NODPA News

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

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The Eby family, left to right-Collin, Curvin, Glennis, Geniece ,Garrett

FEATURED FARM: THE CURVIN EBY FAMILY, HAGERSTOWN, MD

Working Hard to Keep It Simple: Green Acres Farmstead

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

With a 90 head herd of dairy cows, 65 of which are lactating at any given time, Curvin Eby, wife Glennis and their three children, Collin, Garrett and Geniece, ages 14, 12 and 10, have happily settled into life on the 128 acre farmstead which has been in Glennis's family since its inception in 1856.

"This is a small family farm. I am the primary operator. My wife Glennis is very involved

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The 20th Annual NODPA Field Days Producer-Only Meeting: A Summary

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

The 20th Annual NODPA Field Days was postponed until 2021 and we had a hybrid Field Days consisting of a NODPA News Field Days Supplement in our September issue along with video presentations online at www.nodpa.com. However, one of the key components of the annual NODPA Field Days has always been the Producer-Only meeting. This year, we had a virtual Producer-Only meeting as a conference call—none of those fancy ZOOM calls! Producers from throughout the US were on

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Message from NODPA President

Many of you will have seen the jokes on social media that start off with "If 2020 was an ice cream flavor"… and a picture shows an ice cream cone stacked with flavors like liver and onions or liquid manure. It sure has been a wild year, one that we are all happy to put behind us. The whole fabric of our communities has changed due to concerns about the virus – kids learning from home, summer fairs all cancelled, many churches closed, farm meetings became virtual, elderly friends and relatives are isolated. We avoid crowded situations; weddings are small, funerals smaller. Our hearts are heavy for those that have lost loved ones.

But it has brought some positive changes into our lives as we grapple with keeping our communities safe while keeping businesses open. We all have become mindful of the most important things, thankful for our friends and families. For many of us who sell products directly, our farms have been sought out by consumers looking for local, organic food as grocery supply chains were interrupted. According to the indicators, organic dairy sales remain strong. As more people are eating at home, there is a greater demand for high quality food from both grocery stores and farms.

My computer's inbox these days is full of great learning opportunities as farm meetings become Zoom webinars and conferences from all over the world are now accessible at a fraction of their usual cost. For dairy farmers tied to the daily routine of milking and chores, this opens up our world considerably!

As we turn toward a new year, I hope you will consider supporting NODPA in the work that we do. By now you will have received the Annual Fund Drive letter in the mail. Your continuing support in the form of a membership allows us to continue to bring you this newsletter in print and electronically; it will continue to help us advocate for organic dairy farmers across the country, locally and in Washington, D.C.; and it will support the Odairy Listserv and NODPA's website. We ask you for $50, and hope that you find value in that. And our hat is off to those who choose a higher level of support. Your support is critical, especially this year.

From all of us at NODPA, we wish you the Blessings of the Season and a healthy and prosperous New Year!

Liz Bawden, NODPA Co-President
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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

From the NODPA Desk:

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

This issue is slightly late and apologies for that. The chaos of the last few months seems destined to continue, hopefully with some calmer times ahead. Whatever your political opinions, we do need some concrete action to happen for some stability in the organic dairy market and within our communities. The Origin of Livestock Final Rule (OOL) has gotten caught up in the politics of this administration, with the USDA wanting to secure its position in the lawsuit over the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Rule by questioning whether the OOL falls within the scope of the Organic Food Production Act (OFPA). The Organic Trade Association (OTA) immediately criticized the USDA in order to maintain its position that OFPA did allow for further development of regulation about livestock health care. OTA and CROPP Cooperative pressured their members and other groups to join them in their letter to the USDA with a short timeline for signing on. OOL has nothing to do with livestock living condition or health care. It is a clarification of how conventional livestock that has transitioned to organic production is defined within organic certification and how that process happens. It is that simple.

When this OOL process first started back in 2008, when we were dealing with the Harvey lawsuit and the 80/20 allowance, there was a shortage in supply of organic milk; now, in 2020 we are coming out of a large surplus. The average size of organic dairies in Texas is now 4,647 cows with no shortage of organic dairy replacements that are organic from the last third of gestation. Rather than argue the merits of whether USDA's assessment of the OOL Final Rule is correct, the USDA has said it is unenforceable. Let's take that at face value, work with the new administration, and push through a Final Rule with as much speed as possible. We don't need yet another Rule that certifiers say cannot be enforced and would be immediately subject to lawsuits. USDA and certifiers have enough trouble implementing and enforcing the relatively simple Pasture Rule ten years after it was passed. We will almost certainly have to continue to compromise with the wishes of OTA and processors to get a Final Rule passed but the damage is done and we need to shut the barn door as efficiently as possible and move forward. We will continue to fight for a commonsense solution.

The new CEO for CROPP Cooperative, Bob Kirchoff, published an opinion piece in Agripulse at the end of November 2020. His comments were rightly focused on the future. He mentions the Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) and the contributions that the company has to pay to subsidize balancing conventional milk because a high proportion of CROPP milk is sold as Class 1 at retail. This totally ignored the large amount of organic milk that the company balanced through the FMMO with the most recent surplus. Producer owners also have to pay a penalty when there is a surplus. Imagine what that penalty would be if organic was outside of the FMMO! His comments ignore several important issues. The FMMO was established in the 1930s to aid farmers facing low milk prices. There was no standard pricing at the time, so the milk dealers controlled the price. This is what happens in the organic dairy supply market now, with producers being intimidated and harassed by milk buyers who impose a pay price that is dependent on their control of the market. Despite the obvious collusion amongst milk buyers, there is no base price for organic milk, and despite the fact the two major buyers follow each other's pricing and offer non-organic requirements. Rather than look toward the future where Payprice is tied to the organic costs of production, CROPP still continues with the inaccurate comparison of organic and conventional pricing where the costs of production are completely different for the two production methods. The organic milk buyers have no problem with paying well under the costs of production and having fluctuations of over $10 per cwt in pay price on a 'base price' in a single year. Increasingly, the cost of producing organic milk in the Northeast is becoming unprofitable at today's pay price. We used to predict that organic would follow conventional milk supply, which is reliant on large scale production with the economies of scale and exports to support pay price. Viewing the situation optimistically, organic is now at that crossroads. Many will say we have passed that point. As the CEO of a producer-owned cooperative whose mission is to 'create a stable economic model for organic farmers', Mr. Kirchoff is in a unique position to promote a more realistic organic supply marketing alternative that supports producers and does a better job of protecting them from the instabilities and fluctuations of the organic market. A sustainable supply has to depend on supply management, not only in times of crises, and to be applied across the whole of the organic market, not restricted to the whim and market requirements of individual buyers.

The basis of organic marketing is to promote the role of the organic producer and their farm families with feel-good images. Unfortunately, the reality is the producers who provide the raw product and support many levels of bureaucracy, management, shareholders and conglomerates have no leverage when it comes to negotiating pay price. CROPP Cooperative should be a leading voice for adjusting that dynamic and tying its supply and pay price to the realities of the cost of production by promoting an alternative rather than looking to exit the FMMO to save processing expenses. They should also be looking to support organic regulations that truly reflect organic integrity by tying the one-time exemption for the conversion of conventional dairy animals to a producer who wants to convert their whole herd rather than allowing start-up operations to purchase cheaper conventional animal or combine herds of conventional heifers or cows under different companies organized as LLCs. Given the narrow margins for balancing of the organic market, one new Texas herd of 4,000 cows transitioned from conventional animals in one year, and grazing irrigated desert, can dramatically upset the supply of organic milk and undermine a sustainable pay price. For a strong future for all organic dairy producers we need to address the inequities of the current system and work as a community to promote and implement a more appropriate supply dynamic that obviously must involve supply management. Happy New Year – 2021 at last! ◆

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

What is the Microbiome, and Why Should Organic Dairy Producers' Care?

By Chris Dean, Felipe Pena Mosca, Tui Ray, Bradley Heins, Pablo Pinedo, Vinicius Machado, Luciano Caixeta, Noelle Noyes

This article first appeared in the November 2020 Organic Dairy Research News, West Central Research and Outreach Center, University of Minnesota Extension, Morris, MN, and is reprinted with permission.

Introduction

Since the 1960s, the Five-Point Mastitis Control Plan has remained the "gold standard" for reducing mastitis incidence rates and high somatic cell counts on conventional dairy farms and continues to be revised as new information and tools become available. However, despite widespread adoption of this plan, mastitis remains one of the costliest diseases affecting dairy producers, and ultimately, udder health. Organic producers are in a particularly difficult situation because they are unable to benefit from the use of some of these tools – antibiotics, for example. This simple observation implies that organic producers are most in need of new tools that can further support udder health and productivity on organic dairy farms. In partnership with scientists across the country, our group at the University of Minnesota works on the challenge of mastitis on organic dairy farms, using one of the most promising tools at our disposal -- the microbiome. You may have heard the term "microbiome" thrown around before, but what does it really mean, and why should you -- as a dairy or livestock producer -- really care?

History of the Microbiome

By far, most of our knowledge about the microbiome and health stems from research done in humans; hence, we

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will begin our journey into the microbiome starting from there. Though it may be somewhat unpleasant to think about, the human body is home to trillions of microorganisms. These range from single-celled organisms like bacteria and protozoa, to more complex organisms like fungi or even viruses. Collectively, these microorganisms make up what is often referred to as the "human microbiome" and they are ubiquitous within and on the human body. Herein lies an important question: why are these microorganisms present and what are they doing? We can admit that what we know and understand about the function of these microorganisms is limited, but what we do know is that they play a critical role in human health. Perturbations to the microbiome can contribute to a number of diseases, such as obesity, inflammatory bowel disease and diabetes.

Applications of the Microbiome

Interestingly, the human microbiome can play a dual role in human health, acting as the root of disease, or acting as a "helper" to rid the body of disease. Let's illustrate this idea with a real-life example. Clostridium difficile infection (CDI) is a major cause of hospital-acquired infections in the U.S. and is

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What is the Microbiome, and Why Should Organic Dairy Producers' Care?

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often preceded by the use of antibiotics, which are known to disrupt the human gut microbiome -- the microbes inhabiting the human gastrointestinal tract. In other words, the good microbes -- which normally keep the bad microbes in check -- are destroyed, giving the bad microbes the opportunity to take over. Unfortunately, treatments for CDI are limited and relapse rates can be quite high, highlighting the need for new tools -- one of which is, you guessed it, the microbiome.

The idea is pretty simple and may be something you are already familiar with. A donor feces from a healthy individual is inserted inside the gastrointestinal tract of an individual with CDI, with the goal of restoring a healthy balance between the good and bad microbes. This simple procedure has continued to show positive results, with a majority of individuals undergoing the procedure experiencing eventual resolution of CDI after follow-up. If you're a dairy producer or veterinarian, this may sound familiar: indeed, it is similar to something that dairy producers and veterinarians have already been doing for over a century: rumen transfaunation. This relatively simple procedure involves transferring microorganisms from the rumen of a healthy animal to a diseased animal to treat rumen-related disorders. Similar to the success of microbiome transplants in human CDI patients, the healthy rumen microbiome usually establishes itself quickly within the diseased rumen, thus promoting greatly improved health in the cow itself.

Challenges in Microbiome Research

These success stories make it clear that the microbiome can be an extremely powerful tool for the treatment of both human and animal diseases. However, it is important to note that in both cases, the microbiome of the diseased animal or human is dramatically imbalanced. In other words, these microbiomes are nearly completely decimated -- much like a forest after a forest fire. Without much competition from other microbes, it is relatively easy for the unhealthy microbes to take root and flourish within these decimated landscapes. But what about situations when that microbiome imbalance is less intense? Unfortunately, it turns out that in these situations, it's not quite as easy to re-establish a "healthy" microbiome. But we -- and many others -- are working hard to overcome this challenge, because doing so would open up a vast array of new microbiome-based tools for support of livestock health and performance, using bovine mastitis as a test case.

Project Goals, Outcomes and Collaborations

Specifically, our group is trying to understand how the normal skin microbiome of a cow's udder may protect against mastitis. To answer this important question, we have

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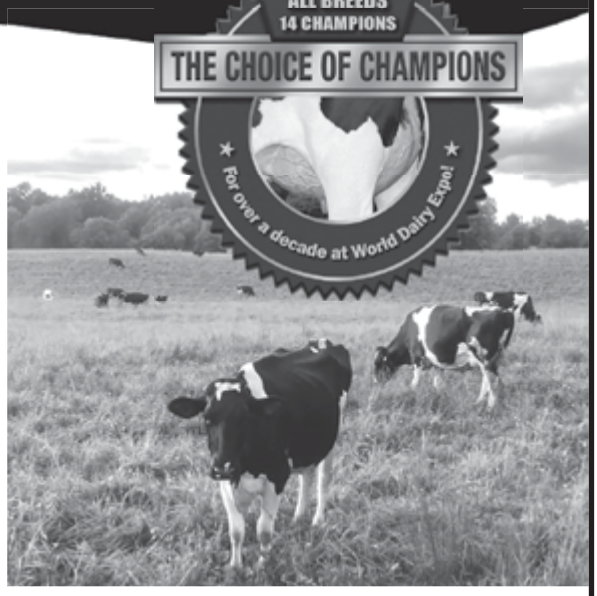
"... good news for the rest of her lactation!"

— Bryce Windecker



WINDEX FARM, FRANKFORT, NEW YORK
Dale, Deb, Bryce and Kayla Windecker
100 Registered Holstein cows
BAA 107.6, 7 EX, 47 VG, 28 GP
65 lbs/cow/day, SCC 110,000
Certified Organic grazing herd

Photos: Bryce, Deb and Dale Windecker with hay equipment. Bryce at 2019 Big E with his bred-and-owned show cow from a top cow family Windex Fremont Dandy EX94. She was nominated Jr. All-American 5-year-old.

"If you can get a cow rolling along when she freshens, it's good news for the rest of her lactation. That's why we use Udder Comfort™ on every fresh cow, especially heifers, 2x/day for 5 days after calving," says Bryce Windecker, cowman in charge of the breeding program at Windex Farm, Frankfort, N.Y. He transfers to Cornell this fall.

Bryce explains how his family has used Udder Comfort for 10 years, since before being certified organic in 2017: "This product is better than anything else. It's real prevention. We use the yellow sprayable Udder Comfort and we like to cover the udder on a fresh animal.

"This gets swelling out fast. That's better for their comfort level and udder quality as a whole, to keep SCC low."

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Cow Microbiome Study- Paving the Way to Lower Emission Cows

Reducing the amount of methane produced by cows, by looking at the bacteria in their gut

By Professor Mick Watson, Director (Agrigenomics), Edinburgh Genomics, The Roslin Institute, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

This research study was first published on The Roslin Institute's website on November 21, 2019, and is reprinted with permission.

Cattle are an important food source globally. With a rapidly growing human population, an increase in demand for beef and dairy cattle is expected. However, population growth and cattle production both produce greenhouse gasses. Methane is a greenhouse gas with 28 times the warming effect of carbon dioxide. Methane gas produced by cattle is the leading source of human related methane production. Methane production is bad for the farming industry too, cattle that produce more methane need more food and have a higher production cost.

Scientists at The Roslin Institute, along with the Scotland's Rural College, and The Rowett Institute in Aberdeen, have discovered a link between cattle genetics and methane production, as well as a convenient way to select for bulls that produce less methane. This can be used to improve beef and dairy stock globally.

We employed a relatively new technique called metagenomics, which involves analyzing the genetic composition of an entire organism including the microbes that exist within it. Our study demonstrates the power of combining this approach with big data analysis tool to solve a real world problem – in this case breeding more efficient animals.

– Professor Mick Watson, Director (Agrigenomics), Edinburgh Genomics, The Roslin Institute

Where does methane come from?

Cattle are ruminants, they have four stomach compartments that give them the capacity to house microbes that can break down the fibre in grass and give it to the cattle for energy. One of the stomachs, called a rumen acts as a fermentation vat where microbes break down the fibre. It is also these microbes that produces methane, which gets burped out during digestion (this process is called rumination). There are two populations of microbes in the rumen, bacteria and archaea, with both contributing to the grass breakdown process. It

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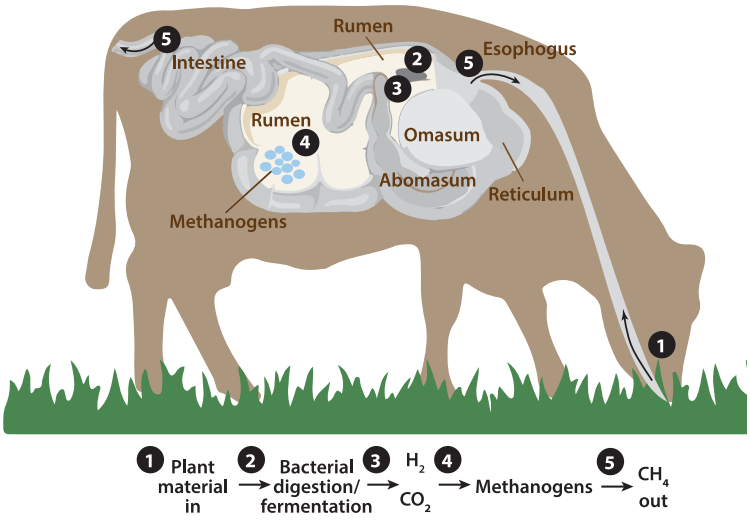


is the archaea that produce most of the methane. Having more bacteria compared to archaea can decrease methane production in cattle and improve feed efficiency.

How can we change the microbial population?

Many studies have attempted to reduce methane production in cattle, often focused on changing diet, or vaccinating cows against methanogenic archaea. These techniques have had limited success.

Instead, scientists at The Roslin Institute did a metagenomic analysis, which is a way to look at all of the genes in an animal, including those from the microbes in their gut. This allows us to identify microbes that are expressing specific problematic genes, including some that we cannot detect through traditional methods.

This analysis revealed that there is a genetic component in cattle that influences what microbes can better colonise the rumen. At the same time, methane production from related family groups was compared. Scientists documented which family groups produced the least amount of methane and tied it to the ratio of bacteria: archaea in the gut.

The difference between the extremes in methane production was 88%, meaning that there is a large difference between cattle families with regard to efficiency and methane production.

There are many genes in cattle that influence what microbes survive better, it is easier and just as effective to look right at the microbes and let them guide us in our search for lower emissions cattle.

How can this be used?

Currently, bulls are tested for a number of traits and given a score based on the genes they carry. As their offspring grow and get assessed, more information is added to the score. This determines the bull's value, and how many times he is used to breed new cattle. Adding information to the score about a better ratio of bacteria: archaea can be used to decrease methane production in future cattle.

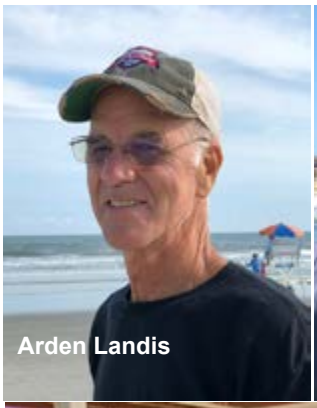
Selective breeding is one of the most ancient methods of genetic engineering. By using individuals with a desirable trait more often, we increase the number of offspring that have the traits we seek, changing the entire population over time. Moving forward, it seems possible to pair more beef and dairy production with a decrease in methane output, increasing global food security while decreasing our impact on the planet. ◆

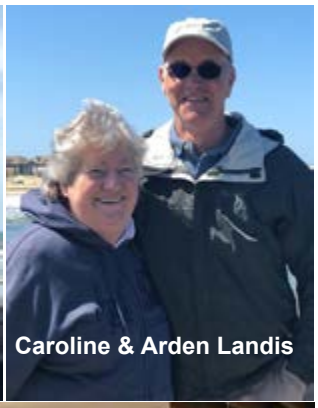
For more information about The Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland, visit https://www.ed.ac.uk/roslin and to contact Professor Watson, email him at mick.watson@roslin.ed.ac.uk.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Arden Landis: A Pioneer in Grass-based Organic Dairy

It is with sadness that we discovered that C. Arden Landis, 67, of Bowmansville, PA passed away on Thursday, October 22, 2020 at home surrounded by his family after a brief battle with pancreatic cancer. Born in Sellersville, PA, he was a son of Warren & Lydia (Bolton) Landis. He was married 47 years to his beloved wife, Caroline (Cartmell) Landis, and is also survived by his four children, Joshua, Sheila, married to Matt Mainwaring, Johanna, married to Jeff Gehman and Debbie; 16 grandchildren; his brother Robert and sisters Joyce, Marilyn, and Irene.


Arden Landis


Caroline & Arden Landis


Arden Landis at NODPA Field Days

A pioneer in grass-based organic dairy, Arden introduced dairy grazing to much of Lancaster County, PA. Most recently, Arden worked as an organic farm inspector and dairy farm consultant after roughly 20 years as a dairy farmer. He became a Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA) representative in 2003 and remained as one until the time of his death. He regularly attended the annual NODPA Field Days as well as grazing events around the country, frequently participating as a presenter and workshop panel participant; contributing articles to the *NODPA News* and to *Graze* magazine. In addition, he was a speaker at conferences around the United States and consulted with other farmers and professionals on a regular basis.

In his free time, Arden enjoyed hunting, baseball, running, gardening, and spending time with his wife whom he adored along with the rest of his family. To send the family condolences, mail to: Landis Family, PO Box 595, Blue Ball, PA 17506.

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OSHA Assists in Identifying and Managing Dairy Farm Hazards

By Nick Donofrio, CAS – OSHA Region 2, New York State

What do construction, mining and farming have in common? Each year these occupations appear on the top-ten list of the most dangerous industries in America. However, a closer look at the injury data shows the total injury rates for construction and mining have decreased significantly, while farming's total injury rates remain high. According to the 2019 Bureau of Labor Statistics injury data, a worker was nearly 4.5 times more likely to sustain a serious injury while employed on a farm than in mining, and nearly twice as likely to have a serious injury working on a farm than on a construction site. Farming remains a dangerous occupation and dairy farming has the added hazard of working with large animals on an almost constant basis.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recognizes the unique hazards that dairy farms present to worker safety. Eight years ago, OSHA began an inspection program in Wisconsin directed at identifying hazards on dairy farms. More importantly, the program created an opportunity for OSHA to talk with dairy farmers about safety improvements to protect workers from injury and in some cases death. In 2018, a five-year local emphasis inspection program began in OSHA Region 2 (New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands). Specific to New York State, the instructions used by inspectors is contained within the OSHA Directive 2019-03. (OSHA Region 2 Dairy Farm LEP (https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/enforcement/directives/2019-03.pdf)

Coining the phrase: "Dairy Dozen", OSHA described twelve common hazard areas identified by safety inspectors of dairy farms that all producers would be well served to take a closer look at in their operations:

1) **Manure Storage and collection facilities** – Manure pits and channels under the barn are a confined space, i.e. these areas have limited entry/exit and people are not meant to be there on a regular basis. For large earthen storages with sloped sides, when placing any equipment such as agitation pumps or rolling stock on the inside slope, a barrier strong enough to stop a slow moving tractor or skid loader from entering the storage pit is required.

2) **Dairy bull and cow movement and worker position** - Handling large animals is a high hazard activity. Slips, trips and falls are common hazards in all industries and possibly a greater hazard in the milking parlors of a dairy farm due to wet surfaces and frequent cleaning. Proper lighting, body position awareness and planning an escape route when moving between an animal and stationary objects are important factors to consider to avoid being pinned.

3) **Electrical systems** – Most farms practice some form of lockout procedures, but don't forget to add tags to identify the person responsible for the lock. Also, lessen the use of extension cords and relocatable power taps, i.e. power strips. Check the labels, but unless specifically approved, most of these devices are not suitable for use outside the home.

4) **Skid Steer loader operation** – This equipment is considered a powered industrial vehicle by OSHA. Employees need to be trained, evaluated and certified in writing that they are qualified to operate this vehicle type.

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5) **Tractor operation** - All tractors need roll over protection systems (ROPS) and seat belts. Tractor operators and all other equipment operators must be trained before assigned to the equipment.

6) **Guard power take-offs** – Use either a master shield or other protective device to guard these rotating shafts. Make sure ALL farm tractors and equipment have proper shields in place and that they are replaced after repairs are made.

7) **Guarding other power transmission and functional components** – All power driven belts, pulleys, sprockets, chains, sheaves, etc., must be guarded.

8) **Hazardous energy control while performing service and maintenance on equipment** – At the time of initial assignment and at least annually thereafter, the employer shall instruct every employee in the safe operation and servicing of all farm equipment (farm field and stationary) with which they will be involved.

9) **Hazard Communications** – Maintain a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for every hazardous chemical used on the farm, such as: teat dips, hoof care products, sanitization products, degreasers, acids, etc. Train each employee on the hazards of the chemicals they use. Maintain a written hazard communication program describing how you manage these chemicals on your farm including container labeling and emergency procedures in case of a spill.

10) **Confined spaces** – Know what confine spaces are and post a sign or label to alert employees of the hazards and prevent unauthorized entry.

11) **Horizontal bunker silos** – Be aware of fall hazards while placing and removing protective covering and anchoring systems. Create safety procedures for work in and on these areas and conduct a safety review with crew before each filling period.

12) **Noise** – Noise loss is permanent so use hearing protection around noisy machines and equipment.

There are limits to the size of dairy farms OSHA can inspect. Farms, which employ less than 10 employees (excluding family members of farm employers) currently and at all times during

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OSHA Assists in Identifying and Managing Dairy Farm Hazards

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the last 12 months, AND have not had an active temporary labor camp during the preceding 12 months, are exempt from inspection under this local emphasis program. However, a farming operation with 10 or fewer employees that maintains a temporary labor camp or has maintained a temporary labor camp within the last 12 months CAN be inspected. For more information on the size and employment circumstances refer to the specifics described in the local emphasis inspection program. (See OSHA Region 2 LEP.)

During the last two years, there have been more than 160 inspections of dairy farms by state and federal safety inspectors throughout the country. Seventy seven (77) of these have been in the state of California with nine occurring in Wisconsin and five in New York. Some of the more frequently cited violations of safety and health regulations involved guarding of rotating shafts, power take-offs, and chain sprockets. Nearly a third of the inspections conducted by federal regulators found that employees were not informed about the hazards of the chemicals they use. As part of the Hazard Communication regulation, OSHA requires employers to train each employee who handles hazardous chemicals on the proper use, storage, protective equipment and what to do in case they contact the material. Employers need to maintain a safety data sheet (SDS) for each hazardous chemical found on their farm. Examples of hazardous chemicals found on dairy farms might be footbath solutions, chemicals used to clean milk tanks and to sanitize equipment. Degreasing solvents, oil based paint, diesel fuel and gasoline are also examples of hazardous chemicals, but check the safety data sheets (SDS) to make sure. Finally, employers need to have a written Hazard Communication program, which describes how they manage the hazardous chemicals found on their farm, the container labeling system, where SDS are stored, how employees are trained, etc.

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Dairy farmers should also be familiar with the agricultural safety standards found in the Code of Federal Registry, 29 CFR 1928. Agricultural Safety Standards (https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1928) The registry describes the safety and health standards applicable to dairy farms, regardless of size. Farmers can find several of the "Dairy Dozen" safety requirements in these regulations, as well as field sanitation and occupational health standards.

Many resources are available to assist farmers to create and develop farm safety and health programs. Beyond farm cooperatives and associations, many states offer a free consultative service to assist farmers to develop or strengthen their safety and health programs. These consultants conduct a mock OSHA inspection (without the fines, penalties or notifying OSHA), issue a written report, work with farmers to help correct hazards and provide training. Grants may be available to offset some of the training costs. Each state offers a free consultative service, particularly aimed at assisting small businesses. Check the OSHA website for the contact information about the agency responsible for safety consultation in your state. You can find this information at https://www.osha.gov/consultation.

Requesting consultative services in New York is as easy as emailing onsiteconsultation@labor.ny.gov or contacting the nearest NYS Labor Department or calling 1-888-4-NYSDOL (1-888-469-7365).

Many OSHA Enforcement Directives include outreach and compliance assistance as an integral component. Compliance Assistance Specialists (CAS) are responsible for coordinating assistance in complying with federal agricultural safety standards. Some of you may have worked with Ron Williams, CAS with the OSHA Syracuse area office. Ron has retired and Nick Donofrio, CAS – OSHA Region 2 is now the contact for help and assistance with understanding the regulatory requirements of the Dairy LEP, or other safety and health questions or concerns.

Nick Donofrio can be reached at Donofrio.nick@dol.gov or 716-796-0803. ◆

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Pay And Feed Prices November/December 2020

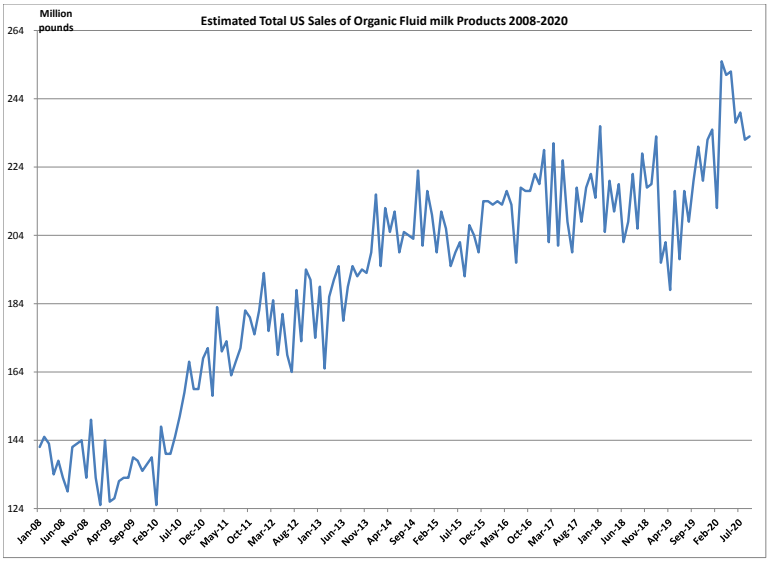
By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

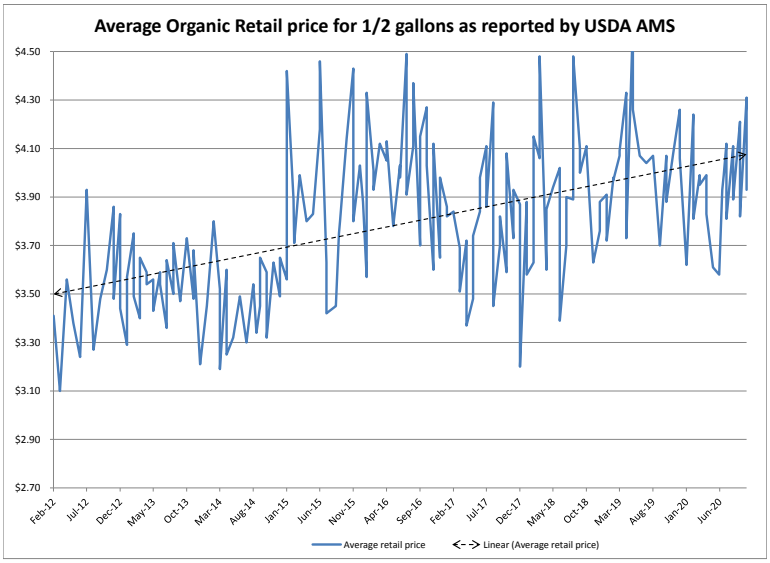
The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) reports estimated US retail sales of total organic milk products for September 2020 were 237 million pounds, down 1.0 percent from September 2019, but up 0.4 percent year-to- date. Organic whole milk retail sales for September 2020, 103 million pounds, were up 6.5 percent compared to a year earlier and up 14.1 percent compared with year-to-date 2019. Reduced fat milk (2%) sales were 84 million pounds, up 12.6 percent from the previous year and up 15.9 percent year-to-date.

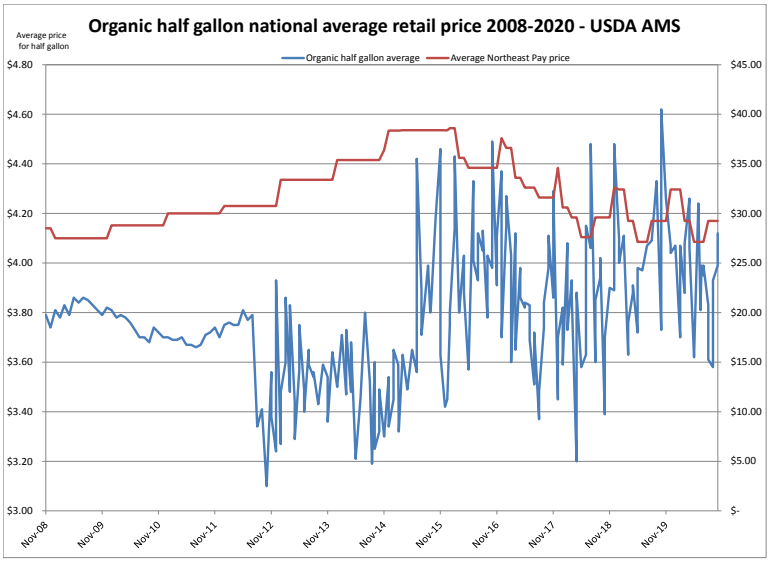
The largest utilization of Class 1 milk is the Northeast Federal Milk Marketing Order 1 (FMMO) and they are one of the only orders that publish utilization of organic milk in that area. In August, September, and October 2020, utilization was lower than any 3 months in 2020. Organic milk utilization was down 16% over August, September and October 2019, with Reduced Fat Milk (RFM) dropping by 7% and Whole Milk by 26%. While the COVID stay at home period in the earlier part of the year may have seen a significant increase in sales of organic milk, especially RFM, the last three months have seen a drop in the utilization of organic milk especially whole milk. The November 2020 in-store surveys of selected supermarkets in twenty-nine U.S. cities reveal that the retail prices of organic whole milk, in half gallon containers, range from $3.13 in

Atlanta, GA, to $5.84 in Pittsburgh, PA. The U.S. simple average price, $4.05, is up a penny from October 2020. The largest price increase, over the previous month, for organic whole milk in half gallon containers occurred in New Orleans, LA, 70 cents. The largest price decline, 35 cents, was seen in Baltimore, MD and Washington DC.

In October 2020, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) published the results of the







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2019 Organic Census. The purpose of the survey as defined in the report itself is "The 2019 Certified Organic Survey is a special study conducted by U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and is part of the 2017 Census of Agriculture program. The primary purpose of the survey is to collect value of sales information at the commodity level along with acreage, production, and practices data for a variety of certified organic crop and livestock operations." What this statement does not reflect is the years of advocacy and work with USDA and Congress to obtain regularly updated and independent statistics that can be used by organic producers, USDA agencies, organic input suppliers and Congress. Whereas in the past, surveys were done by the USDA's Risk Management Agency, this survey by USDA NASS provides consistency in how the data is collected and tabulated. The 2019 Organic Survey publishes data from producers that were certified organic and transitioning to organic certification. The 2016 and 2015 Certified Organic Surveys published data from certified organic farms and ranches. The 2014 Organic Survey published data from producers that were certified organic, exempt from certification, and transitioning to organic certification.

There were 16,585 organic farms in 2019 farming 5,495,274 organic acres in the US. For organic dairy there are not too many surprises. In the US there were 3,134 organic certified dairy farms with 337, 540 milk cows on 12/31/2019 an increase of 575 farms and 70,017 in the number of milk cows, an average of 121 dairy cows per new operation from 12/31/2016. The average pay price for the northeast supply at 12/31/2016 was $38 per cwt; on 12/31/2019 it was $32 per cwt.

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Comparison between 2016 and 2019 number of organic dairy herd and numbers of organic cows for selected states

	12/31/2019			12/31/2016			Difference between 2019 and 2016		
	Farm	Cows	Herd size	Farm	Cows	Herd size	Farms	Cows	Herd Size
California	152	56,496	372	106	48,741	460	+46	7,755	-88
Colorado	8	16,934	2,117	6					
Connecticut	1		-	1		-	0	-	0
Idaho	29	20,150	695	20	6,497	325	+9	13,653	+370
Indiana	253	11,623	46	225	8,855	39	+28	2,768	7
Iowa	107	5,321	50	76	3,445	45	+31	1,876	4
Maine	88	4,983	57	63	3,594	57	+25	1,389	0
Maryland	27	2,653	98	15	1,453	97	+12	1,200	1
Massachusetts	14	710	51	7	396	57	+7	314	-6
Michigan	93	5,078	55	70	4,384	63	+23	694	-8
Minnesota	127	10,407	82	108	9,998	93	+19	409	-11
New Hampshire	22	964	44	14	558	40	+8	406	4
New Mexico	5	7,616	1,523	2			+3		
New York	610	32,419	53	486	24,944	51	+124	7,475	2
Ohio	264	11,400	43	212	9,382	44	+52	2,018	-1
Oregon	40	18,776	469	47	20,408	434	-7	-1,632	35
Pennsylvania	362	16,685	46	303	14,807	49	+59	1,878	-3
Texas	9	41,819	4,647	6	27,704	4,617	+3	14,115	29
Vermont	175	13,789	79	173	12,243	71	+2	1,546	8
Washington	45	9184	204	41	8,774	214	+4	410	-10
Wisconsin	530	31,747	60	455	27,049	59	+75	4,698	0

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Pay And Feed Prices

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On a brighter note, Michael Langemeier, Purdue University Ag Economist; and Michael O'Donnell, Purdue University Extension Educator have published a report entitled "Conventional vs. Organic Grains: 5-Year Comparison Of Returns." Due to continued increases in demand for certified organic grains, crop farmers that have transitioned from conventional to certified organic grains report higher net returns per acre. Despite this, certified organic land accounts for less than 2 percent of U.S. farmland. The full article can be found at https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2020/09/conventional-and-organic-enterprise-net-returns.html

Some extracts below:
Table 1 shows the average conventional and organic crop yields for alfalfa, corn, oats, soybeans, and winter wheat. The ratio illustrated in the last column of the table was computed by dividing the organic crop yield by the conventional crop yield. Alfalfa and oats exhibited the smallest differences in crop yields between conventional and organic crops. The yield drags for corn, soybeans, and winter wheat ranged from 29 to 32 percent.

Gross revenue, total expense, and net return to land per unit for alfalfa, corn, oats, soybeans, and winter wheat are presented in Table 2. Gross revenue includes crop revenue, crop insurance indemnity payments, government payments, and miscellaneous income. Total expenses include all cash and opportunity costs, other than those associated with owned farmland. Farmland costs included in the total expense reported in Table 2 were comprised of cash rent, real estate taxes, and interest, which would be lower than the full opportunity cost on owned land. ◆

Table 2. Average Conventional and Organic Gross Revenue and Total Expense per Unit, 2015 to 2019

	Gross Revenue	Total Expense	Net Return to Land
Alfalfa ($ per ton)	132.16	95.24	56.06
Organic Alfalfa ($ per ton)	162.75	125.93	58.49
Corn ($ per bushel)	3.61	3.79	0.53
Organic Corn ($ per bushel)	9.50	6.09	4.30
Oats ($ per bushel)	3.29	3.34	0.51
Organic Oats ($ per bushel)	6.25	5.74	1.54
Soybeans ($ per bushel)	9.82	8.81	3.30
Organic Soybeans ($ per bushel)	20.21	16.24	7.60
Winter Wheat ($ per bushel)	5.36	5.98	0.34
Organic Winter Wheat ($per bushel)	10.88	10.54	2.55

Source: FINBIN Database

Table 1. Average Conventional and Organic Crop Enterprise Yields, 2015 to 2019

	Organic	Conventional	Ratio
Alfalfa (tons/acre)	4.02	4.47	0.899
Corn (bushels/acre)	125.30	184.20	0.680
Oats (bushels/acre)	60.20	73.60	0.818
Soybeans (bushels/acre)	33.80	47.40	0.713
Winter Wheat (bushels/acre)	41.00	60.00	0.683

Source: FINBIN Database

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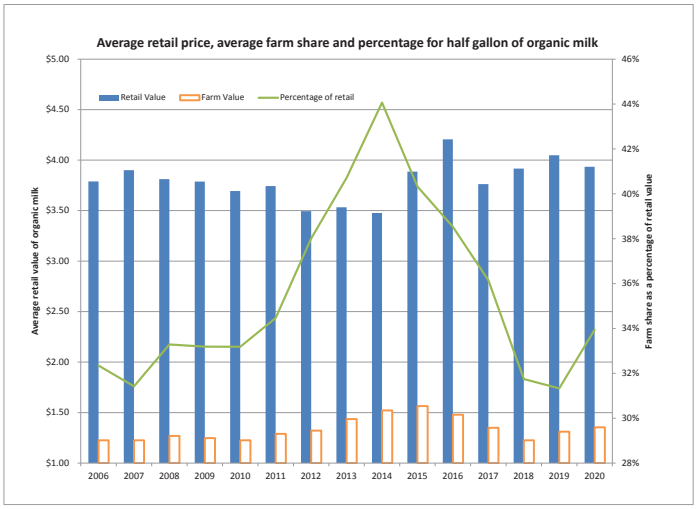

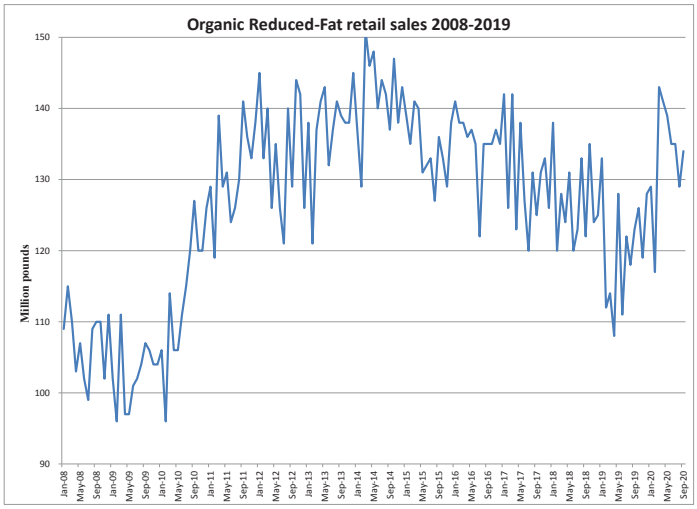

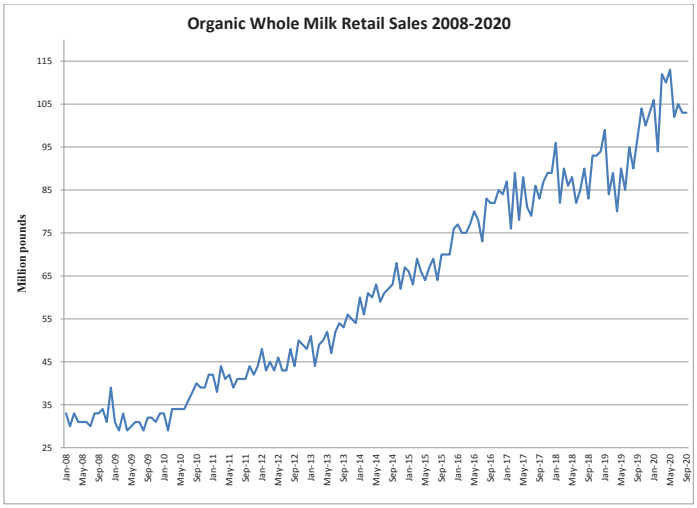

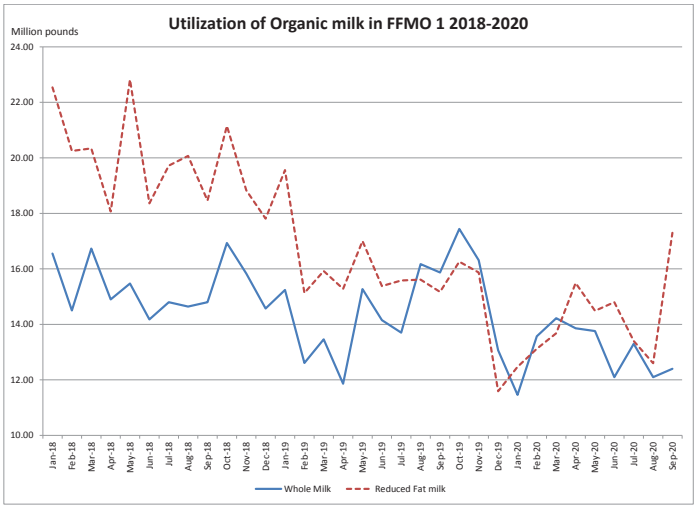

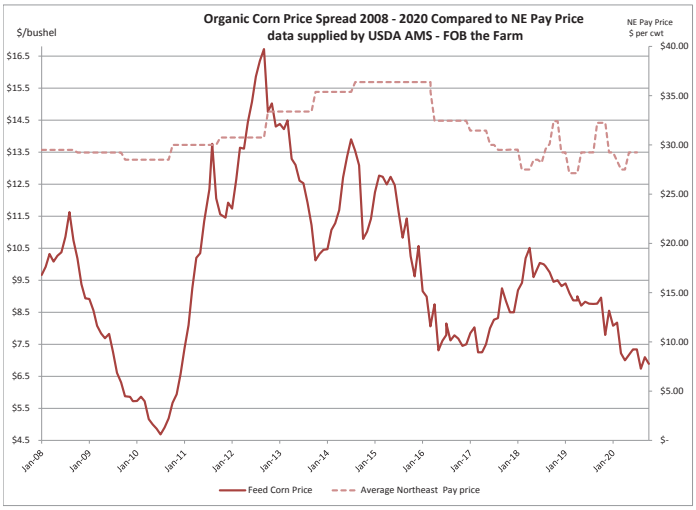

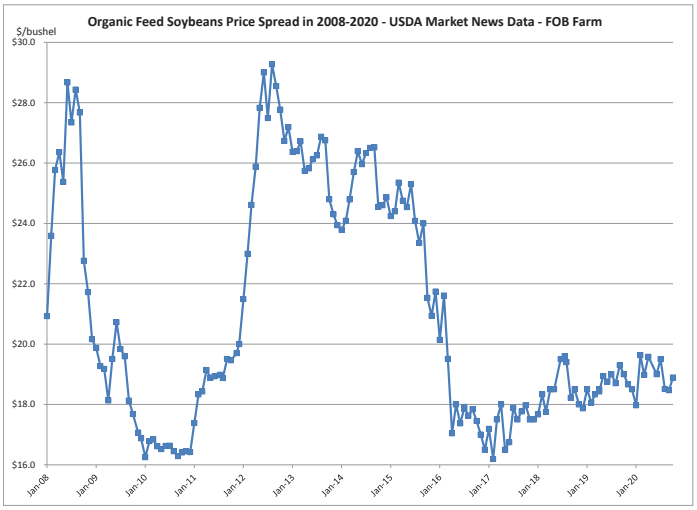

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

The 20th Annual NODPA Field Days Producer-Only Meeting: A Summary

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the call, and it was a good opportunity to catch up. Thanks to all who dialed in.

Here is a summary of the call which took place before the results of the Presidential election was known:

There were over 20 folks on the call, made up of both NODPA and WODPA members. The principal area of discussion was the Origin of Livestock (OOL) update plus whether to sign on to the Organic Trade Association (OTA)/CROPP Cooperative /Danone letter complaining about the National Organic Program's (NOP) decision not to publish a Final Rule. Ed Maltby started the discussion with a summary of the facts and the current situation.

The decision not to publish the Final Rule and move instead to a third Proposed Rule on OOL was announced as part of the NOP report at the National Organic Standards Board's (NOSB) virtual meeting on October 28th 2020. This new Proposed Rule will address the concerns raised by the USDA Office of General Council (OGC) which was summarized as:

1. More enforceable – the Proposed Rule will need to clarify whether the exception for the transition is tied to the producer or the certified entity as defined within regulation. The processors are pushing for the operation as the certified entity. To ensure enforceability the regulatory unit has to be the same across all the NOP livestock standards.

2. The second area has to do with animal movement and to close the loopholes that allow for continuous transition or changing the organizational business structure to an LLC. The organic status of transitioned animals needs to be addressed in a way that can be enforced.

3. Address whether the proposed regulation falls within the scope of Organic Food Production Act (OFPA). OFPA allows for a one year transition period and although regulations as written do go further than the Act, further modifying the regulations does call into question the authority of OFPA. Some lawsuits do relate to that authority.

4. The new Proposed Rule will address legal concerns based on OGC feedback that anyone who thinks the Rule did not follow appropriate process could sue USDA if it was determined that they did not follow appropriate process as governed by the Administrative Procedures Act.

The overwhelming consensus from participants on the call was that NODPA/WODPA should stick with our joint statement and not sign on to the letter. Subsequently, the National Organic Coalition (NOC) and the Organic Farmers Association (OFA) also decided not to sign on. *The letter from OTA can be found at the end of this summary.*

OTA was concerned that the USDA would use the failure of the Final Rule to pass through USDA agency review to further justify their lawsuit's defense for not allowing the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) to be implemented. USDA has said that the OFPA does not give it the authority to deal with animal welfare issues (they can only deal with healthcare, not animal welfare). OTA and OV attorneys say that OFPA does give USDA the authority to implement regulation involving animal welfare and fear that USDA accepting the decision of OGC will impact the success of their lawsuit. Whereas the OLPP does deal with health care, OOL

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

does not. It is a simple regulatory issue about what defines organic certification of dairy animals.

Some points that were raised on the producer's call:

1. The time to object to USDA's position was back in August when it could possibly have had some effect. There was no attempt at that time to have a community wide letter to USDA.

2. Objecting now is just pandering; the way that support was aggressively sought, by both OTA and CROPP, to sign on to the letter with a very short timeline ignored the decision-making process of the organizations that were being asked to sign on.

3. It's better to go on the record seeking action on this issue as soon as it's practical because if there is a transition in Washington, the new administration will have to deal with many more pressing issues which are of higher importance than this.

4. With the announcement by Jenny Tucker at the NOSB meeting, USDA has gone on the record as saying that the Final Rule as written will not be enforceable. It has also gone on the record that the OGC has said there are legal flaws in the Rule as written. Effectively, they have provided the perfect legal position for any operation or producer (depending on what the Rule says) who has a non-compliance to say that the rule is invalid and USDA will not enforce it.

5. We do not know what the Final Rule says or exactly what OGC objected to – Can we find out?

6. OGC has raised a long unspoken contradiction that OFPA says one thing and the 7 CFR § 205.236 regulation something different. We are assuming that another Proposed Rule will address that question or give an opportunity for us to address it by asking those questions during comments on a Proposed Rule. By addressing this in a new Proposed Rule we will be able to negate what OGC has said and possibly provide a strong legal argument that can make the regulation more enforceable in law.

7. The assumption is that if the administration does not change, Perdue will continue as he seems to be, in line with Trump's agenda, and there is no logical reason why they would go against the OGC and the implied potential objections of OMB.

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The 20th Annual NODPA Field Days Producer-Only Meeting: A Summary

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8. If the administration changes, then it will be at least 6 months before they are able to instruct NOP to change their position if indeed they can be persuaded to publish a Final Rule that was not approved through the USDA review process. It seems more logical and quicker to work with NOP on a new Proposed Rule that can answer the question raised within NOP and OGC, and takes Jenny Tucker at her word that this is a priority for NOP.

9. NOP uses both the producer and the operation as the certified entity in different situations, as do certifiers, so there are some fundamental issues here that were raised within comments on the Strengthening Organic Enforcement Proposed Rule (SOE).

10. The agreed goal was to have an enforceable regulation that is implemented quickly, even if it is imperfect, since the longer, continuous transitions are allowed, the worse it will become for organic dairy producers.

11. We need to work together as producers to have an enforceable regulation.

Statement from Producers on the publication of the OOL – 10/28/2020

Transitioning of conventional dairy cows to organic production on new organic dairy operations

The Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance and the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance welcome the announcement by the National Organic Program that clarifies the situation with the Origin of Livestock Final Rule. We strongly urge the NOP to quickly move to publish a new Proposed Rule with a short comment period followed by the timely publication of a Final Rule with immediate implementation.

Our producers have been working for the last two decades to bring clarity, consistency and regulatory enforcement to how conventional dairy cows can be transitioned to organic production. We want a level playing field for all organic dairy producers, no matter the size of their operation, location, certification agency or ownership.

We need a regulation that will stop continuous transition, and stop the two track system that has caused an uneven economic playing field for how dairy producers can move to, or grow, their organic production. The whole one-time transition must happen over a twelve-month period and under the supervision of a certifier as part of the producer's Organic System Plan. We need one regulation for all organic dairy producers, whether they are large or small operations, which recognize the unique needs of beginning organic dairy operations. We want to encourage and facilitate the increase in the number of organic dairy producers, recognizing the sweat equity and commitment of existing organic dairy producers and their families while retaining the integrity of the organic seal and support of the consumers.

We need a regulation that can be enforced with consistency, using the existing infrastructure of the National Organic Program that reflects the intent of the many parts of the Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) of 1990 and recognizes the current state of the organic dairy industry 30 years later. There needs to be clarity as to whom or what is the responsible 'person' (as defined by the regulation) that is recorded within the organic database. Some parts of organic regulations look to the operation, while other parts to the producer as the "person" of record. Tracking and accountability will need to be well defined with any Final Rule to ensure that organic dairy producers and their production practices retain the trust of the organic consumer. ◆

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Letter to USDA initiated by OTA and CROPP

October 30, 2020
The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Building, Room 116A
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: **National Organic Program – Origin of Livestock Rulemaking**

Dear Secretary Perdue,

The recent announcement by the National Organic Program (NOP) to backtrack and initiate yet another proposed rule on the Origin of Livestock is extremely disappointing.

As you well know, the ongoing divergence in certifier's application of the Origin of Livestock creates unmistakable competitive harm among market participants. This failure has long been recognized, and the 2015 proposed rule offered a remedy allowing a one-time event that permits the transition of a conventional herd to organic and thereafter the dairy farm/producer will only source from dairy livestock managed as organic from the last third of gestation.

The 2015 proposed rule garnered strong public and industry support through two comment periods with over 2300 comments and 99% of commenters supporting the general premise of the proposed rule offered by the NOP.

Additionally, there is clear Congressional intent for this rule to be finalized quickly, evidenced by the December 20, 2019 FURTHER CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT which stated:

> SEC. 756. Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall issue a final rule based on the proposed rule entitled "National Organic Program; Origin of Livestock," published in the Federal Register on April 28, 2015 (80 Fed. Reg. 23455): Provided, That the final rule shall incorporate public comments submitted in response to the proposed rule.

The enactment of the federal law requiring USDA action on Origin of Livestock was over 300 days ago.

A second proposed rule and yet again another comment period is unnecessary and has not been justified to the impacted industry. There is very little or nothing to be discovered or gained from a second proposed rule on the Origin of Livestock and a third public comment period, especially since the last public comment period was less than a year ago.

We do not agree that the impediments USDA has claimed to have identified would prohibit the immediate issuing of a final rule.

We urge USDA to issue a final rule on the Origin of Livestock without delay.

Sincerely,

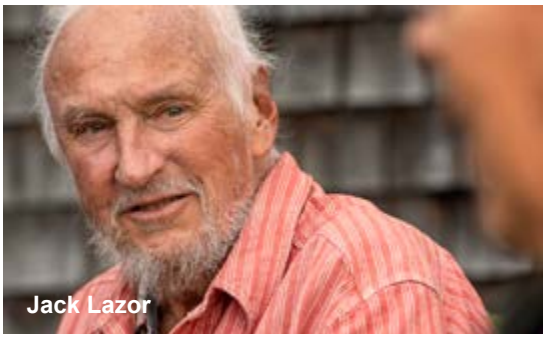
National Organic Trade Association
CROPP Cooperative | Organic Valley
Danone North America
Farmers Union
Stonyfield Farm, Inc
Maple Hill Creamery
Straus Family Creamery
Accredited Certifier Association
Oregon Tilth
Montana Organic Association
Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service
Aurora Organic Dairy
California Certified Organic Farmers
Pennsylvania Certified Organic
Georgia Organics
Tilth Alliance
Alexandre Family Farm
Sheffers Grassland Dairy LLC
Pleasantview Farm
Maine Organic Milk Producers
Organic Egg Farmers of America
Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
Westby Coop Creamery

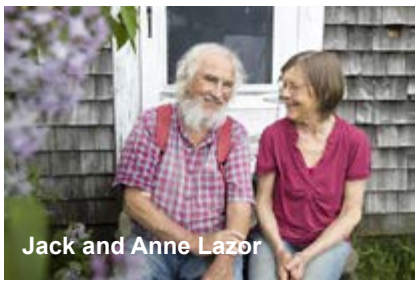
CC: Under Secretary Greg Ibach
U.S. Representative Collin Peterson
U.S. Representative Michael Conaway
U.S. Senator Pat Roberts
U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow
National Organic Standard Board

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Jack Lazor, Butterworks Farm, Westfield VT Dies at the Age of 69

Jack Lazor, a pioneer of organic agriculture and organic grain production in Vermont, died at home, around midnight on Saturday, November 28, 2020, according to his daughter, Christine Lazor. Jack, who was 69, was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2010 and had been on dialysis for seven years for cancer-related kidney failure. Despite his early diagnosis, Jack made the most of every day despite the need for dialysis and multiple treatments through the years.


Jack Lazor


Jack and Anne Lazor


Jack Lazor in field of grain


Anne and Jack Lazor

Jack Lazor was co-owner of Butterworks Farm in Westfield, VT, with his wife, Anne, and cofounder of the Northern Grain Growers Association. Jack had grown organic grains in the mountains of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom since 1975 and was considered a leader in the movement for growing grains in cold climates. He grew grains both for human consumption and for feed for their herd of Jersey cows, including corn, oats, barley, soybeans, legumes, alfalfa, and oilseeds, such as flax and sunflower. Butterworks Farm also produces organic Jersey milk yogurt, buttermilk, sweet Jersey cream, cheddar cheese, at their on-farm processing plant, and grain products. Jack was the recipient of many agricultural awards, too numerous to list here.

Perhaps best said on the Northern Grain Growers Association's tribute to Jack Lazor: "Among the many gifts Jack gave to us and the world was cultivation. Cultivation of plants and animals to provide nutritious foods. Cultivation of knowledge through his teaching at UVM and beyond. And, perhaps most importantly, cultivation of relationships – bringing together people throughout the food system to find a common path to sustainability. Jack's work to help found the Northern Grain Growers Association is an example of this cultivation. Bringing together not only farmers but bakers, millers, and buyers that he met through his business and travels – all with the common goal of feeding people healthy foods while healing the earth." To read more, visit their website: https://northerngraingrowers.org/remembering-jack-lazor

Anne and Christine Lazor can be reached at Butterworks Farm, 421 Trumpass Road, Westfield, VT 05874, or Anne via email at jack@butterworksfarm.com. ◆

The Treffler tine harrow is unrivalled in mechanical weed control for all vegetable and field crops regardless of the crop stage.

Harrowing is all about timing. Treffler's precision adjustable tension is the widest range on the market. Together with the patented tine suspension you can begin harrowing early in the season in shallow rooted weeds (tension 100-500gr) to ensure you're ahead of weed pressure. Later in the season, you can increase up to 5000 gr for more aggressive harrowing.
No chemical inputs required.

The tines follow the contour of your field, potato ridge, or raised bed, while the downward pressure remains constant. Precise weed control for all vegetable crops, transplants, and can be used to break a crust. In field-crops, you can rely on the same Treffler precision for blind cultivation in two-leaf corn, soy or grain. Guaranteed that the entire field will be worked evenly.

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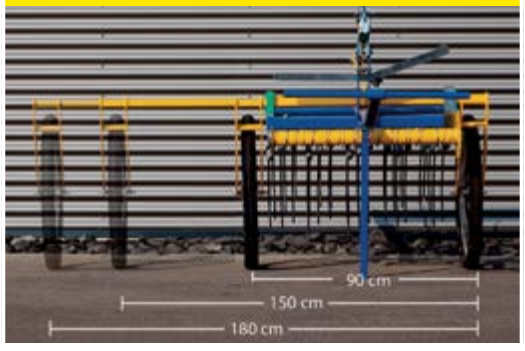

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FEATURED FARM

The Eby farmstead with Ellie the dog in the foreground

THE CURVIN EBY FAMILY, HAGERSTOWN, MD

continued from page 1

with decisions making and milking cows. The children each share in farm chores and activities between their schooling and their hobbies," Curvin said. "Everybody helps where and when they can. No non-family works on the farm."

The couple began their dairy farming journey when they returned to the family farmstead in 2007. They had made a handshake agreement with Glennis's family to maintain the property in exchange for a below market value rent. Their goal was to establish a grazing dairy herd utilizing the existing infrastructure - not updated since the 1960s.

The Eby's put in place the fencing, cattle lanes, equipment, watering systems and perennial pastures needed to begin grazing a dairy herd. Thus began the evolution of the former confined dairy and row crop operation into the certified organic, grass-fed certified and intensively rotationally grazed dairy farm it is today.

The couple now owns the farm, and has paid down all of their startup expenses. But there is little capital left for infrastructure improvement.

"Looking back, I would say it is working out okay, but probably was not the most ideal arrangement," Curvin said of the dairy's beginnings. "If more farm owners would view their operations as an ongoing business that will be gradually transitioned to new ownership - whether that is family or not - it would make it easier for everyone."

Herd Management

The initial expenses incurred in establishing the operation also included purchasing cows from two different grazing dairies, and breeding them to craft the genetics that would best meet their grazing goals.

The herd is now predominantly Norwegian Red crosses, with some Milking Shorthorn, Brown Swiss, Jersey and Holsteins remaining. All breeding is done via AI, with a strong preference for polled and A2A2 beta casein genetics.

FEATURED FARM

"I like a sturdy mid-sized cow with good feet and legs and a uniform udder," Curvin said. "High butterfat and protein percentages are a plus, although I believe a cow's body condition and quality and quantity of forage ingested influence those numbers significantly."

The cows average production is 25 pounds of milk per day in the winter season, and 45 pounds during the peak spring grazing season, with a yearly average of approximately 30 pounds per day. With butterfat running above 4.5 percent, and protein at 3.5, Curvin is satisfied that his forages, herd health and breeding program are all contributing to meet the farm's goals.

The cows are milked twice per day, in the tie-stall barn, at 4:30am and 3:30pm. It takes two people between an hour and ninety minutes to milk the herd, plus set up and clean up time.

The herd is managed as one group. Calves are never separated from their mothers, even during weaning. Raised as naturally as possible, the calves are born on pasture, and nurse until six month of age. Plastic weaning rings in the nose prevent them from suckling when it's time. By keeping the calves on the dam and with the herd, they readily learn fence training, human interaction, grazing habits and herd instinct.

Calves remain healthy, with few of the common concerns often seen with scours, respiratory illnesses and other diseases which often plague confined herds. Curvin does not vaccinate the herd, believing that the natural environment, grazing healthy forages and reducing stressors keeps illness to a minimum. From birth, animals have free choice access to pasture, salt, kelp and water.

"With this method they develop a healthy immune system and experience uninhibited growth," he explained. "The transition from calfhood to a heifer and into the milking herd is essentially seamless."

As all the animals forage together, the diet is the same: pasture during the growing season, and high-quality hay and baleage in the non-grazing season which runs from mid-December through April 1st. When grazing, the herd receives 75 percent of its dry matter intake from pasture forages alone.

The milking herd is also given a liquid molasses supplement, along with apple cider vinegar. This blend provides additional energy, vitamins and minerals. Curvin has seen good benefits with this, and is now offering it year-round, not only during

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The dairy herd featuring hay feeding on pasture and calves with cows

FEATURED FARM

THE CURVIN EBY FAMILY, HAGERSTOWN, MD

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the winter season.

"The benefits I notice are increased milk production and butterfat levels, good body condition and hair coat, as well as improved milk quality," Curvin said.

The milking herd ranges from two to eight years old, with a nine, ten and fourteen year-old, too. An average if 10-15 heifers are kept each year for replacements, and any additional are sold as young calves. All bull calves are sold via a local sales barn.

"I am at maximum capacity for my farm," he explained.

They originally began with the goal of keeping a closed herd. A recent decision to breed bi-seasonally meant purchasing 20 pregnant cows last fall in order to quickly implement a spring and fall calving schedule.

"Breeding the entire milking herd for a spring seasonal window is a very challenging task. I had too many cows falling behind that were otherwise good cows. We decided to keep them and give them a second chance in the fall," Curvin said.

A bi-seasonal herd also evens cash flow, because the cooperative pays a winter price premium for milk. The winter typically was a low point financially.

"By freshening half the herd in the fall it boosts our income potential for the year," he said.

Pasture Production

The entire farm acreage is fenced for pasture grazing. Perimeters are fenced with permanent high tensile electric fencing, and permanent fencing also defines inner pastures throughout the farm. Those fields are further divided into grazing paddocks using temporary polywire fencing. Water tanks are moved throughout the paddocks as needed. A cattle lane divides the farm in half, providing easy access for moving the cows around the fields.

Paddocks are sized "to accommodate several hours of DMI

Eby cows on a fall day

FEATURED FARM

for the herd," Curvin said of his grazing strategy. Moves occur one to five times per day, depending on the season.

The pastures were established in fall 2007, seeded with a no-till drill. The primary grass is orchard grass, with medium red clover in the mix. Some small amounts of ryegrass, timothy, fescue, alfalfa and white clover are interspersed. Volunteer forbs also sprout up here and there.

"I graze what grows," Curvin said. "I will interseed grasses or clovers - and sometimes plant annuals - when my pasture stand is thin. The entire farm is in a grass/legume mix and grazeable by the cattle."

There is not enough land to graze 90 head and also make enough hay. Hay is grown on 30 acres of pasture and cut in the spring and early summer, after which the land provides pasture for grazing. Alfalfa hay fields were renovated by discing and then rolling the soil smooth prior to seeding with a fescue, orchard grass and clover mix.

The primary weed of concern is nodding thistle. To prevent spread, Curvin clips the pastures before the seed heads form.

The farm is prone to drought, and about 30 - 40 percent of the yearly hay supply of dairy quality baleage is purchased. In order to maximize forage production, Curvin is applying soil amendments, based on current soil fertility tests.

"The end goal is that it will result in increased forage production in my hay fields next season and reduce purchased hay expense - which is my largest input cost," he said. "I am not able to grow 100 percent of my animal feed needs for various reasons."

Grazing Management

Currently, the cows are being transitioned to winter feeding. This means that they graze the pasture during the day, and are left to bale graze in the winter sacrifice paddock overnight.

Similarly, each spring, the animals are transitioned back to pasture grazing incrementally. The herd begins spring grazing every afternoon after milking once the grasses and clovers have actively begun growing. Before then, they are fed baleage on the winter sacrifice lot during the day for a three weeks to

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Collin feeding the cows molasses/ ACV in the tie stall barn

FEATURED FARM

THE CURVIN EBY FAMILY, HAGERSTOWN, MD

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prepare for spring turnout.

"This allows the cows' rumens to adjust to the feed change and also matches the slow grass growth in early spring," Curvin explained. "Afternoon and evening grazing allows the sun during the daytime to pull energy up into the plant and balance the high protein content of lush grass."

Curvin monitors grazing by assessing the pasture visually to judge DMI availability, and monitoring the pasture after grazing to see how well the cows ate, and how much forage is left. He also makes use of a pasture stick, referencing the recommended height of various grass species. His goal is to leave about 50 percent of the forage for regrowth purposes. The size of the next paddock will be adjusted based on the grazing pattern seen in the current paddock.

"My goal is a full 30 day rest and recovery period for all grazed paddocks," Curvin said, although that period can be shorter in the spring and longer - 45 to 60 days - during the summer slump.

Hay fields are incorporated into the grazing rotation during the summer as well. After taking a spring and early summer cutting of hay, they fields are then rested and put into the late summer and fall grazing rotation.

"Also sometimes I will reserve some paddocks from the spring and allow them to partial fallow and set seed. These paddocks can be incorporated into the rotation by mid-July," Curvin explained.

He also supplements with hay feeding in response to dry spells during the grazing season. This year, he's had to supplement hay while on pasture since the end of September, following two dry periods. The cows will graze during the day and are also offered supplemental hay while on pasture. They are then moved into the sacrifice lot at night, in order to deal with the shortage of pasture forages.

The overall grazing goal is to keep the cows' rumens full. Moves occur at least two times per day, and often up to five times.

"I like to see them graze and then lie down and chew their cud. If they seem hungry I will give them a larger section or move them more often," Curvin said.

Summer heat means the cows are grazed earlier in the day and moved more frequently, both to keep them cool and to best utilize the grasses and increase DMI.

"More dry matter intake equals more milk in the tank. Having fresh water in each paddock is very important. It increases DMI and helps to keep the cows cool and hydrated," Curvin said.

Winter pasture is a nine acre sacrifice paddock where the cows are bale grazed. The sacrifice area is located behind the barn, and cows have unimpeded access to it at all times, with the very rare exception of extreme weather. There is also a concrete barn yard area which is always accessible, as is the barn, which is bedded with old hay.

The sacrifice area will be smoothed out with tillage equipment in May, and no-tilled with annual sorghum-sudangrass. Some years, this area is left to regrow of its own accord, with good results. The annual forage, however, helps during the summer, when perennial growth slows.

"Weather has a direct effect on milk production. Rain, drought, heat, cold - so many variables and so many decisions to make," Curvin said. "Every year is different. I find it works best to have a plan in place and then be flexible as we progress through the season. This is all part of the challenge. It makes dairy grazing fun!"

Manure Management

While the majority of the time manure is simply deposited on pasture as the cows rotate through, manure and waste water from the tie-stall barn where the cows are milked, the interior barn's bedded pack, and the concrete barnyard area is scraped into a manure pit. The manure pit is emptied once per year, with the manure used to fertilize hay fields. The building of the manure pit, along with seeding of fields into permanent pasture to control erosion issues, earned Eby the title of Outstanding Conservation Farmer, in 2011.

"I feel being organic is a conservation effort as it protects the soil, air and water quality and ultimately affects the health of all living creatures," Curvin said.

Aside from manure applications, hay fields are also treated to occasional applications of chicken litter or dry blend organic fertilizers, dependent upon soil testing. Curvin's primary concern on his own farm is the tendency towards drought, which controls the need for purchased hay.

FEATURED FARM

"Even though I can't control the rainfall, there is an area of management that I am focusing on this year and that is soil fertility, especially the hay fields," he said.

Dairy Concerns

Eby has few herd health issues. He has one or two instances of milk fever each year, and one or two retained placentas. He may assist with a birth once per year. A topical mint udder liniment is used if swollen quarters occur. Chronic cases are culled.

"A clean environment, fresh air and water, sunshine, cow comfort, nutritious grass, free choice salt and kelp, plus supplemental molasses and apple cider vinegar keeps the herd in optimal health," he said.

A veterinarian is on-call if needed, and Curvin takes advice from a agronomy and nutrition salesman he trusts.

But it is a small, local farmer organization that provides the biggest benefit and support he needs. The group gathers monthly for pasture walks at each member's farm, and shares advice, insights and experiences.

One general concern Curvin does have is the restrictions being placed on milk production by the cooperatives. Green Acres Farmstead is a currently a member of the Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative.

Organic dairy farming in general is in jeopardy because of the mega dairies, which do not fully comply with organic guidelines, he said. These dairies are "flooding the organic milk market and creating an unfair playing field for the smaller compliant dairy farmers."

The Eby's are content with their dairy farming lifestyle, despite the uncertainties of the market, and the uncontrollable nature of the weather.

"A true farmer is an eternal optimist though - next year things will get better! And so we soldier on! The country lifestyle is great and our children love growing up on the farm!" he said. "You pray for wisdom. You make the best decision you possibly can. And then you watch how it plays out. I try to thank God for His blessings and learn from my experiences!" ◆

Curvin Eby can be reached at Green Acres Farmstead, 19534 Reidtown Road, Hagerstown, MD 21742, 301-992-7685, duet4ever@localnet.com

NET UPDATE

Recent ODairy Discussions

By Liz Bawden,
Organic Dairy Farmer, NODPA President

Many farmers could relate to this producer's problem of muddy and eroding conditions at the barn entrance. She asked the group if anyone had experience burying landscape fabric or permeable stall mats to stabilize the ground at these high traffic areas. Two responders suggested digging out the mud, down to firm ground, then laying down the road fabric. One of the responders, an engineer, gave more specific instructions: "Cover the fabric with about 6 inches of #2 round stones, 12" of cobbles, and another 6 inches of stone dust. Such a rugged treatment should extend from one end of the former muck to its other end. Make sure you are getting road-construction grade stone. Your town Highway Dept. can probably recommend local sources. Whatever you do, the most important thing is to clean out all the muck down to good ground before you make any improvements. Wet ground is weak compared to dry ground. The soil particles flow. If the entrances are not used during winter, the above stone depths may be halved". One producer suggested NRCS as a resource. Others had good success in keeping cows out of the mud using wood chips, ground up asphalt or hog slats. Another producer suggested taking a look at the whole area and utilize gutters, awnings, and surface grading to keep roof runoff or surface runoff from being a factor. ◆

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

Calendar

January 4-25, 2021, EVERY SUNDAY IN JANUARY, 3-5 PM

REAL ORGANIC SYMPOSIUM, JANUARY 2021 (online)

A virtual series of talks and panels with more than 50 prominent organic farmers, scientists, and climate activists Don't miss the 2021 Real Organic Project Virtual Symposium featuring prominent organic farmers and experts discussing "Can real organic farming be saved?". Speakers include Al Gore, Leah Penniman, Vandana Shiva, Dan Barber, Alice Waters, Jean-Martin Fortier, and over 60 more! One ticket gets you access to five sessions, Sundays in January from 3-5pm EST or a reduced price ticket for viewing the recorded sessions each week. (BIPOC and need-based scholarships & farmer and student discounted and free tickets are available!) www.realorganicsymposium.org

January 12th, 2021 - 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

BODY CONDITION SCORING IN BEEF (webinar)

This online Zoom meeting will serve to review the importance of monitoring BCS and how it can impact a cow/calf producers' bottom line. The link to the Zoom meeting will be emailed to you after you register. Register: https://tinyurl.com/y4gdpuvy.

Please contact Marylynn at mrm7@cornell.edu with questions or for assistance in registering.

January 13th, 20th, and 27th
Wednesdays, 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm each day

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL WINTER GREEN UP GRAZING CONFERENCE (webinar)

Join us at our thirteenth Winter Green-Up, the Capital District's original grazing conference! Speakers and topics are: Elizabeth Marks, USDA-NRCS biologist, Holistic Management Educator, and USDA Northeast Climate Hub detailee on "Climate Change Trends Over the Last 125 Years in NY and the Northeast and What Farmers Can Do to be Resilient to Them" on January 13th; Ed Rayburn, Extension Specialist at West Virginia University on "Capturing and Converting Sunlight to Healthy Soil, Meat and Milk; It's What Plants Do" on January 20th; and Fred Provenza, Professor Emeritus of Behavioral Ecology at Utah State University on "Nourishing the Wisdom Body" on January 27th. Three sessions are $35, two sessions are $25, and one session is $15 – prices are per person. Register at https://tinyurl.com/WinterGreenUp2021 - links to the Zoom meetings will be emailed to you after registration. For questions, contact Ashley Pierce at 518-649-0267 or arp253@cornell.edu. For assistance with registration, call 518-765-2518 or email cce-caahp@cornell.edu.

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.

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

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: _____

January 14-16-2020, Virtual

25TH ANNUAL VERMONT GRAZING AND LIVESTOCK CONFERENCE: AS ABOVE, SO BELOW: TAKING STOCK OF WHAT WE SEE TO CARE FOR ALL WE GROW.

The conference is hosted by the Vermont Grass Farmers Association (VGFA) and coordinated by the UVM Extension Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Join our enthusiastic group of farmers and agricultural resource providers for a deep dive into topics specific to raising pasture-based livestock in the Northeast. More details about the conference as well as registration are available at www.vtgrassfarmers.org/conference. Contact Conference Co-Coordinator Colene Reed at colene.reed@uvm.edu or 802-535-7606 with any questions.

Registration: A registration discount is available for VGFA members, $20 per person, up to 6 tickets per farm. We are offering a sliding scale ticket pricing option for everyone, but recommending a non-member ticket price of $40.*

*Why are we charging? The advantage of a virtual conference is that the costs are certainly much lower than in-person; however, there are still costs associated with hosting an online event. We hope that a sliding scale fee options make this event accessible to all, while still covering our costs.

Saturday, January 16, 2020 to Saturday, January 23, 2020

NOFA-NY WINTER CONFERENCE: ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

This year's conference will be held virtually and will offer a full week of online workshops, discussion groups, and entertainment. We're also excited to feature the third biennial Northeast Organic Seed Conference, as well as NOFA-NY's 2021 organic dairy programming! You can register for the full conference or choose a one-day pass. For the full conference registration, we're offering two price points in an effort to make the conference more accessible to a broader audience. All full conference participants will have the same level of access regardless of how much is paid for registration. Learn more about the 2021 Winter Conference here: https://nofany.org/2021-winter-conference/.

Thursdays: January 14 – February 11, 2021

SOCIAL MEDIA & ONLINE MARKETING

Are you struggling with questions like what do hashtags do, how to start selling online, are webpages still useful, and more? This new, 5-week course is designed to improve your understanding of social media, online marketing ideas, and tools that may increase sales and increase awareness about your business. https://smallfarmcourses.com/p/bf-205-social-media-online-marketing

Mondays: January 11 – February 15, 2021

WRITING A BUSINESS PLAN

Arm yourself with a business plan and you will have a guide to aid your farm decision-making and demonstrate to yourself and your family that your ideas are feasible. This course is designed to help you build your plan, including developing financial statements. https://smallfarmcourses.com/p/bf-202-writing-a-business-plan

Classified Ads

ANIMALS

FOR SALE/AUCTION: Organic Dairy Public Auction - Dead End Farm LLC. - Ben and Kate Whittemore - December 18th at 11am - 113 Powers Rd. Candor, NY 13743. 160 head of NOFA-NY certified organic freestall/ parlor trained milking herd + 20 bred heifers due for spring. RHA 15,290, current average 60 lbs., Holsteins and crosses, year round calving, bull bred to top quality registered bulls. We are Organic Valley Members in good standing, but due to health reasons must sell our herd. Interested OV members should call Ben Whittemore at 607-372-1227 ASAP for more information on how to make this milk yours for winter premiums! DHIA records will be available day of the sale. More information at https://www.facebook.com/shoresbrookauctions/ Sale managed by Shoresbrook Auctions LLC - Randy Shores 607-857-2224

Location: Candor, NY

FOR SALE: California Cloverleaf Farms has Organic Bred Heifers for sale. 85 Crossbred, Jersey, Friesian Due to start calving 12/15/2020. Please Contact Ward Burroughs at: 209-678-5967 Posted (on Odairy) 11/12/20.

Location: Snelling, California

WANTED: Organic Cows We are looking to buy cows due to calve in March, April, or May. We have a preference for cows from a low grain or grass fed herd. Jerseys, crosses, or smaller framed cows ideal. Please call 607-842-6764 or email MurraydaleFarmsLLC@gmail.com

Location: Truxton, NY

FEED, GRAIN, HAY FOR SALE/ WANT TO BUY

FOR SALE: Certified Organic BEDDING HAY. 4 x 4 1/2 Round Bales. Netwrapped - stored outside. Contact Jeff @ 607-566-8477 or Mitchellorganics@hotmail.com.

Location: Avoca, NY - Stueben County

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Natural Farmer Publication - Editor and Writer – Independent Contractor

The Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council (NOFA/IC) is hiring an Editor and Writer for its beloved publication, The Natural Farmer (TNF). The TNF is a critical educational journal of topics important to the organic farming and gardening community. Currently, each quarterly version of the publication has a particular focus that is presented in depth by the editor and experts in the field. This publication is a membership perk for about 5,000 members of the seven state chapters of the Northeast Organic Farming Association. The quarterly publication is currently printed and mailed as a hard copy as well as published online at https://thenaturalfarmer.org. This publication is an ideal opportunity for someone with a farming, homesteading or serious gardening background that loves to write, read and educate on areas of interest to NOFA's members. NOFA enjoys a diverse membership of gardeners, farmers, homesteaders, landscapers, activists and people that care about the quality of their food. The current editor is retiring from the publication after 33 years and will be available to assist in the transition. For a complete job description, use this link: https://www.nofamass.org/the-natural-farmer-publication-editor-and-writer/

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

What is the Microbiome, and Why Should Organic Dairy Producers' Care?

continued from page 6

partnered with organic dairy farmers across the U.S., all of whom are committed to helping discover new ways to curb mastitis in dairy cows. Equally important is our diverse research team, with individuals at the University of Minnesota, Texas Tech University, Colorado State University, and Oregon State University. This team consists of faculty trained in veterinary epidemiology and dairy production; graduate students trained to analyze and interpret large and complex biological datasets from livestock systems; and numerous student and lab workers. One of the major lessons of microbiome research is the need for integrated yet diverse teams, with expertise that spans from on-the-ground livestock production to molecular biology and computer science. We are fortunate to have assembled such a team, all of whom are passionate about dairy cow health and welfare. This team is dedicated to ensuring that the livestock community benefits from microbiome-related advances. We hope to bring these discoveries to the livestock producer community through several channels, including upcoming webinars and YouTube videos. For now, a good place to start is our website: https://eorganic.info/openroamer.

If you are interested in learning more about the microbiome, check out the webinar that we presented for eOrganic entitled "The microbiome: what is it, and how might it impact organic dairy production?" https://eorganic.info/node/33349. ◆

Chris Dean, Felipe Pena Mosca, Tui Ray, Bradley Heins, Luciano Caixeta, Noelle Noyes, University of Minnesota, Pablo Pinedo, Colorado State University, Vinicius Machado, Texas Tech University

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