

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 wellbeing of the organic dairy industry as a whole.

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

From the NODPA Desk: September 2015

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

Lots of activity since the September issue of the NODPA News went to press. As you will read or may already have heard we had a great Field Days and Annual meeting with plenty of networking and education along with bringing some younger folks into the NODPA leadership. We welcome Kirk Arnold as NODPA Vice President and know that he will bring new thoughts and energy into our activities and policy work. Fresh perspectives are always important as organic production evolves into new markets, fresh challenges and more products.

After the Field Days there was the task of putting together comments for the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) and then attending their meeting in Stowe, Vermont. Organic certification has a unique position within the USDA because of the structure of the NOSB and its regulatory power established by the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). Governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), the NOSB considers and makes recommendations to the USDA Secretary through the National Organic Program (NOP) on a wide range of issues involving the production, handling, and processing of organic products. While most FACAs are purely advisory, the NOSB has special responsibilities in making recommendations to the Secretary related to the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances, the list that governs what can and cannot be used in organic production. The aim of incorporating this 'citizens' committee into the process of maintaining organic integrity was to ensure that all the stakeholders within the organic community are able to influence decision makers (NOP) on what should be allowed in certified organic production that goes directly to the Secretary of Agriculture. Most FACA committees do not attract the attention that the NOSB does on a regular basis, and do not have the power to influence federal rulemaking that the NOSB does. The foresight of those that worked on the OFPA to have the NOSB charter within the legislation ensures that, no matter how much the NOSB recommendations may differ from the current administration's policy, it cannot be disbanded and can play a strong role in maintaining the integrity of organic certification.

The practice and implementation of that goal has been haphazard and somewhat imperfect, but the organic community has defended that right against the natural inclinations of federal bureaucracy to control input and 'streamline' the process. An-

other benefit of the NOSB is that it has twice yearly very public meetings which give the organic community an opportunity to talk directly to the NOP both through its written comments and directly with verbal comments at the meeting, all of which are entered into the official record to be considered by the NOP and NOSB. This is an important point of leverage for those of us, which included Vermont Senator Leahy, that recognize the importance of ensuring that everything that is allowed to be used in organic production is guided by OFPA and not by the different criteria used by EPA or other government agencies. For most of the time this process is unwieldy and confusing for organic farmers and manufacturers, and definitely not efficient, but it is necessary in protecting the intent of OFPA and the integrity and uniqueness of organic certification.

The meeting in Stowe did feature a demonstration by Vermont farmers and their supporters about hydroponics, an issue which the NOSB has already made recommendations five years ago but the NOP said they needed more information before rule-making. The hydroponic issue was also raised by many in the verbal comments to the Board. The farmers that took the time away from their farms to stage a very polite protest for an hour or so outside the NOSB meeting stressed the importance of cultivating, building, improving and replenishing the soil and the environment as central to the integrity of the organic label. They also accepted that they have a responsibility to play an active role in maintaining that integrity. Liana Hoodes made the same point at the NODPA Field Days that farmers have a responsibility to safeguard the label by being involved with the process of rulemaking and deciding policy. Often it's the scientist or the consumer or the environmentalist that has the center stage in presenting opinion, scientific evidence and then justification in deciding what is acceptable in organic production. The voice of the farmer must be heard, especially when those decisions that are being made make no practical farming sense or common sense. Economic growth or the preservation of economic investment or the status quo cannot be arguments that prevail at the expense of the future integrity of the organic label. With organic dairy we went through the process where NOP said the regulation on access to pasture was not legally explicit enough to enforce and large dairies were already established that would suffer 'economic hardship' with a strict enforcement. We have that issue also with Animal Welfare and now it appears with hydroponics. From a farmers point of view they seem like non-issues (of course growing and harvesting crops that aren't grown in soil is not organic) but we do need to participate in the decision-making process to ensure that regulations are explicit and legally enforceable. Otherwise, we will lose the market to large, capital intensive operations that can game the system, especially now that organic is a worldwide commodity. ♦

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Hydroponics

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to their exclusion of the soil-plant ecology intrinsic to organic farming systems and USDA/NOP regulations governing them.” As is very common with the NOP and NOSB, this recommendation followed seven years of deliberations, discussions and public comment and was specific in detail about what could be grown in soilless mediums and what certifiers should look for in making decisions around what inputs could be used. The NOSB also agreed that some soilless crop production methods do in fact “foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity,” as defined in the Organic Rule. Examples of such systems include transplants that are eventually planted in soil, or a system of aquaponics that employs microbial decomposition of fish waste and cycles nutrients from fish through plants. Other systems may include cycling of nutrients using worms or composting.

Unfortunately, the NOP did nothing with this recommendation and we now have a situation where some domestic and foreign hydroponic operations are being certified organic and increasing in scale to directly affect the viability of the market for organic producers who grow their produce in soil. While some certifiers accept the use of hydroponic solutions using only approved materials as organic, other certifiers believe the maintenance of ecological balance and biodiversity in the soil is essential to a truly organic system of production. Those certifiers believe that hydroponic systems, with their dependence on outside inputs,

Hydroponics: *The production of normally terrestrial, vascular plants in nutrient rich solutions or in an inert, porous, solid matrix bathed in nutrient rich solutions. (NOSB 2010)*

Organic Certification: *Organic is a labeling term for food or other agricultural products that have been produced using cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that support the cycling of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity in accordance with the USDA organic regulations. This means that organic operations must maintain or enhance soil and water quality, while also conserving wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used. (USDA NOP)*

a highly controlled system which relies upon large volumes of outside energy for lighting and nutrient dissemination through the system, does not meet the letter or spirit of the OFPA.

Dave Chapman, an organic producer from Vermont has stated very clearly the effect that hydroponics has had on the marketplace: “The NOP is still embracing hydroponic growing as fully certifiable. Hydroponic “organic” sales now easily exceed \$50,000,000 a year in the US. Perhaps the number is much high-



Farmers Protesting about Hydroponics at the fall NOSB meeting



er, but there is no way to know for sure. It is almost impossible to go into a supermarket in the US that offers organic produce, and not find “organic” hydroponic tomatoes on the shelf in the place of soil grown real organic. It might be different in California, but in my travels throughout the East coast, and into the South and Southwest, this is what I have seen. In almost all cases, the cheaper hydroponic produce has pushed off most of the soil grown organic produce. It has gotten to the point where most real organic growers are forced to market their organic tomatoes and peppers in farmers markets, road side stands, and CSAs. The supermarkets have been taken over by the hydroponic growers from Mexico, Canada, and Holland. They are selling produce to us that could not be certified in their own countries.”

In response to increased concern and pressure from many groups to declare a moratorium on certifying any hydroponic operations, and request for “NOP Instruction to Certifiers” that leads to Rulemaking based on the NOSB 2010 recommendations, the NOP created a Hydroponic and Aquaponic Task Force in September 2015. The stated intention of the Taskforce is to “explore hydroponic and aquaponic production practices and their alignment with USDA organic regulations.” Miles McEvoy, head of the NOP, has said several times that he hopes that the task force will be able to clarify the language of the 2010 NOSB recommendation banning hydroponic, which he said was too unclear for him to make a rule on. At the NOSB meeting in October 2015 he stated that: “The task force will provide a report to the NOSB

on current hydroponic and aquaponic production methods used in organic production, and whether these practices align with OFPA and the USDA organic regulations.” The NOP has not publicly specified what it believes is unclear about the NOSB’s 2010 recommendation, thus requiring the creation of the Task Force.

The task force was originally limited to people with at least 3 years of experience in “hydroponic organic” growing. The NOP later responded to a public outcry and complaints, and opened the task force to all interested people. According to Dave Chapman, “A number of highly qualified volunteers with lots of experience in organic farming were not selected for the task force, including organic greenhouse growers David Miskell from Vermont and Ken Kimes from California. About two thirds of the task force members are experienced in hydroponic production, and have little experience with real organic farming.” The National Organic Coalition (NOC) also commented on the make-up of the committee: “Furthermore, while we appreciate that the NOP chose to appoint NOC’s recommended candidates to the Hydroponics Task Force, the overall make-up of the Task Force is such that the majority of those appointed actually disagree with the NOSB recommendation (i.e. believe that hydroponics should be allowed to be certified). Unfortunately, this is likely the result of the original Federal Register notice, which clearly restricted membership on the Task Force to people with at least three years’ experience in

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It's November: Time for the Annual NODPA Fund

Has your NODPA Fund Drive letter arrived? When it does, we hope you will consider all the ways NODPA works for Organic Dairy farm families and those who support the industry, and send in your annual contribution. If you already support NODPA through the monthly Milk Check Assignment or during NODPA's Field Days, we say thanks!

Do you wonder how the events happening in Washington, whether in Congress or at the USDA, are impacting your organic dairy farm? NODPA is the only independent organic dairy farmer-controlled organization that represents your interests and can keep you informed of what is happening before it is too late to act. Are you wondering how to be informed of what the different processors are paying and what opportunities exist to sell your milk? Do you want to know and understand the current retail price for organic milk? Are you interested in learning new and successful animal health care methods, new production practices, and what other producers are doing? The NODPA News print edition, NODPA E-newsletter, and the NODPA website are full of the best and most up-to-date information.

NODPA provides a wide range of resources and services, such as hosting and moderating the ODairy listserv, publishing the print newsletter (NODPA News) 6-times per year, the monthly e-newsletter, managing the resource-rich website, organizing and hosting the annual NODPA Field Days, and providing advocacy on behalf of all organic dairy farm families through membership in the National Organic Coalition. Although we

keep costs to a minimum, there are still bills to pay, and your generous support is needed.

"NODPA supporters are dedicated organic dairy farmers and industry professionals; hardworking, committed to the principles of organic farming and focused on operating their businesses in the most efficient and informed way possible," said organic dairy producer and NODPA Board President Liz Bawden, "We work long hours and have come to expect reliable information delivered in the most convenient manner possible, and NODPA delivers! We know you depend on NODPA for the latest organic dairy news and education and that your support is a vote for the work we do."

"Many organic dairy farmers already support NODPA with their monthly Milk Check Assignment, and that continues to be a great way to support NODPA. We also offer Business Memberships," said Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director, "and applications for both are on page 37 of this newsletter, or on our website, www.nodpa.com." "If you didn't receive a letter in the mail or have misplaced it, you can complete and send in the contribution form on page 37. You can also donate online at www.nodpa.com/donate.shtml," said Nora Owens, NODPA Fundraising Campaign Coordinator, "And, if you have questions or need assistance, please give me a call at 413-772-0444 or email noraowens@comcast.net." Your generous financial support will help NODPA continue to provide the valuable resources and services that you have come to depend on, so please take a moment and send in your pledge today. ♦





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Quick & Easy*By Neal Kinsey*

There are advocates who now seem to maintain that we need everything in brief “sound bites” to reach others with any meaningful message. But the value of such “short and quick” principles should be more closely examined when it comes to matters that affect our livelihood and the most important aspects of life and living. For when accuracy or learning how to correctly apply what is needed begins to be lost at the expense of having a quick answer - what is of most value should not be sacrificed for the sake of a short or speedily expected conclusion.

Perhaps without it even occurring to them, most of those involved in agriculture utilize this type of rationale to grow what we all need to sustain life and health. Working with producers in countries around the world we see this very problem, especially in terms of soil testing and fertilization of crops. Year after year farmers and growers insist, “I can’t wait! I need a low price and all the test results and recommendations in three days!”

If you are willing to stand the costs, somebody will find a way to give you what you want. Quick testing at a low price in three days or so - is that what a soil really needs to do its best in terms of production, quality and profitability? Not very likely.

Even in agriculture – the growing of our food – the plants and livestock that provides for our nutritional needs – the “quick and easy” philosophy has become extremely pervasive and even damaging in various ways due to such beliefs and the consequent demands that everything needs to provide needed implementation at an ever faster and cheaper rate.

If a person goes to a doctor with a serious problem they likely hope for a quick answer. However, if the problem is not obvious enough without the proper tests being done, how many would feel comfortable saying, “Forget the more specific testing that would provide the best approach. That will take so much longer, and I don’t have the time to wait! Just do something quick and give me what you think would generally help in most instances like mine, and I’ll come back in a year to see what to do then?”

Most soils are not anywhere close to producing at their top potential in terms of eliminating fertility limitations. But far too many farmers and growers feel they cannot take the time to plan ahead and find out what each different soil really needs and what it takes to achieve that full potential. In too many cases farmers and growers have become convinced, perhaps even subconsciously so, that they lack the time, resources or the ability to learn and understand what is required to be most successful at growing crops on their land.

It seems those most directly involved in food production have somehow been persuaded that such a program would be far too complicated and it would take too much time to learn and put into practice. Or it is too expensive and will never pay for all the extra time and expense involved. While still others are told they don’t get enough rainfall, or it is too hot, or the growing season is too short, and thus the need for the use of “stopgap” measures and not long range solutions. Should those who produce our food trust in that type of thinking? Which program in the end will show to be the most economical approach on land that is capable of producing a crop worth consuming?

When fertilizer is purchased and applied for growing a crop, why not spend that money where it will make the most difference? To receive the utmost from invested inputs requires adequate amounts of effort and expense, including enough time and testing to do it right. When in doubt, prove it on a small parcel of land first, then once the profitability has been established expand as time and expense permits.

Overall, clients tell us that when they completely and correctly follow through, then for every dollar we recommend they spend on implementing this program it makes them at least ten more. For one after another, what they have achieved was deemed as impossible to accomplish. Yet they never knew they could accomplish those results until they personally learned how to do it and tried it for themselves.

Farmers and growers today need to learn and put into practice the principles of soil fertility and understand the basics about nutrients and what they can do for the crops being produced. No one can teach you what they have not learned themselves. If someone has been taught to understand only the “shortcuts and stopgap measures” how will applying that knowledge ever enable reaching the land’s top potential? Could such a program be designed and sold as serving the needs of the grower while actually standing in the way of attaining the potential success that is truly achievable when the proper methods are understood and utilized.

How can proponents who sell a program of what to do when you believe you cannot do what you need to do - and not trained to go any further than what the products they have to sell will accomplish - provide all the needed information that goes above the level they currently know and understand? Many who make and sell the fertilizer being recommended for growing crops cannot even explain the differences between soil tests that point to good production versus bad, let alone what it really requires to bring those soils into shape for top production and superior quality?

The basic foundational principles of nutrient values and good soil fertility are not hard to learn or understand. The greatest hurdle is to actually commit to the relatively short amount of time required to learn and do it. You don’t learn this type of information in “sound bites.” It requires time to explain and time to grasp the basics of such a program - to learn the how and the why. But time and again for those who will allocate sufficient time to learn and apply the applicable soil and fertility principles, the results are regarded as worth far more than the time and expense it took to implement the program.

Our company does not sell fertilizer or make commissions from any of those companies where our clients choose to buy fertilizer. We only sell advice. Sound bites may work to sell fertilizer to farmers, but they do not work best when it comes to making the best crops and best yields. Only hard work and accurate, unprejudiced advice will ultimately serve to accomplish top quality and yield potential.

Half or more of those who come to us for training are farmers or growers who feel it is important to have a better grasp of soil fertility for themselves in order to make the best use of that information and better understand the reasons for doing what such a program requires.

To profitably grow the best food and feed possible – seriously consider and allot sufficient time to correctly understand and accomplish such purposes. The best in terms of providing for agricultural success - both for personal, family and needs of the community - is the means required for growing high yielding, nutritious food and feed crops. The best in terms of vibrant health for the soil, plants, livestock and the people who benefit as a result literally depends on it.

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Local Farms Fund: a New Farmland Investment Fund

By Sonja Heyck-Merlin, NODPA News Contributing Writer

Local Farms Fund (LFF) is a new farmland investment fund that supports young and early stage, sustainable farmers by providing secure land access. The fund's goal is to provide lease-to-own land arrangements, with the option for the farmer to purchase the land from the fund after 5 years. LFF's lease-to-own model provides essential land security to the farmer, while the farmer is developing his or her farm business.

Recently, Sonja Heyck-Merlin, NODPA News contributing writer and Maine organic dairy farmer, interviewed Kevin Egolf, Co-Founder and Manager of the Local Farms Fund:

Please introduce readers to the Local Farms Fund:

The Local Farms Fund (LFF) is a high-impact, socially responsible farmland access venture co-founded by nine NYC Slow Money investors and Working Farms Capital. One of the greatest

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Steve Fondiller (left - Chairperson of LFF) and Kevin Legolf (right - manager of LFF).

Advertisement for CROPP COOPERATIVE featuring three men in flannel shirts and caps. Text includes 'our CEO wears flannel', 'Join America's Leading Organic Farmer Cooperative', and a list of services like 'Stable Organic Premiums' and 'Transition Assistance'.

Advertisement for OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) featuring a cow and a bottle. Text includes 'Looking for products for organic livestock?', 'With OMRI you can trust the product is allowed in USDA certified organic operations.', and the website 'www.omri.org'.



Jamielynn and Timothy Biello, Saratoga
Draft Power Farm, Saratoga NY

 An advertisement for ClearSpan fabric structures. The background is a large, arched metal structure housing a dairy farm with many cows in stalls. The text is overlaid on the image.

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Local Farms Fund

continued from page 8

challenges young farmers face is land access and we created LFF with the specific intention of addressing this challenge. We work primarily within the NYC Foodshed - New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania with preference given to operations in the Hudson Valley, Catskills and Adirondacks.

Can you tell us more about Slow Money and Working Farms Capital and how they relate to the Local Farms Fund?

Slow Money NYC is a chapter of a national not-for-profit organization called Slow Money, Inc. Slow Money NYC envisions a new economy based on knowing where our food comes from and where our money goes and the goal is to invest in small, local food enterprises in order to provide a tangible and direct way to begin addressing the structural problems of our food economy.

Similarly, Working Farms Capital manages and develops farmland ventures looking to prosper from the long-term growth of local and organic foods. Working Farms Capital operates on the premise that farmland ownership with a sustainable business model is an attractive asset class with financial returns equaling or exceeding many financial alternatives.

Working Farms Capital is one of the initial investors in LFF and will act as manager for the venture providing development guidance as well as operation and acquisition services.

How will the services that LFF provides differ from more traditional farm lease arrangements?

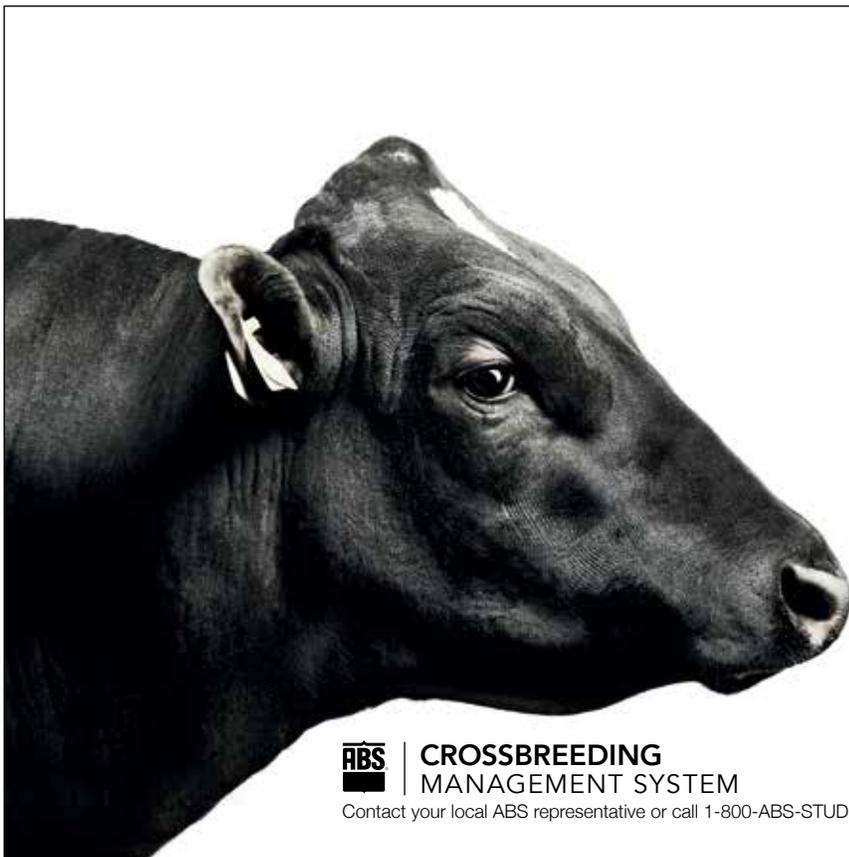
Traditional leases are a great option for entering farmers because of less upfront costs and less risk but they generally lack long-term security. Generally, farmers leasing property lack a landowner that is focused on supporting the farm business and providing them the security required to feel comfortable making expensive land or infrastructure improvements.

Using private investment money, LFF will purchase a farm and design a mutually beneficial long-term lease of up to twenty years. From years five through twenty of the lease the farmer is given the option of purchasing the farm. The system was designed to make sure the farmer has the time to make a purchase.

We are providing sustainable farmers with a secure lease and a property that they can take ownership of from the beginning. If farmers lack the ability to stay on the land long-term, they won't invest the time and resources required to make the land and their business more productive.

How does LFF identify properties for purchase?

In designing this fund, we knew that we wanted it to be farmer-driven. We do not seek specific farmland properties but rather are looking for



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talented farmers who have both the agricultural knowledge and skill and business acumen to be a successful producer. Farmers will find a property that suits the specific needs of their long-term business plan. This way they won't be forced onto a specific property, and the fund isn't forced to find a farmer that might fit a farm property.

What type of farmer is the fund designed to assist?

The fund is designed to support early stage farmers. We have defined this as someone who anticipates farming for the next twenty years. The farmer should also have enough experience to run a profitable operation on their own. Although we do not require organic certification we are seeking parties committed to sustainable agricultural practices.

How does the land acquisition and lease process work?

Once a farmer has identified a property the process begins with a conversation. If there is a mutual agreement and commitment to

work together, we move into due diligence. This involves a review of the business plan, financial analysis, reference check and a visit to the existing operations (if they have one). The process generally begins with a phone conversation, working towards an in-person interview at a mutually agreed upon location. I do the first stage review but everything must be approved by the board of LFF.

If this process reveals a symbiosis between the fund and the farmer, LFF signs a letter of commitment which states that LFF will purchase the property and then lease it to the farmer.

Communication between the farmer and the fund is critical. If farmers are able to communicate with the fund then the fund is more able to communicate with our investors.

How long does the process take?

The time frame is dependent on the farmer's needs. We can move as quickly or as slowly as necessary. Assuming a property

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Local Farms Fund

continued from page 11

has been identified, the minimum time for our review to be completed is about one month. Closing on the property may add a significant amount of time depending on the circumstances.

**How will you determine lease rates?
Will they be less than a mortgage?**

Lease rates are a function of acquisition costs and rents are paid directly to LFF. Payments will start out considerably less than a mortgage with the understanding that starting a farm is difficult.

Tell us about your first farm acquisition:

It's a 63 acre parcel located in Saratoga County, NY. It will be leased to a young couple and has the working title of "Saratoga Draft Power Farm" on which they intend to establish a free-choice on-farm vegetable Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) powered by draft horses. A 20-year lease with an option to purchase from LFF will allow them to focus capital on business

and infrastructure development while still providing the necessary land security.

What are the fund's goals?

Founded in 2014, LFF is a new business. We are in the process of our first major fund-

raising goal to raise one million dollars. We recently purchased our first farm and our intent is to finish this initial offering and purchase at least three more farms. Our initial target is to purchase six farms under two separate capital raises and evaluate our model from there. Also, we are looking for investors who want to support local sustainable farmers and understand the need for entering farmers to have access to patient capital.



Tim Bello with his draft horses

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Does demand exist for investment vehicles like LFF?

There is a huge growing space for high-impact, socially-driven investment models. A growing number of investors want to support local farms as well as community-oriented and local businesses. Investors receive a modest return but also have the satisfaction of supporting something that is tangible. This greatly differs from traditional stock investments in large companies which have no direct connection with investor's communities. The impact investment space is growing very quickly.

What returns can LFF investors expect and what is the source of revenue?

LFF makes no promise of a return but our goal is to deliver a 3% return on an annual basis over the life of the fund. The revenue comes from rental income on our properties and when the farmer purchases the farm the investor's original capital will be returned to them.

Are there any closing thoughts you'd like to share?

Our mission is driven by two goals- to support early stage

farmers in securing long-term land access and creating an investment avenue that allows for people to make investments that they feel good about while achieving a return. The impact investment model is still developing and will accomplish many things that philanthropic money can't. The amount of philanthropic donations that people are permitted to make is miniscule compared to the amount of investment capital in the world.

Funds such as LFF strive to be change makers in the way investments are made, the way people think about investments and the investment opportunities available. ♦




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Organic Industry News

NOSB MEETING NOTES

STOWE, VERMONT - OCT 26-29, 2015

By Dr. Jean Richardson

The meeting in Stowe was very well attended, with about 200 attendees, including 110 people who made public comment. This was in addition to the 35 additional people who had provided public comment during the Webinar format public comment in the two weeks prior to the Stowe meeting. These opportunities for public comment via an internet webinar allowed the NOSB to receive comment from farmers and veterinarians and others who could not come to the meeting in Stowe, including one person calling in from Australia to support the addition of sodium and potassium lactate for use in meat processing.

Public Comment was certainly one of the highlights for me. About 20 local farmers presented their perspectives on some of the materials which were up for Sunset Review. They were incredibly eloquent and provided excellent information on bioplastic mulch, parasiticides, lidocaine and procaine, GMO contaminations, and hydroponics. Dr Verne Grubinger provided research results from the Northeast indicating that copper materials do not accumulate in our soils and that they should remain on the National List. Dr Kent Henderson provided an enormous

Dr. Jean Richardson



amount of detail on the parasiticides which provided us with recent scientific information to support NODPA's request to shorten the withholding periods after emergency parasite treatment. Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director, spoke in support of the proposed shortening of withholding periods.

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Public comment also took the form of a demonstration/protest to support the NOSB in its 2010 recommendation that soil is a required component to get organic certification, and thus hydroponics should not be certified organic. In courteous Vermont style, the protest leaders contacted me as Chair ahead of time, and I worked with them to help make this an effective, positive demonstration. It was held at lunchtime, with tractors and a parade with signs and talks from speakers standing on a pile of compost in the parking lot at the conference center, with a friendly, smiling cop on hand! The sun was shining and the speakers were eloquent.

The five-year Sunset Review requires two opportunities for public comment, and NODPA provided comments both times in regards to a number of materials, including Lidocaine and Procaine, and the parasiticides Ivermectin, Fenbenzadole and Moxidectin. Lidocaine and procaine, two local anesthetics, were voted to remain on the National List, and information provided by NODPA as well as many others, will allow us to provide a specific proposal at the April 2016 meeting to shorten the withholding times from the present 90 days to 8 days after administering lidocaine or procaine to livestock intended for slaughter, and 7 days for administering to dairy animals. After considerable discussion, all three parasiticides were voted to remain on the National List at the present time. We had expected to remove Ivermectin because of its impact on dung beetles which are so vital for good pasture management, but sheep and goat producers appear to use Ivermectin as the preferred parasiticide, especially in the Western states. Ivermectin, which can be bought over the

counter, is not used much on dairy farms, but western sheep producers do not seem to use fenbenzadole, which requires a veterinarian, and moxidectin is presently listed as external use only. In addition, there is apparent confusion over which parasites can be controlled by fenbenzadole as compared with Ivermectin. The discussion in Stowe, and extensive public comment, will allow the NOSB Livestock Committee to present a proposal to the full NOSB to reduce withholding times on Fenbenzadole and moxidectin, although the withholding time for Ivermectin will remain at 90 days. The proposal will allow for both internal and external use of moxidectin, and probably allow all parasiticides to be used without need for a veterinarian. In addition, the NOSB will be recommending that sheep fleece can be sold as organic even if parasiticides have had to be used in emergency situations.

Furosemide was voted to be removed from the National List based on public comment received stating that it was not needed, and on recommendation of well known dairy veterinarians that there are plenty of alternatives for control of parturient edema. However, the day after this vote we received verbal comments from an agricultural consultant, a farmer and a certifier saying that furosemide is used by dairy farmers in the Northeast, although not frequently. The issue may be that most dairy farmers do not use the name furosemide, but recognize the medicine as Lasix. There will be a further chance to make public comment when the Rule Making process begins, and, undoubtedly, Ed Maltby will let you know when that period of public comment opens. ♦

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Organic Milk Pay, Retail and Feed Prices for November 2015

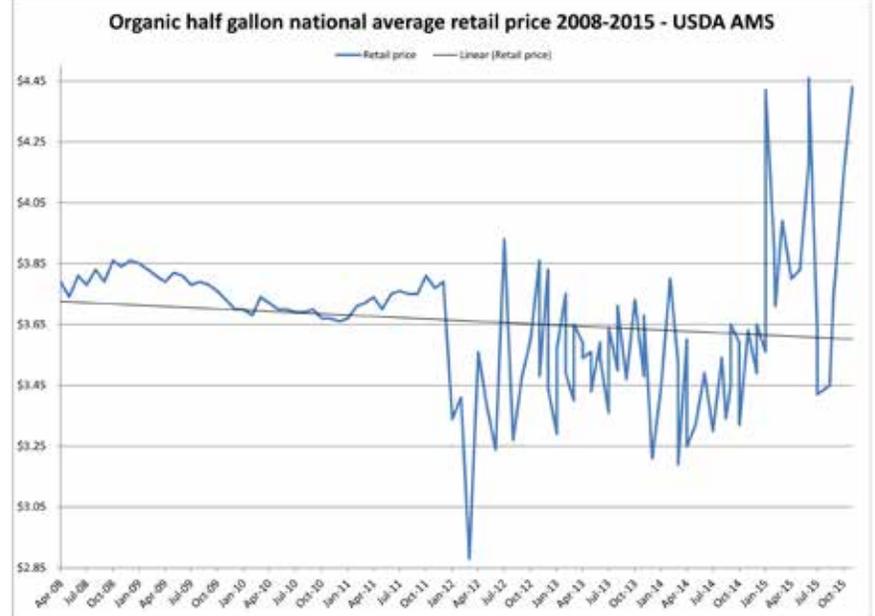
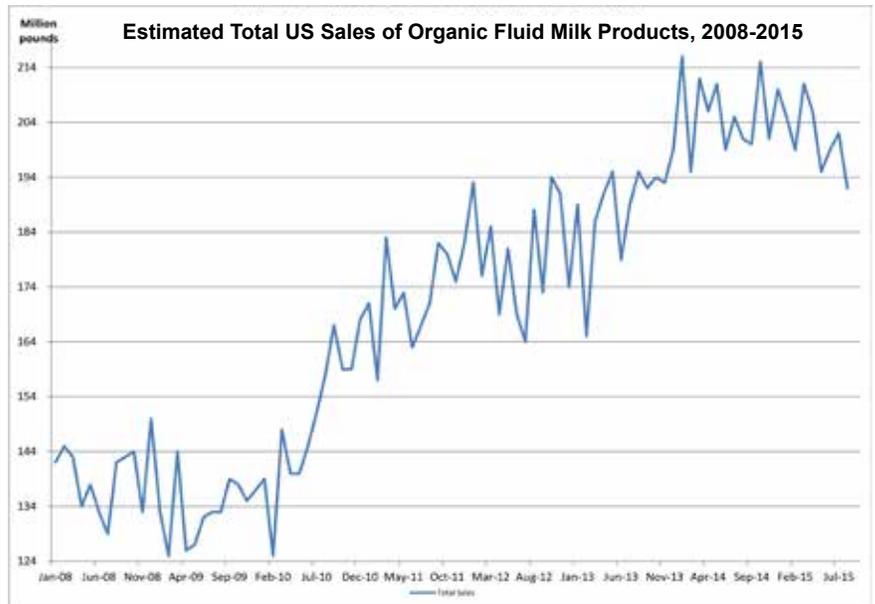
By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

Total retail sales of organic fluid milk for July and August 2015 show a decline in sales on the previous year with sales of non-fat products continuing to drop while whole milk continues to increase. While retail fluid sales have declined, the retail price has increased and there are still shortages on supermarket shelves. The drop in sales can be attributed to a shortage of supply or milk being diverted to manufacturing as demand for organic dairy non-fluid products is increasing. Producers are continuing to move to different buyers as contracts end and pay price continues to increase in response to higher inputs and competition for supply. In the northeast farmgate prices between \$35-40 per hundred pounds are being reported, and higher for operations that meet the grass-based criteria of some buyers and at least two certifiers. In the Midwest the mailbox price can average \$33-35 per hundred pounds.

As domestic supply is tight and the number of producers transitioning or expanding is slow, the two major national brands are looking overseas and to other beverage products to expand their operations and profitably.

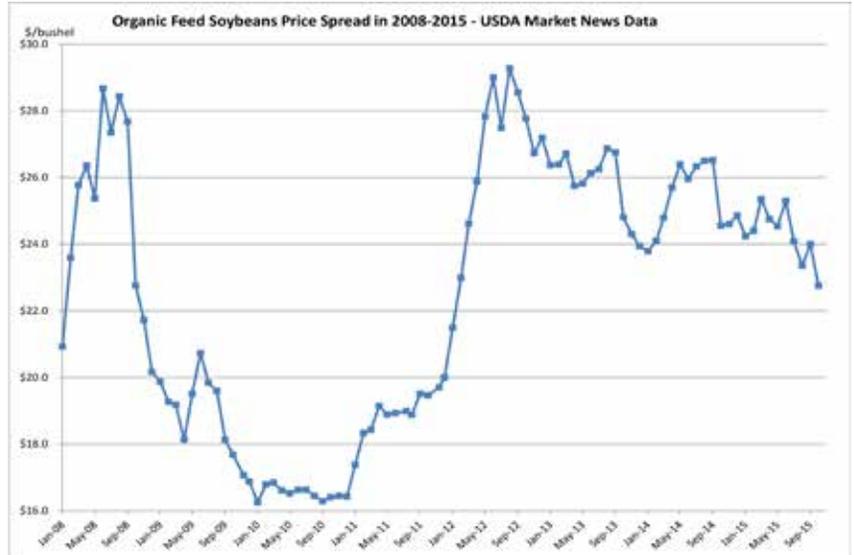
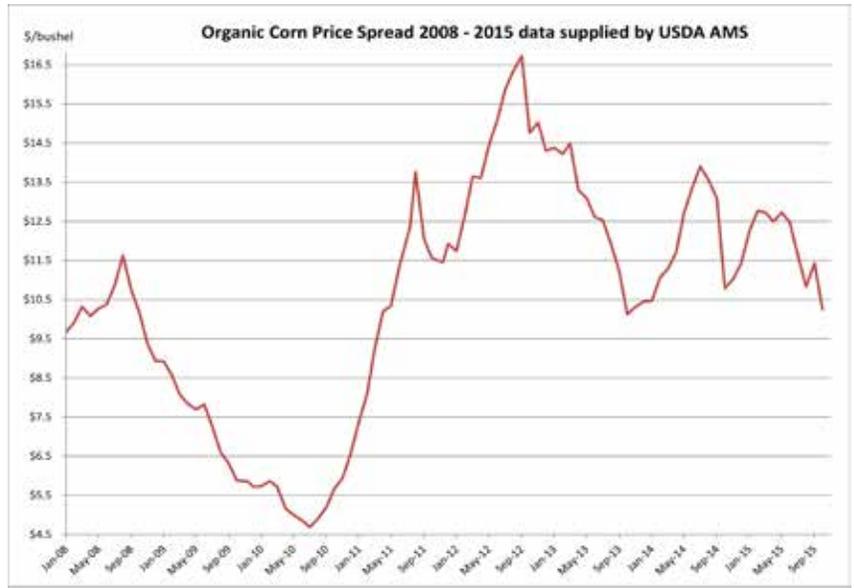
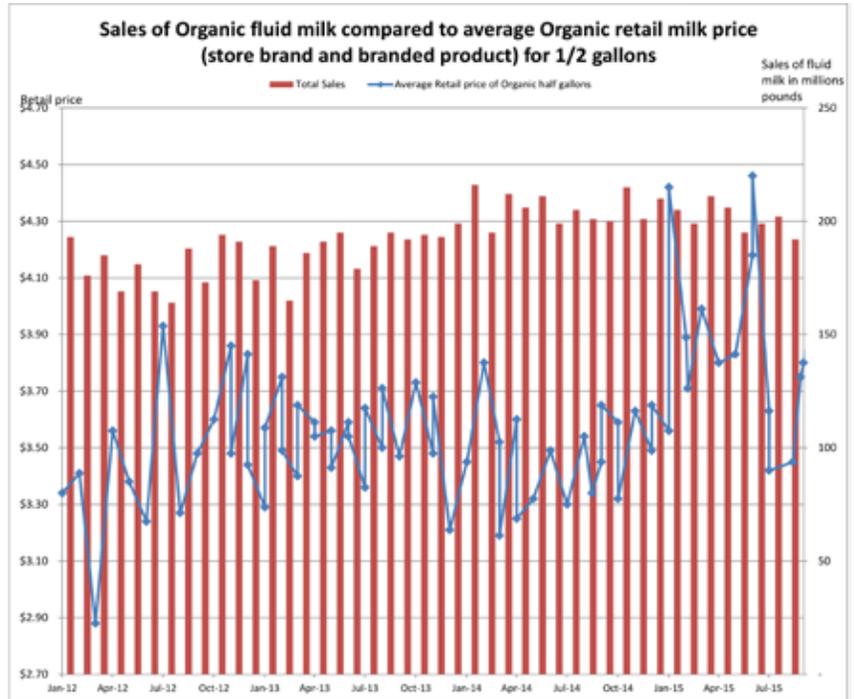
WhiteWave (parent company of Horizon) reported overall sales were up 17%, exceeding \$1 billion for the first time in a single quarter, with “plant-based beverages” here in the US and internationally driving their profitability, and Horizon sales were up 6% on 1% lower volumes due to higher prices and increased sales of butter and cheese. They also stated that the Wallaby yogurt brand, of which they completed the acquisition, was the number one organic yogurt in the natural distribution channel (food co-ops, Whole Foods, Vitamin Cottage, etc.). WhiteWave’s popular plant-based foods and beverages brands in Europe include Alpro® and Provamel®, and its plant-based beverages in China are sold under the Silk® ZhiPuMoFang® brand.

Organic Valley/CROPP (OV) and the British cooperative the Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative (OMSCo) have strengthened their ties to “help



develop markets for organic milk and dairy products.” Each will become a member in the other’s organization, while retaining independence. The two already have a close working relationship, with OV marketing and distributing OMSCo’s Kingdom Cheddar, the only European organic cheese available on the US market. The rationale for the increased cooperation can best be summed up by their management as reported by the British agricultural press: “OMSCo and CROPP are the two largest dedicated organic dairy pools in the world, with a combined organic milk supply of almost 1 billion litres,” said Richard Hampton, managing director of OMSCo. “Our relationship has naturally evolved, and this alliance is the next step. This agreement will allow both co-operatives to market each other’s bulk and branded products and, by working together, OMSCo will be better prepared to satisfy the growing global appetite for organic dairy products.” The move was an important development for co-operation in organic agriculture on a global scale, said Eric Newman, Organic Valley’s vice-president. “In meeting the ever-increasing consumer demand for organic dairy products all over the world, our two co-operatives are doing what we know best: we’re co-operating.” CROPP already has marketing relationships with organic dairy and beef cooperatives in Australasia.

These developments by the leading buyers of domestic organic milk illustrate the direction that organic dairy is moving and has become a worldwide commodity, mirroring the conventional dairy market. What that will do for any future producer pay price, retail pricing and organic integrity is an open question but we have seen the effect of world pricing on the pay price for conventional dairy. ♦



NODPA has three publications, available on NODPA’s website Resources page, to help producers in making decisions on their contracts. They can be downloaded for free or we can send you copies if you do not have online access.



Farm tour group in the barn at Cottonwood Farms

The 15th Annual NODPA Field Days Organic Dairy: Preparing for the Next Generation

By Liz Bawden, NODPA President and Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

For the first time, NODPA's Field Days were held in western New York on October 1 & 2, 2015 and the farm tour which is always a popular part of the event, took place on the first morning under excellent, but blustery weather at Cottonwoods Farm, Pavilion, New York. The farm tour was attended by more than 60 folks who spent over three hours at the farm, courtesy of the Tillotson family. Paul and Jason Tillotson led farmers through their 300-cow barn equipped with robotic milkers. Farmers touring the farm were also introduced to the other sophisticated technologies which included automated calf feeders and a manure management system that reused dried manure as a component of the cows' bedding. Those touring the farm were split into two groups to get the full benefit of the knowledge and experience of the family members in looking at the reasons they had chosen different ways to re-invest in the farm. Quality of life for those working on the farm was obviously a large factor in influencing decisions around capital investment, and, as is common in these family partnerships, Paul was more

inclined towards livestock and Jason towards machinery. For those of us who have spent countless hours pushing feed up to cows, the computerized robot for doing the work seemed a no-brainer and actually watching the robotic milker work answered a lot of questions around the use of technology. The takeaway from the farm tour, apart from the fact that the farm was obviously making money, the cows were healthy, and that they had all the same problems as the rest of us, was that the family had planned their future to suit the family, not allowing the farm, or habit, to dictate the lifestyle, and on which family members could farm.

The first part of the afternoon featured an exceptional presentation by Rick Kirshbergen, University of Maine Cooperative Extension. He shared his experience traveling to farms in the Netherlands as he discussed the future of robotic milking in the US, especially on organic farms. In Europe, robotic milking appeals to the smaller farm, and is increasingly common on farms

in the 50 to 200 cow range. As animal welfare becomes an increasing point of concern for consumers, the mechanization of milking to suit the cow's needs, rather than the farm worker, can be an added benefit in any evaluation, especially as the "robots" become more efficient and less expensive. Rick's presentation highlighted the benefits of mechanization for small to mid-size operations where reliable and well trained labor is at a premium.

The theme for the Field Days was "Preparing for the Next Generation". A panel of young farmers openly discussed their goals and challenges as they pursue their farming careers. Virginia Chamberlain, Eric Beiler, Stephen Gould, and Peter Martens shared their personal stories and ideas about farming in the future, expertly moderated by Joan Petzen. Not surprisingly, these young farmers highlighted good pay, time off and good training as critical elements required by the next generation. They recognized the limiting belief that there are few opportunities for them "out there" in farming to be a real barrier. Access to capital and financial concerns was the other main barrier. For those coming into an existing farm business, they saw the merits of a generational transfer plan, and emphasized the importance of re-investing in the business. Technology, they felt, also has an important role. Under the excellent moderation of Joan Petzen, the parents were also brought into the discussion to verify some of the assumptions made by the panel and also give some history to the decision making around generational transfer. Recent data from USDA confirms that there are more young farmers in organic production than conventional agriculture which presents great opportunities for the future but, as was apparent from some of the panelist answers to

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Pioneering Women of Organics: Kathie Arnold, Mary-Howell Martens, Liana Hoode and Sarah Johnston



Young farmers at NODPA Field Days



Rick Kirshbergen discussing robotic milking

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Planning for Winter Feeding

By Karen Hoffman

Resource Conservationist – Animal Science
USDA-NRCS, Norwich, NY

It is once again the time of year to begin thinking about winter feeding. In most areas the pastures have either slowed significantly or completely stopped growing, and stored forage will need to be fed to cows for a few months. A concern that some organic dairy farmers have expressed is the cost of organic grain, and those who are 100% grass-fed want to plan their forage inventories. What can you do that will help keep the cost as low as possible, as well as keep cows healthy and productive through the winter?

Forage testing is one place to start, for a couple of reasons. First, it will help you determine how much forage your cows can eat, based on the fiber levels. In grass-fed herds, this will help you estimate how much hay or baleage of varying qualities you will need. Even in herds fed supplements, if your cows can eat a higher forage diet, you can feed a lower rate of grain. Second, it will give you an idea of how much protein is in your forage, and from there you can determine how much protein you want or need to buy. Last, it will give you an estimate of how much energy you might need to supplement. Unfortunately, forage analysis is one of those tasks that either isn't on the priority list, or is done infrequently on many farms. However, it has the potential to bring better returns than you would expect.

The cost to have your forages tested should be less than \$20 per sample, unless you decide to have additional nutrients analyzed that are not part of a "standard" analysis package. The most important forages to sample are those that will be fed to your milking cows, and those should be the forages you think will be the highest in quality. This may mean conducting an inventory of everything you have stored on the farm first, and then identifying where your sampling will pay back the most.

When you sample your forages, make sure it is a representative sample. This means sampling from more than one round bale, bale of baleage, or small square bale if you are having these types of forages tested, and then mixing and sub-sampling. Likewise, if you use an upright or bunker silo for fermented feeds, you should take a bigger sample as it is being fed out, and then mix and sub-sample to obtain a representative sample.

Since many organic dairies don't utilize the services of a nutritionist, the information from the forage tests can help you to formulate a basic ration based on a few key nutrients. Although it is still a good idea to make sure your ration is balanced for many other nutrients, you can be generally correct by running through the following types of calculations. It can also be helpful for planning and pricing anything you may need to consider buying.

Once you have the results back, the first two nutrients you should look at are NDF (neutral detergent fiber) and protein. NDF is a measurement of fiber in the forage, and less NDF is better than more. Lactating dairy cows can eat approximately 1.1% of their body weight in NDF, although with higher quality, more digestible forages like pasture, they can eat 1.3 to 1.4% of body weight. Thus, if you are going to feed mostly baleage to your 1200 lb cows and it tests 50% NDF, they should be able to eat 13.2 lbs of NDF ($1200 \times 1.1\%$), or 26.4 lbs of baleage ($13.2 \text{ lbs}/50\%$) on a dry matter basis. However, if the baleage tests 45% NDF, the cows could eat 29.3 lbs of baleage ($13.2 \text{ lbs}/45\%$), or 2.9 lbs more. That extra 2.9 lbs of forage intake means you could feed 2.9 lbs less grain to meet their total intake requirements.

On the protein side, milking cows need between 16 and 18% protein in their diet, depending upon milk and component production. The 16 to 18% protein is approximately equivalent to 7 to 9 lbs of protein. If we assume the baleage above that is 45% NDF is also 14% protein, we need higher protein coming from grain to meet their needs. The 29 lbs of baleage they could eat (based on NDF) would provide 4 lbs of protein ($29 \times 14\%$). The remaining





3 to 5 lbs of protein would need to come from grain or another, higher protein forage. A grain mix of 18% protein, fed at a rate of 17 lbs per cow would provide 3 lbs of protein. Higher quality forage would mean less protein in the grain mix, and less total grain that would need to be fed to meet their requirements.

If the herd is 100% grass-fed, then the 14% protein baleage would not provide enough protein for the cows either. Although grass-fed cows produce a lower volume of milk, they still require between 12 and 14% protein in their diet, which translates to about 5 to 6 lbs of protein. They should be fed a higher protein baleage or hay, in the range of 16 to 18% protein to ensure they have enough protein in their diet. This is where forage testing can be very helpful, so that you can allocate your better forages to milking cows. If you are also seasonally calving and cows will be dry during some of the winter months, you can plan to save your better forages for early lactation, and feed the lower quality ones while they are dry.

Energy supplementation is usually the least expensive nutrient to purchase, but there are times when it is more expensive due to limited supply or other factors. The forage test will also give you an estimate of the energy content of your forages, which can help you determine how much high-energy grain you might need to feed. On the forage test, energy is expressed as Net Energy for lactation, maintenance, and growth (NEL, NEM, and NEG). For milking cows, the only value you need to work with is NEL, as it includes the maintenance needs. The NEL values are not measured directly in the forage analysis, but it is predicted from other components of the forage such as NDF, NFC's, protein, and fat. A low fiber, high NFC, high protein forage will generally have more energy. Since cows will eat more of these types of forages as well, there is less need for energy supplementation with them.

Milking cows need a ration that is approximately .72 to .78 Mcals/lb of NEL, again depending on milk production, breed, stage of lactation, and so forth. This equates to between 20 and 35 Mcals/day, with lower producing cows having the lower requirement. Using the same baleage above, and assuming it is .52 Mcals/lb NEL, the cows would get 15 Mcals/day from the baleage (29 lbs x .52). If they are lower producing cows, the remaining 5 to 10 Mcals needed could be supplied by 5.5 to 10.5 pounds of corn meal (.95 Mcals/lb). Higher producing cows would need to be fed 10.5 to 21 pounds of corn meal to meet their needs with this quality of baleage. Other options for providing energy from forages include annuals such as corn silage or small grain silages, and other grain options include the small grains or molasses. Molasses is also the only supplement allowed for most grass-fed programs, so if your forages are low in energy a few pounds of molasses is a good option to help boost the total energy in the diet.

The bottom line to all this thinking and calculating is that if you want to minimize your grain costs this winter, you should sample your forages now to determine what you have to work with. From there, you can work through how much forage they are capable of eating, and how much protein that would provide. You may discover that you need to purchase some higher quality forage, or that you really don't need to spend much on grain this winter. With costs being what they are, simply shooting in the dark with no information is probably not the most profitable strategy. ♦

Karen Hoffman, M.S., PAS

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USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
99 North Broad Street, Norwich, NY 13815*

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Organic Industry News

NOFA-NY Announces New Organic Dairy Certification Transitions Project

By Bethany Wallis, NOFA-NY Education Director

NOFA-NY Inc. announces a new program to help dairy farmers transition to organic management. With the current downturn in conventional milk pricing, many farmers who have been on the fence about transitioning to organic management practices are now taking a good hard look at the organic marketing option as a way to increase farm income. They are also evaluating an increase in marketing opportunities that organic processors are providing with new grass fed price premiums. This may be the largest transitioning group NOFA-NY has seen since farmers were trying to get in before the 1 year, 100% organic feed rule change.

NOFA-NY is working hard to help grow the organic dairy industry and support these farmers through technical assistance, our on-farm skill development guide, educational workshops, field days and our annual conferences. In that effort, we are excited to be working on a new Organic Dairy Transitions Certification Project supported by funding from the New York Farm Viability



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Institute. We look forward to working with transitioning dairy farmers in the 2015-2016 season to help them complete their certification application; identify barriers; develop a transition plan; and provide technical support to the farm.

NOFA-NY's Organic Dairy Certification Transitions Project will work directly with dairy farmers who are interested in organic certification. Farmers who need guidance evaluating their farm production practices to comply with organic regulation and would like assistance in the organic certification application process are encouraged to apply. Farmers who participate will gain a working knowledge of the organic industry; learn how to manage

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their farm organically to meet certification standards; and be on their way to organic certification upon completion of this project.

Farmers who participate will receive the following services:

- Registration for the Organic Dairy and Field Crop Conference to be held March 16, 2016 at the Holiday Inn in Syracuse NY, where they will meet with the Organic Dairy Team to begin developing a transition plan & network with organic dairy farmers and industry professionals
- On-farm site visit by an Organic Dairy Team member to discuss on-farm focus areas that need change to meet regulations, review certification information and answer specific questions, and get information as needed.
- Participate in a phone/Skype meeting to address any lingering questions on certification and review certification packet for submission. Discuss farm needs for second in person meeting and determine additional consultant to participate.
- Final on-farm meeting with Organic Dairy Team member and consultant to address any problem/concern areas for the farmer.

The application can be found at www.nofany.org or call our office at 585-271-1979 for a hard copy. We will be accepting application through December and will contact program participants in January, 2016. ♦

For additional information on the Organic Dairy Certification Transitions Project please contact Bethany Wallis at 585-271-1979 ext. 513 or email Bethany@nofany.org

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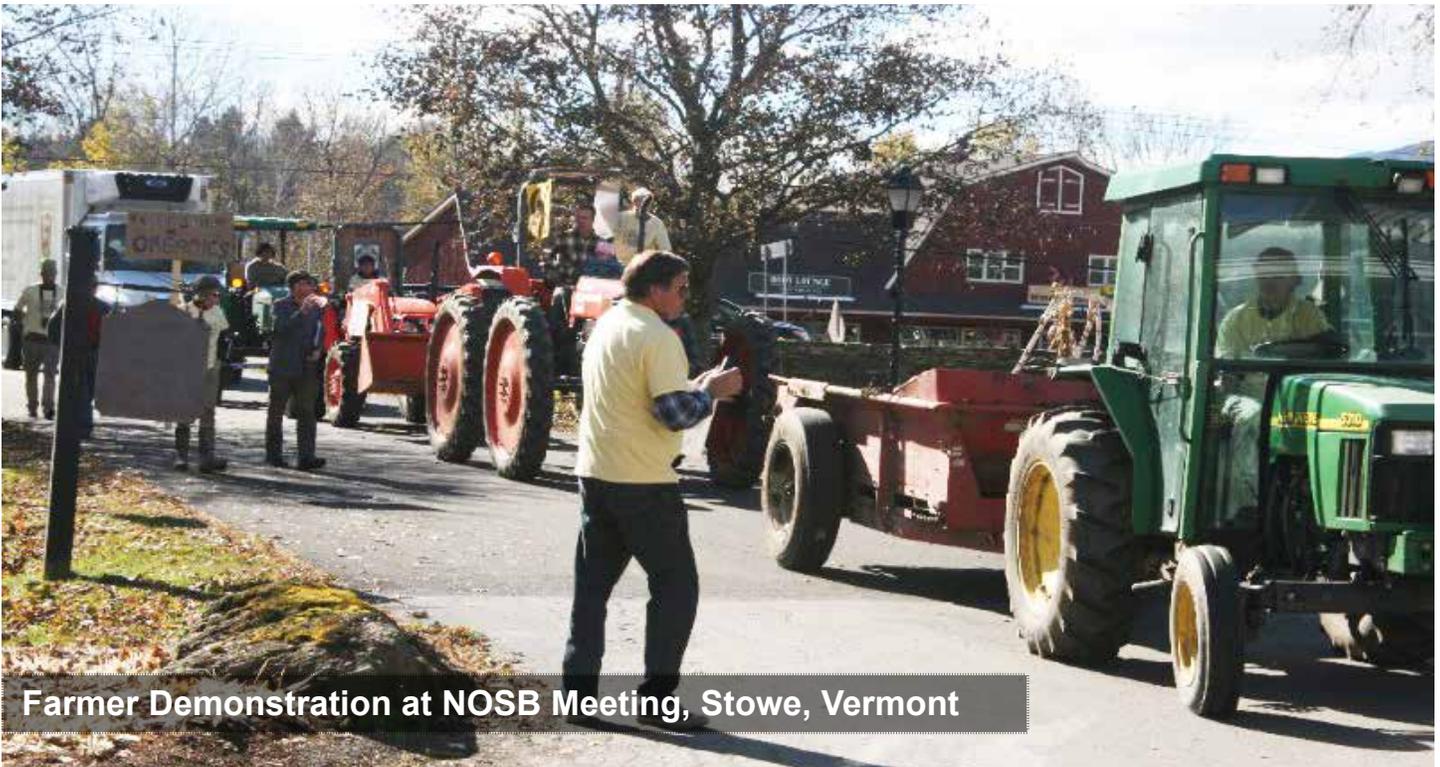
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Farmer Demonstration at NOSB Meeting, Stowe, Vermont

Hydroponics

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“organic hydroponic.” Though the NOP did lift this restriction after public outcry, the result is a group that is stacked in opposition to the NOSB’s recommendation.”

We are now entering very familiar territory in the Rulemaking process. The NOP is following a pattern that has been used in the past to slow down decision-making under the guise of analyzing the current situation. With the Access to Pasture we had exactly the same process that delayed any decision and allowed large scale dairies to establish themselves as economically necessary for the organic dairy industry. If the Taskforce follows its stated mandate and goes back to square one to examine the current situation and assess the economic impact of not certifying hydroponic operations, we will be looking at many years before the Taskforce reports back to the NOSB. The NOSB would have to discuss the Taskforce recommendations and recommend rulemaking to the NOP. The rulemaking would then have to fit into the work plan of the NOP and the availability of slots in the USDA allocation for rulemaking on the Federal Register. We are looking at many years of the status-quo and the rapid expansion of domestic and especially foreign organic hydroponic operations.

The NOP could choose to have a two track course and instruct certifiers as to which soilless systems may be certified, and which do not meet the criteria and are not eligible for organic certification. The instruction should include clear criteria that follow the NOSB 2010 recommendation, and adhere to the definition of organic production presented in the Rule.

The NOP could and should instruct the Taskforce to only clarify what the NOP will need to get to rulemaking rather than a

complete re-examination of the hydroponic industry and get a recommendation to the NOSB by Spring 2016. The NOSB could then have a recommendation open for comment and possibly have a final recommendation for the NOP by the Fall meeting in 2016.

The integrity of organic production is an essential part of the marketing of product using the USDA organic seal, especially for those that sell commodities on the wholesale market. The NOP was created to ensure ethical and consistent marketing in organic farming. The whole purpose of the National Organic Program was to prevent misleading labeling and inconsistency of organic certification that we are now seeing with hydroponics. People are buying “organic” tomatoes and peppers with no idea that the produce is hydroponic. Many people don’t even know what hydroponic means. The websites of the businesses and organizations that are organic champions celebrate the soil. Statements are commonly made such as “Organic Growing, it begins with the soil”, and “Organic farmers understand that what you put into the soil has a profound impact on what you get out of it”. But the reality of what is offered in the stores is quite different.

The Big Deal is that without the belief of consumers in the integrity of organic, there is no future for organic certification. Dave Chapman has responded to the challenge of making the process work and his comments to the NOSB meeting in Stowe Vermont this October give a clear path for action by the NOP, as did the protest by organic farmers outside the NOSB meeting on the first day of the NOSB.

Dave Chapman comments to the NOSB:

“The time has come to come to a conclusion on the issue of

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Organic Industry News

Hydroponics

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hydroponics in organic. Like the Emperor's new clothes, the NOP position relies on our continuing silence in order to avoid ridicule. The 2010 NOSB recommendation is completely clear in saying that hydroponic production has no place in organic certification. Soil-less growing is simply not in keeping with the basic principles of organic farming. I believe that the task force is an attempt to avoid rather than to act on the recommendation. I believe that most of the people in this room agree with the NOSB recommendation.

Most of the organic farmers in America agree with that recommendation. IFOAM, The National Organic Coalition, Cornucopia, The Organic Trade Association, the Agrarian Elders, the OSGTA, and the Vermont Organic Farmers have all issued statements in support of that recommendation. Five hundred organic farmers and over one thousand organic consumers have signed petitions that support that recommendation. The standards of 23 of the 27 member states of the EU, Japan, New Zealand, and Mexico support that recommendation.

So who opposes the 2010 recommendation? The NOP.... and the hydroponic growers.

Was it ever intended that the NOP would redefine the principles

of organic farming? No! They are only meant to be the referees, ensuring that the organic standards are enforced and kept safe from corrupting economic interests. That is the entire reason that the NOP was created by Congress. To protect the farmers AND the consumers from unethical marketing, from tricking people into buying something they didn't mean to buy. And now the NOP is becoming EXACTLY what they were created to protect us from.

Let us stop settling for Certified SORT OF Organic.

I have three proposals for the NOP:

1. Create an immediate moratorium on certifying hydroponic production, until the recommendation can be acted on.
2. Act QUICKLY to create a rule that will ban hydroponic growing from organic certification.
3. Connect the hydroponic growers to the USDA Process Verified Program, so that they can create a label that will honestly offer what they grow to the American people. Let them be proud of how they grow, and not hide it behind the organic label. Then let the people make their choices.

I call on Miles (McEvoy), the NOSB, Senator Leahy, and all of you to push the issue to a speedy conclusion, keeping the organic standards strong and true." ♦

Dave Chapman can be reached at: davechapman52@gmail.com.

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ORGANIC PRODUCTION: FEATURED FARM

Wisconsin Organic Dairy Farmers Kevin & Lynn Thull KT Organic Farms

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Born in 1965, Kevin has always called Kewaskum home. “Farming is what I always wanted to do although I could have done a lot of things. I was the 9th oldest of ten kids and a lot of it was timing,” he explained. “By the time I graduated from high school I had twenty heifers. In 1985, at age twenty, I rented the farm from my dad who passed away seven months later. It was kind of scary the first year,” Kevin chuckled, “but I did a lot of learning on my own and from those around me and was fortunate to have an uncle farming down the road. There certainly are a lot more resources available now to beginning farmers.” In 1988, Kevin completed the purchase of the 120-acre family farm which now bears the simple name of K.T. Organic Farms.

Although Kevin’s dad kept a confinement herd, he quit spraying in the late 1960’s after connecting the boils on his neck with the agricultural chemicals. “He started connecting the dots,” Kevin said. “If you develop healthy soils, healthy crops will follow which in turn will produce healthy animals and healthy people.” He continued, “The things he did back then make a lot more sense to me now.” A forward-thinker like his father, the farm was certified organic in 1992, well before the great swell of growth in organics, with Kevin being one of the first farmers contracted directly by Earth’s Best Baby Food and Health Valley Foods to grow organic sweet corn. Kevin also didn’t hesitate when prompted

by his certifier to have his milk certified and he began shipping organic milk to CROPP in 1993, the 25th farmer to produce for the co-op whose membership has grown to roughly 1600 dairy producers.

Organic agriculture depends on forward thinking. It involves a long-term commitment to the health of the soil, land, animals, people and community though progress often occurs so slowly it seems there could never be enough daylight to help the land reach its greatest potential. Kevin, a modern day pioneer of the crazy organic dairying adventure, has never shirked the heavy responsibility required to manifest his goals and visions to the land, animals and people around him. It’s evident in the fact that three of the farm’s employees are local teenagers, not always the easiest group to train and manage, but one that needs to be exposed to the basic realities of where our food comes from and particularly our organic food. It’s evident in the calves: “They’re huge at weaning, solid and rugged,” he said, and it’s also evident in the health and productivity of their 70 milkers, a mixed herd of Holstein, Jersey, Normande, Swedish Red and Fleckvieh. “Herd health is very good. I think we spend more money on our dog’s healthcare needs than on the cows. Cows breed back easily; calve easily. They’ll take care of you if you take care of them,” he said.

His daily commitment - part faith, grit, industriousness and tenacity are evident at every step. A glance reveals the neatly laid out and efficient grazing system in which all groups of animals

KT Organic Farms Farm Tractor and Storage barns



KT Organic Farms' Cows Heading to the Barn



easily meet the organic grazing standard. Kevin shared his success with using a 12-foot Airway aerator on his 65 acres of permanent pasture, noting that, "It works great at breaking up the hard pan. If I get it done by August the pastures green up during our late summer slump. It allows nutrients to go from the top to the bottom rather than sitting on the surface." Another look reveals a well-developed and productive cropping system on an additional 225 leased acres, a classic organic mid-western rotation of corn silage, alfalfa and small grains which are sold as seed or cover crops. The Thull's gave up feeding grain about seven years ago, and although the rolling herd average has dropped from 18,000 pounds to 15,000 since eliminating grain, their milk production is still a testament to his skill in producing high quality forage.

Resourcefulness can further be seen in the farm's direct market beef and pork operation. Building on a base of customers that first started coming to his dad more than fifty years ago, Kevin retains all the steers from the dairy herd, about thirty to forty a year. They're started on pasture at weaning age, raised on grass until 500 pounds, and are finished on organic forage. Twenty pigs per year are also privately marketed. Diversification is rounded out by the sale of certified organic winter rye seed.

Although it can often be difficult to look up from one's dirty chore boots, Kevin portrayed a quiet yet strong sense of commitment to the community where he has spent all of his 50 years. The strength of a community of course is the sum of the small actions of many. Explained Kevin, "We have lots of custom work done and I help those custom guys with some of the work they do for other people. We trade a few hours and although it doesn't balance out it helps out a bit. We have a guy that custom bales

and if he gets in a bind I bale for him. My neighbor plants and chops my corn and I go and fill and pack his bunkers. We're a pretty close-knit community. If somebody's behind or having a little hard luck we try to help them get caught up. It's not always a monetary thing. Every hour doesn't have to be paid for. It's a good feeling to just be able to help somebody."

Extending Kevin's father's maxim that healthy soils will eventually yield healthy people, the Thull's also make numerous community donations in the form of tasty and healthy hamburger. "A number of years ago," Kevin said, "we started donating 50 pounds of hamburger to the annual car show at the local tavern. They raise money and donate it to needy families. Now we're up to 180 pounds. There are also local ballparks concession stands where my friends do coaching and we like to provide hamburger to them. These donations in turn help drive sales."

These are the rewards of spending a lifetime organically managing a piece of land and growing roots in the same place you were born. Provide for the land and it will provide for you, hopefully both emotionally and financially. There isn't enough time in a farmer's life for all their hopes and grandiose dreams to be fulfilled so a generational continuum seems the ideal progression for a dairy farm. In 2007, Kevin married Lynn, a farm girl who had a seven year old son, Brent. On June 18th, 2014, Brent Schultz, age 16, was killed in a car accident with his best friend. His obituary explained that "Brent served as an officer of the Kewaskum FFA and was member of the New Fane Kettle Riders Snowmobile Club, Sundown Coon Hunters and Trinity Lutheran Church in Dundee. He was an avid hunter and fisherman and

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Heifer barn



FEATURED FARM

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will fondly be remembered for his big heart, his dimpled smile and the love he had for his truck and country music.”

“Brent turned sixteen on Monday, got his driver’s license on Tuesday, and was killed on Wednesday. We were gearing up towards his future with buildings and everything. I don’t know if he would have milked, he probably would have raised steers. A lot has changed since then,” Kevin said with deep sorrow. Farmers are deluged with setbacks, challenges and obstacles in the forms calamitous weather, break-downs, health and financial problems.

These daily stresses on a farm are assumed as a risk of the trade but the disruption of what seems so natural, the passing on of your lifetime of hard work to your kin, is tragedy in its purest form. “It’s a surprise you never expect,” mourned Kevin, “no graduation, no grandchildren, no wedding, none of that. It’s all zero.”

The work-hungry, demanding nature of a farm may be a reprieve from grief but without an heir compelling you to further improve and shape your small piece of the earth for future generations, a farm can become a lonesome endeavor. Despite the Thull’s enormous loss it is their nature to continue looking forward. “I am only 50 years old,” Kevin spoke thoughtfully on the future of the farm, but “I didn’t want to wait until I was sixty. I thought it would be a lot easier to identify someone and adapt to one another’s needs over time.”

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And so, Kevin and Lynn are in the process of transferring the farm to a team of brothers. "We have boys that want to farm organically in the worst way. They both have two jobs now and are saving money and want to put money down," Kevin explained. The transfer is expected to take five to ten years. The tentative plan is for the brothers, whom the Thull's know well, to buy the cows within five years, and then rent the machinery and land for the next five years. The brothers will also be given the option to buy the equipment with the acquisition of the land coming in the fifteen year range. In September, Kevin and Lynn closed on a lake house about twenty minutes from the farm and Kevin joked that now "we can go on vacation between chores." Their plan is to eventually move to the lake.

Each day on the farm is the same but is also marked by noticeable and discernible changes. The farmer is consumed by tilling, seeding, milking, handling manure, feeding calves, cleaning barns but superimposed upon this is progress that often seems to come so slowly that it's difficult to remember when it happened or that it was your design. New buildings emerge, different crops are explored, the herd expands, the best crop of corn ever is grown, pastures and soil improve, and equipment comes and goes. The long-view farmer is always striving, yearning to do justice to the multi-dimensional organism that is a dairy farm. Hurricanes and drought can be prepared for, ice storms and collapsing barns too. Regardless of the diligent long-view some moments of time though, like the death of a child, can never be prepared for. Still,

the Thull's forge onward and forward toward keeping their farm viable for the next generation though sadly it is not their own blood.

It's not to be forgotten that despite organic dairy's steady growth in the marketplace, organic dairy families are a unique part of rural America. Kevin doesn't anticipate the growth of organic dairy in his small part of Wisconsin and noted, "I think 10-15 years ago is when we saw the greatest shift by conventional producers to organic. More of the flip side seems to be going on around here, conventional farms expanding and expanding. There are two 3,000 cow dairies within five or six miles of here."

Head back towards Kewaskum on State Road 28 after a brisk autumn visit to Kettle Moraine State Forest. Slow down and wave your hand at Kevin on a tractor as he goes about the work of putting up the fifth and final cutting of alfalfa before winter and imagine him as a young man driving these same roads. He's dedicated his life working the land for not only his own gain but to the benefit of the soil, the crops and the cows, and ultimately his community. "Eventually the world might starve," Kevin mused, "because the food being produced isn't healthy for the people." What will become of this dedication and passion when the Thull's eventually make the move to their new home? Kevin chuckled, "you know those brothers we're going to transfer the farm to? Well, they already asked me if I'd work for them." ♦

Kevin Thull can be reached at: thullkevin@gmail.com

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- In the Southeast, contact Gerry Cohn at (919) 605-5619 or gerry.cohn@organicvalley.coop.
- Central to Western PA, contact Solomon Meyer at (814) 515-6827 or Solomon.meyer@organicvalley.coop.
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Seeking 100% Grass Dairy Farmers! Maple Hill Creamery, located in Stuyvesant, NY is a small manufacturer of 100% grass-fed organic yogurt. We are growing rapidly and are looking for more 100% grass-fed farms in the NY state area to join us.

We offer:

- Six month winter premium
- Grass fed premium paid OVER organic milk price
- Grass fed dairy technical assistance / mineral program
- Organic transition payments possible

Requirements:

- No grain, no corn silage
- Just pasture, dry hay and baleage
- Certified Organic

Please CALL US with questions! Phone: 518-758-7777

Dairy Marketing Services Organic

More milk is needed by Northeast organic customers! Dairy Marketing Services can help you facilitate the transition from conventional to organic production. Count on DMS Organic specialists for organics, transition stabilizers, pasture requirements, pasture supplies and more. Call David Eyster at DMS: 1-888-589-6455, ext. 5409 for more information today!

Stonyfield Farm, Inc.

Stonyfield Farm, Inc is looking for producers to support their comprehensive line of organic yogurt and diversified portfolio of organic dairy products. We offer a stable price platform with competitive premiums for components, quality and volume. In addition, we offer a comprehensive technical assistance program designed with producers to help them achieve their unique business goals. We are actively seeking producers looking to grow their business today and for the future.

Please contact our Farmer Relationship Manager, Kyle Thygesen for further details at kthygesen@stonyfield.com or (802) 369-0267.

To be listed, free, in future Organic Milk Sought columns, contact Nora Owens at 413-772--0444, noraowens@comcast.net.

NET UPDATE

Recent ODairy Discussions

*By Liz Bawden, Organic Dairy Farmer,
NODPA President*

A cow freshened with a hot, hard quarter and a temperature of 105.6. A vet on the list determined that this would be a coliform mastitis. He suggested that generally an animal can rebound from this with good care if just one quarter is affected. If two or more quarters are involved, the prognosis is not so good; the cow generally withers away over a week or two even with good care. Since only one quarter was involved, the following was suggested: Give Belladonna 30C hourly, many times, give IV Vitamin C (one 250cc bottle daily), give Flunixin to make her feel better, use one of the mint lotions on the affected quarter, give a strong garlic tincture (you can mix it with dextrose and give IV – 60 to 90 cc in 500cc dextrose), and give an antibody product like BoviSera (one 250cc bottle IV). It was also suggested to give probiotics as that will help with gut health and toxin elimination, and to keep stripping the quarter.

Confirmed cases of lungworm in one producer's herd sent him to the list looking for alternatives to the use of a conventional parasiticide, which carries a 90-day withholding for milking animals. Some suggestions were ITM's herbal Anti-parasite Powder at 1 Tbsp twice a day, or Black Walnut tincture at about 30 drops twice a day. Expectorants have to be added to help the cow cough up the dead worms – Elecampane or Thyme was recommended. There is a lungworm vaccine in Europe, but it is not available in the US, although one producer suggested that you could get it from Canada. Another vet suggested standing back and taking the long view that susceptibility to parasites is a reflection of the health of the animals in the herd. Animal density was mentioned as an issue, along with grazing wet areas. Another producer suggested that the damage to an animal's lungs may be severe enough to warrant culling the serious cases, and treating only the cases that appear to be in the early stages.

A farmer asked the group if there was an approved treatment to heal pneumonia scars in cattle that would calm chronic and occasional coughing. A vet suggested an herbal approach and recommended Mullein, Horehound, Coltsfoot, and Japanese Knotweed (dried root). She also suggested small doses of Blood-root tincture (10 drops twice a day).

A long discussion about one sick cow led to some good discussion about Staph aureus. One vet said she has had good results with a Chinese herbal product called Si Miao San from a company called Jing Tang in Reddick, Florida. Another producer reminded us that improving the immune system will eradicate much (if not all!) of the mastitis from the herd, so he suggested focusing on the minerals, producing highly mineralized feed

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Website & E-Newsletter Advertising

NODPA is pleased to provide additional advertising opportunities for our organic dairy supporters and resource individuals through our Website and our monthly E-Newsletter.

Website Advertising

Three banner ads are located at the top of the home page and at least 10 other pages on NODPA's website. NODPA.com receives over 2500 visits each month navigating to an average of 3 pages per visit.

Ad Design: Display-ready ads should be 275 pixels wide by 100 pixels tall. Your ad can link to a page on your website.

Cost: Display-ready ads are \$150 per month.

E-Newsletter Advertising

Two banner ads are located at the top of each E-Newsletter, going out monthly to over 2,000 individuals through our E-Newsletter, the NODPA-ODairy discussion forum, and NODPA's Facebook page.

Ad Design: Display-ready ads should be 300 pixels wide by 125 pixels tall. Your ad can link to a page on your website.

Cost: Display-ready ads are \$125 per month.

Discounted rates for commitments of 6 months or more.

Interested in one or both of these opportunities? For more information, contact Nora Owens at:

Email: noraowens@comcast.net

Phone: 413-772-0444

Go to the following web page for more information:

www.nodpa.com/web_ads.shtml

Subscribing to ODairy:

ODairy is a FREE, vibrant listserv for organic dairy farmers, educators and industry representatives who actively participate with questions, advice, shared stories, and discussions of issues critical to the organic dairy industry.

To sign up for the ODairy listserv, go to:

www.nodpa.com/list_serv.shtml

FIELD DAYS 2015

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questions, also a great responsibility to more experienced organic producers to pass on the history and values of organic production which are essential to the future of the integrity of the organic label.

Liana Hoodes gave a unique keynote speech drawing from her many years of experience of working within the organic and sustainable agriculture policy arena, national and locally. Liana has for many years been the 'go to' person in the organic community when it came to building consensus around differences of opinion on regulations, policies and practices and she showed her experience and knowledge of organic and the organic community with her insightful speech. She encouraged producers to be part of the process to protect the integrity of the organic label, with many practical examples of success.

Building on Liana's speech, Fay Benson led a discussion on working together for a sustainable future. Farmers discussed how we can move forward without stumbling into the same pitfalls as conventional

agriculture and what was needed to maintain the integrity of organic certification. Inevitably that led to exchanges of opinion around how much cheating there is and how that is being dealt with by certifiers and buyers. Other challenges identified by producers was the sense of frustration on the implementation of regulations, the role of the NOP and what producers can do to make changes.



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608-637-2526

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Baystate Organic Certifiers certifies dairies in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest






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www.baystateorganic.org

The producer breakfast meeting at 7:00 am on Friday morning was excellently moderated by Henry Perkins, Past President of NODPA and President of the Maine Organic Milk Producers and started with a financial report and then election of officers. Kirk Arnold was elected as the new NODPA Vice President and Ryan Murray was appointed as a New York State Representative. As usual, there was a well facilitated discussion around major issues facing producers, especially around parasiticides, which easily flowed into discussions around what veterinary tools are available for organic dairy producers and the great reliance by established producers on prevention, good production practices and building immunity within their herds.

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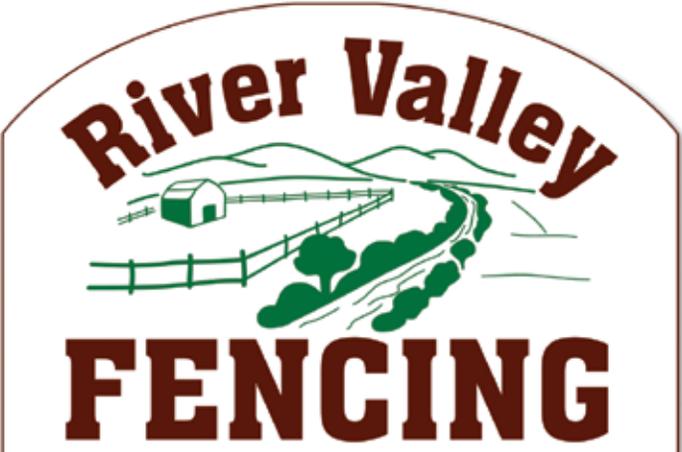
NET UPDATE

ODairy Updates

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from good soils, and increasing the biodiversity of pastures.

Cooler temperatures brought hordes of mice into one farmer's barns. There were the usual suggestions about adding more cats to the staff and putting down traps. A vet recommended putting up nesting boxes for barn owls or sparrow hawks. If they are native to your region, they can consume great quantities of mice. ♦



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Hauler Bob Meendering (l) and DFA Member Rick Bousquet (r)

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FOR Northeast Organic Farmers**

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Field Days 2015

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Tim Joseph from Maple Hill Creamery gave a great presentation on grass milk and its increased presence in the marketplace. The consensus from producers was that organic grass milk was the preferred option which was why at least two certifiers and one organic milk buyer have bypassed the USDA and established their own certification label and criteria for organic grass fed milk. In the absence of enough supply of organic grass fed milk to meet the increased demand from buyers and retail customers, grass fed milk is fast establishing its own market. There was discussion about whether this posed a threat to organic and the organic pay price, as producers can move to grass-fed milk far more easily than transitioning to organic. Some saw grass milk as an entry point to organic certification but other worried about the lack of incentive to complete transition. It was an interesting and thought provoking discussion about the future.

This was followed by the door prize raffle and a short presentation on the final workshop of the day on cow comfort at the Cottonwoods Farm.

Then it was back to Cottonwood Farm for a workshop in Optimal Cow Comfort with members of the NWN Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Team, Cornell University/Pro-Dairy: veterinarians Dr. Gerald Bertoldo and Dr. Melanie Hemenway, and Libby Eiholzer, Dairy Specialist Team Member. Workshop participants were led on an in-depth tour of the calf barn, heifer facilities, and robotic milking facilities. The calf barn featured tunnel ventilation, wooden wind breaks below the curtains for cold weather, a robotic calf feeder in each pen of up to 25, and lots of space per calf with dry, deep bedding. Cow comfort in the milking barn focused on the deep bedding in the freestalls and the low-stress environment created by robotic milking. Because cows are not pushed in groups, stress is greatly reduced once they are trained to the robots. The Tillotsons felt that heifers raised on the robotic calf feeder took to the milking robot easily. There was a variety of questions from farmers, and



15th Annual NODPA Field Days Social Hour



NODPA Field Days' Keynote Speaker Liana Hoodes

these two vets had a great deal of insight and experience to share.

The Field Days wrapped up at the magnificent Letchworth State Park, where the New York Organic Dairy Initiative's Fay Benson and Ellen Fagan (and their many volunteers) sponsored a cookout. It was a blustery day at the park, and the indoor pavilion with a beautiful roaring fire was a warm and welcoming backdrop for our delicious lunch and good discussions before all headed for home. The quality of the food matched the unique setting which is rightly called the Grand Canyon of the East. ♦

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance Producer Milk Check Assignment Form

I, _____ (please print name on your milk check)
 request that _____ (name of company that sends your milk check)
 deduct the sum of :
 _____ \$0.02 per hundredweight to support the work of NODPA
 _____ \$0.05 per hundredweight to support the work of NODPA (the amount that has been deducted in the past for national milk marketing but can now be returned to you as an organic producer if you have applied for the exemption.) If you need assistance in applying for the exemption, check here _____
 _____ \$0.07 per hundredweight (the \$.05 marketing check-off plus \$0.02)
 as an assignment from my milk check starting the first day of _____, 201____. The total sum will be paid monthly to NODPA. This agreement may be ended at any time by the producer by sending a written request to their milk buyer with a copy to NODPA.

Milk handlers please send payments to:
 Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director, 30 Keets Rd, Deerfield, MA 01342

Producer signature: _____ Date: _____
 Producer number/ member no: _____ E-mail: _____
 Number of milking cows: _____ Tel #: _____
 Certifying Agency: _____
 Farm Address: (please print) _____

Producers—please send this to NODPA, Attn Ed Maltby, Executive Director, 30 Keets Rd, Deerfield, MA 01342, so we can track who has signed up and forward this form to the milk handler. Thank you.

Subscribe to the NODPA News and support NODPA!

By becoming a subscriber you will receive 6 copies of the NODPA News and help support the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance. NODPA depends on your contributions and donations. If you enjoy the bi-monthly NODPA News; subscribe to the Odairy Listserv (http://nodpa.com/list_serv.shtml); visit our web page (www.nodpa.com) or benefit from farmer representation with the NOP and processors that NODPA provides, please show your support by making a generous contribution to our efforts.

Note that if you sign up for the NODPA Voluntary Organic Milk Check-Off, you will be automatically signed up as a NODPA News subscriber.

_____ \$40 to cover an annual subscription to NODPA news _____ \$300 to \$500 to become a Friend
 _____ \$50 to become an Associate member (open to all) _____ \$500 to \$1,000 to become a Patron
 _____ \$100 to become a supporter of NODPA _____ \$1,000+ to become a Benefactor
 _____ \$150 to become a Business Member

Name: _____ Farm Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone: _____ Email: _____
 Date: _____ Are you a certified organic dairy producer? YES NO
 Number of milking cows _____ Milk buyer _____

Are you transitioning to organic? YES NO If yes, anticipated date of certification: _____

Please mail this form with a check to: Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director, 30 Keets Rd, Deerfield, MA 01342, or by fax: 866-554-9483 or by email to ednodpa@comcast.net. Please make your check payable to: NODPA

Credit card: Master Card Visa Card #: _____
 Name on Card: _____ Expiration Date: __ __ 201__ Security Code on Card: _____

Calendar

Beginning Farmer Online Courses: Group Discounts Available (multiple courses and multiple dates)

The Northeast Beginning Farmers Project is offering group discounts on interactive 5-7-week courses connect you to the information and people you need to start a successful farm business or diversify your farm. There are a variety of different courses offered throughout the year, which can be found at <http://www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/>. If you get 5 beginning farmers together to register for an online course, you will receive a 25% (\$50/per person) discount for that class! Each 6-week course costs \$200 normally (\$150 with the group discount). Courses are instructor-led, with a real-time webinar featuring farmers, educators, researchers, and other ag professionals each week; and discussions, resources, and homework between webinars in an online "classroom." Contact Erica Frenay at ejf5@cornell.edu with any questions.

Tuesday, December 1, 7:00 – 8:00 pm

PASA Webinar - Renewable Energy for Pennsylvania Farms

This presentation will provide a broad overview of renewable energy policy in Pennsylvania and explain how sustainable agriculture operations can utilize renewables to stabilize or reduce energy costs, decrease greenhouse gases, and supplement agricultural income. The presentation will describe challenges and solutions for Pennsylvania farms developing or hosting solar, wind, geothermal and biomass projects. Policies currently under consideration at the federal, state, and local levels as well as opportunities for advocacy supporting renewable energy in will also be explored. This is an online webinar. Contact Jessy Swisher at 412-365-2985 or by email, jessy@pasafarming.org

December 2 – 4, 2015,

8th Annual Young Farmers Conference, Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture Pocantico Hills, New York

This conference provides participants with access to inspiring keynotes and unique workshops that address soil science, technical skills, agricultural policy, farm business management, conservation and more. yfc@stonebarnscenter.org, 914 366 6200 x134.

December 8-9, 2015

PASA Eastern Region Workshop- Understanding GAP & Writing Your Own Food Safety Plan Carbondale Technology Transfer Center, Carbondale/Lackawanna County

Are you a farmer interested in produce safety? Do you want to understand produce safety issues and Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and third party audits? Then this two-day workshop is for you!

Day One: Produce Food Safety. Day Two: Writing a Farm Food Safety Plan. Both days are from 8:30am - 3:30pm. - ATTENTION IS LIMITED, SO PLEASE REGISTER TODAY! Attendees are asked to bring their laptops if possible. Questions? Contact Tracy Raymond at tracy@pasafarming.org; (717) 612-2949. If you are interested in only attending Day 1 of this workshop, please contact Tracy for details.

Tues.-Wed., Dec. 8-9, 2015

2015 Acres U.S.A. Eco-Ag U

Wyndham Downtown, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Pre-conference Eco-Ag U Advanced Study

Optional, intensive courses by eco-farming's top consultants, practitioners and thinkers. To learn more, visit the Eco-Ag U website: <http://www.acresusa.com/events/2015ecoagu>

Wed.-Fri., Dec. 9-11, 2015

(evening of Dec. 9, then morning through evening Dec. 10-11)

2015 Acres U.S.A. Conference

Wyndham Downtown, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The annual Acres U.S.A. conference sets the standards for innovation and learning. It is where you find farmers and consultants from every side of eco-farming who come together to share their experience and expertise. Attend the non-stop event, learn the latest in cutting-edge technology and methods, and return home ready to make your farming operation the best it can be. For full conference details, visit the Acres USA website: <http://www.acresusa.com/events>

December 13-16, 2015

6th National Conference on Grazing Lands -- Grapevine, TX

This is a one-of-a-kind, producer-based conference which brings together ranchers, farmers, land managers, grazing specialists and conservationists from across the nation for education, technology advancements and grazing land sustainability. We also are bringing together renowned speakers Dr. Don Ball, Dr. Garry Lacefield, Kathy Voth, Dr. Rachel Gilker and Peter Ballerstedt to the conference program. On-line registration is now live! Regular conference attendees, speakers, exhibitors and sponsors can register for the conference here: <http://www.cvent.com/d/brqsmx>. Remember to register early for the best rates!

December 15-16, 2015

Growing Pennsylvania's Organic Farms Winter Conference Sheraton Harrisburg Hershey

Growing Pennsylvania's Organic Farms Winter Conference is PA's annual organic event focused on advanced organic marketing and production. The second annual conference hosts Deputy Secretary Hannah Smith-Brubaker, PA Department of Agriculture on the 15th to welcome attendees with our kickoff keynote address. The conference website is <http://www.gpofconference.org/> or for more information, call Darlene Livingston at 717-705-2121 or Michele Brookins at 717-787-5319.

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

From the MODPA Treasurer

Hopefully this finds everybody in good spirits following the past growing season. Overall it was a good season in my area. I cannot remember the last time we had this much good pasture for a full season. We usually have a summer slump in the pasturing season but it never showed its face this year. Now it is time to get all of the pieces in place for colder weather. If all of this talk about El Nino comes true it should be a nice winter here in the Upper Midwest. If not, oh well just another typical winter. Survived many before, what is one more?

There continues to be good demand for milk in my area, which has been good for the pricing of our milk. This area is much better suited to dairy than cropping, although many are trying to just crop. There will be a good supply of hay in my area this year. Quality should be good overall, although much of the first cutting was made a little late due to rain. Should make for good production but I think will also cap it enough to keep from blowing the lid off. Grain yields have been all over the place; I think the end yields will be average to just above.

One of the continuing issues I see is the financial side still treating organic like it is conventional. Most bankers I know in this area still want to lump their organic producers in the same pool of mud as their conventional counterparts. We need to do a better job of educating them, NOT just for ourselves but for future generations. We need to remind them that organic is not just a fad and definitely not on the same path (hopefully) as conventional. If you get the chance to tell any of the public sector the benefits of organic please take the time to do it. This is the best way to ensure long term sustainability for all of us, now and for the future generations.

By the time you are reading this we will most likely be into the Holiday season. On behalf of myself and the MODPA board we wish all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to come.

Bruce Drinkman
MODPA Treasurer
3253 150th Avenue
Glenwood City, WI 54013
715-265-4431

Become a Member of MODPA!

Member dues are \$35 per year, for which you receive our newsletter and become part of our team working for the best interests of all organic dairies.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Certified Organic Dairy? Yes No # of cows: _____

Transitioning: _____

I wish to support MODPA (check whatever applies):

___ By becoming a state rep or director.

___ By supporting MODPA with a %/cwt check-off.

___ By providing a donation to support the work of

MODPA. \$_____ enclosed.

**Please send this form to: Bruce Drinkman, MODPA Treasurer,
 3253 150th Ave, Glenwood City, WI 54013**

About MODPA

The Midwest Organic Dairy Producer Alliance (MODPA) represents organic dairy producers in WI, MN, ND, SD, IA, NE, KS, MO, IL, IN, OH, & MI with the mission "to promote communication and networking for the betterment of all Midwest organic dairy producers and enhance a sustainable farmgate price." To ensure a fair and sustainable farm gate price.

1. Keep family farms viable for future generations.
2. Promote ethical, ecological and humane farming practices.
3. Networking among producers of all organic commodities.
4. Promote public policy, research and education in support of organic ag.

MODPA Board

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 zimbadairy@tband.net
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**Northeast Organic Dairy Producers
Alliance (NODPA)**

c/o Ed Maltby
30 Keets Road
Deerfield, MA 01342

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Calendar

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January 22-24, 2016

2016 NOFA-NY Winter Conference

Saratoga Hilton and City Center, Saratoga Springs, NY

The 34th Annual Organic Farming and Garden Conference: Good Hard Work: Ecosystems, Economics, Energy and Equity
Keynote speakers will be Rosalinda Guillen, a widely recognized farm worker and rural justice leader who works to build a broader base of support for rural communities and sustainable agriculture policies that ensure equity and healthy communities for farm workers, and Kathie Arnold, 2016 NOFA-NY Farmer of the Year. The full program can be found at: www.nofanyconference.org.

February 3-6, 2016

PASA's Farming for the Future Conference

The Penn Stater Conference Center, State College, PA

Save the date for PASA's 25th annual conference. Registration opens

in November. For more information, contact the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) at 814-349-9858, www.pasafarming.org/conference or email info@pasafarming.org

February 13-15, 2016

NOFA-VT Winter Conference

At the University of Vermont, Burlington

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont brings 34 years of conference history to the cutting edge of the local, organic food movement. Visit www.nofavt.org

February 25 – 27, 2016

26th Annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference

LaCrosse, WI

The MOSES conference is the largest event in the U.S. about organic and sustainable farming and includes 67 Workshop Choices, a 2-Floor Exhibit Hall with over 150 vendors and more than 3,400 participants. Visit the conference website at <https://mosesorganic.org/conference/>