

# NODPA News

## Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

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MK Dairy LLC

### FEATURED FARM: MK DAIRY LLC - OWEGO, NY. Owned and operated by Madeline and Bruce Poole

## New Generation: Transition Success at MK Dairy LLC

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

It isn't true that you can't go home again. Just ask Madeline Poole. Madeline left home for college - where she met her husband, Bruce, in 2012 - and graduated with a degree in Dairy Science and a minor

in Agricultural Business; found a job working as a herdsman at a conventional, 600 milking head dairy; and finally returned home in 2016 to prevent the sale of the dairy

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## Leave Organic or Leave DFA, Says DFA to Member-Owners shipping to Horizon Organic

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

In a March 26th, 2024 letter sent to its members who sell to Horizon Organic, Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) said, "DFA has decided to end its supply relationship with Horizon Organic," and, "Effective on your anniversary date, DFA will no longer be managing the relationship

between your farm and Horizon Organic." The sentence of the letter which worried many organic producers who are members of DFA was "We do not intend to transfer current dual membership to another organic marketer."

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Message from NODPA Co-President

## Keep a Growing Edge

Summertime provides many opportunities to win at the game of farming--especially dairy farms. Get out onto your pastures, walk around. Or get onto someone else's farm to ask questions. Both are good ways to keep a growing edge. Looking at your own farm and observe the way cows graze, the way crops are growing--both ways to keep a growing edge. Digging in your soil to see which type of management will do the best for you is important as well. Don't expect all the opportunities to learn to be free. You might have to pay to get in and the more you pay, I would guess, the more you will get. Look up Soil Health Academy's website and see where their three-day Soil Health Academies are being held and go learn.

Find a successful farmer and ask him or her for a tour and pick their brain for management ideas. Ask him what his latest changes are and why he made them; ask her what the changes have done for her. Avoid prescriptive advice; change something up in your operation and the way you graze your cattle, the fields you graze, where you start, and how much residual you leave. All

these and more questions beg to be asked, and have answers that will surprise you. A keen observer makes a good farm manager. And when you know what's happening on your own farm, you will be a better observer of what's happening when you get on someone else's farm.

Call Leah at Soil Health Academy, 256-996-8742 and ask for more info or go to their website and read all about it. Whether a crop farmer or grazier, you will get your money's worth of good changes you can make, and while you're at it, you can network with other farmers and learn from them as well. This is an intensive three-day seminar that will change your perspective on your farm. Keep a growing edge.

PS. These seminars are not just for organic farmers. They are for anyone who wants to increase their bottom line.

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Animal Welfare: A Key Tenant of Organic Livestock Production

How do we improve our practices and make certified operations accountable?

*By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director*

On April 12, 2024, The Atlantic Magazine published a story *The Truth about Organic Milk*, by Annie Lowrey, about the Alexandre Family Farm LLC and its A2 regenerative organic farms in California (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/04/alexandre-farms-treatment-of-animals/677980/>). More specifically, the piece heavily relied on a report from Farm Forward, (<https://www.farmforward.com/publications/dairy-deception-corruption-and-consumer-fraud/>) which said that the Alexandre Family Farm engaged in systemic deception, cruelty and animal abuse. Kathie Arnold, New York organic dairy farmer, NODPA founder and chair of the NODPA policy committee, commented in a statement on NODPA's ODairy list serv, "The video by Farm Forward, at the end of the article, taken of scenes allegedly at the farm is devastating--so many scenes that should never happen on an organic dairy, or any conventional dairy, either. Yes, when a farm has livestock, there

will be dead stock at times, but they should be dealt with rapidly and appropriately, which looks like it has not happened in many cases there."

In a statement, the Alexandre Family Farm LLC said: "The allegations of systemic abuse on our farm are false. The truth is we have had a few isolated incidents happen in our years of organic farming. We do, however, accept responsibility for all animal treatment on our farm and sincerely apologize for the rare actions of some employees in the past who did not uphold our standards and for any animal suffering their actions caused. When we uncover problems, we take appropriate and immediate steps to improve protocols, increase employee training and provide whistleblower access to ensure all employees are following protocols for proper

*Continued on page 4*



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Animal Welfare: A Key Tenant of Organic Livestock Production

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treatment.” They do blame bad actors and people they have done business with that have deliberately wanted to discredit them, which may have been the case considering their high profile locally, regionally and nationally.

As organic dairy producers, we do not vilify the practices of other dairies and do not endorse attacks on conventional dairies to protect or promote organic production methods. Blaming long hours of work or poorly trained employees is no excuse. If the operation is beyond the owner/corporate manager’s capacity and current management practices, it is the responsibility of the ‘responsible person’ (to use a legal term) to make changes, not to plead victimization. The quality of animal care is not dictated by size or production practices but by management, whether family or corporate. Every farm and farm family develops their own production methods and different uses of inputs to suit their goals, their land base, and economic sustainability. Dairy farmers have different beliefs and ideas around production methods and size of operation. All dairy producers are animal welfare certified, or organically certified, or certified through the Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) program which is required by all processors, milk handlers and milk buyers. All dairy farmers believe in strong standards of animal welfare and enforcement of those standards.

The Alexandre Family Farm, LLC, has a milk processing plant (Alexandre Family Creamery), national marketing, and distribution of their own label, 4,000 acres of irrigated pasture access, and four dairy farm parcels. In 2021, the family’s herd consisted of 4,500 lactating cows, 3,700 heifers, and about 2,000 calves, which are born each year (NODPA News March, 2021). CCOF records state that they certify 8,472.35 acres under the LLC. They have been featured in the NODPA News in March 2021, which can be found at: <https://nodpa.com/n/5974/Regeneration-Alexandre-Family-Farm-The-Blake-and-Stephanie-Alexandre-Family-Crescent-City-California>.

The Alexandre Family farm, LLC is not your typical organic dairy family farm and cultivates a very high public image based on their farming practices and the high quality of their milk, which is sold coast-to-coast. Organic certification requirements should be interpreted equally no matter what the size or financial balance sheet or the public profile of the operation. The responsibility lies with the certified entity to meet the regulations and with the certifier to ensure compliance. The USDA NOP does say that the certifiers’ inspections should be risk based. Given the size and complexity of their operations, this LLC would obviously be categorized as a higher risk and necessitate more time spent on the certification process.

All dairy operations rely on strong enforcement of Animal Welfare regulations. Organic dairy relies on the USDA organic seal of third-party certification to maintain their markets, which benefits all organic producers. Producers need to be able to rely on the integrity, knowledge, and skills of their certifiers to discover fraud or non-compliance with animal welfare requirements within organic regulation (and there are very many). There are many Animal Welfare certifications that lack the ability to enforce or validate their certification and leave producers paying for a piece of paper that means nothing, fraudulently undermining consumers trust.

The Alexandre’s have stated in their press releases that they would take direct action to correct the problems, ensure no recurrence and continue to monitor their practices. It is the responsibility of certifiers to take the same actions to discover what their systems are missing, perhaps working together with the Alexandre’s to get the best results can better inform the process moving forward. ♦



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— Emily Pankratz



**EMILY PANKRATZ**, herd manager  
Holtz Ridge Grass Farm, RUDOLPH, WISCONSIN  
150 cows, Certified Organic, SCC 200,000

Emily (left) at our Central Plains Dairy Expo booth with her mother Peggy.

“We started using Udder Comfort™ a couple months ago to get better milk quality results. We keep using it because it takes edema out of udders more quickly than anything else,” says Emily Pankratz, herd manager for the 150-cow dairy at Holtz Ridge Grass Farm, Rudolph, Wisconsin, where she loves caring for the cows from calving through dryoff.

Emily stopped by our booth at Central Plains Dairy Expo after buying the donated gallon in the Dairy Forward auction. “Our protocol is to put it on after every milking (post-calving), until the cow or heifer is not high in the CMT anymore. This includes cows that may acquire mastitis or high SCC during lactation.

“What I like most about this product is how fast it works on edema. It helps blood flow and gets our heifers off to a quick start,” Emily explains.

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Leave Organic or Leave DFA, Says DFA to Member-Owners shipping to Horizon Organic

*continued from page 1*

This is a complete reversal of DFA's long term position in the Northeast of encouraging organic dairy farms to have a dual membership and long-term relationship with DFA. DFA supplies member services (which vary from customer to customer) on behalf of organic brands like Horizon Organic, Lactalis/Stonyfield, CROPP/Organic Valley, and Maple Hill, that includes writing the checks for producers. DFA has also provided a conventional market for those organic producers who are either forced out of organic production for economic reasons or lose their market. This was significant for some Northeast producers when they were dumped by Horizon when it was owned by Danone in 2021, and when HP Hood decided to leave the organic market in 2009.

Why was there a reversal of decades-long policy on organic by DFA management? What does this mean for other organic brands? The relationship between Horizon and DFA has been strained for many years. In the past, DFA charged Horizon producers directly

for their services on top of any other payments, because they could not reach a satisfactory agreement with Horizon Organic on paying for DFA services. In a conversation with DFA's Bryan Stokes (Senior Director, Membership), he explained DFA's current position as a change in their business relationship with Horizon Organic. The ending of dual agreements would only impact those producer members of DFA who ship to Horizon Organic. At this time, there would be no change in relationships with any of the other organic brands they currently work with.

Horizon Organic shippers who are DFA members would have a minimum of 60 days and up to a year, depending on their anniversary date, to become either an independent Horizon Organic Farm, switch to another cooperative, for example National Farmers Organization (NFO), or leave organic and stay with DFA as a conventional producer. Bryan Stokes said that DFA would not impose any penalties on Horizon Organic producers who wanted to leave DFA before their anniversary date. If producers wanted to switch to Organic Valley or Maple Hill, they would lose their dual agreement with DFA and end their relationship with DFA if they continued shipping organic milk. DFA will continue their policy of not taking on any new members. If any DFA members wanted to transition from conventional to organic production, they would have to leave DFA. Byron Stokes said that DFA is always

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

evaluating these policies to meet different situations. He did not have any details about who or what would provide the necessary services to a now independent Horizon producer except to say that there are other companies that can provide the needed services. Horizon Organic has not returned any calls asking for clarification of what services an 'independent' Horizon Organic producer would receive.

According to information received, NODPA understands that currently there are 52 Horizon, 108 CROPP Cooperative, 54 Maple Hill, and 18 Lactalis/Stonyfield organic shippers in DFA's Northeast region who are members of DFA with dual agreements.

I've asked the various brands and cooperatives that have a presence in the Northeast (even though this affects the whole of Horizon's direct supply) for any comment on the situation. The National Farmers Organization (NFO) is one of the alternative coops that organic producers are currently using. They played a dominant role in the formation and initial growth of CROPP in the Midwest, but since the dissolution of Dairy Marketing Services, LLC in 2017, and DFA's refusal to allow NFO to join DFA, they have had to struggle to rebuild their organization and conventional milk markets. In a conversation with Regional Director, Don Harnish at 814-386-3880, [dharnish@nfo.org](mailto:dharnish@nfo.org), he said that they would welcome any organic producers, and NFO already has agreements with CROPP, Lactalis, Maple Hill and Horizon Organic. Producers should contact him directly for more details. The challenge will be in providing cost-effective services and available trucking routes. Agri-Mark has repeatedly said they have no interest in providing member services to organic farm members.

Maple Hill responded with the following from Mitch Clark (Senior Vice President for supply chain): "Maple Hill and DFA have had a strong relationship for 8+ years; a fair amount of our producers are DFA members. We have been intentional about being a good partner to them and they have reciprocated that to Maple Hill. We have always maintained consistent communication with them, and in recent weeks they have assured us that they have no intention of ending our arrangement."

I have contacted Organic Valley/CROP Executive Vice President of Membership, Shawna Nelson, Horizon Organic representative Gillian Armstrong and Horizon Organic new owners, Platinum Equity but, at this time, have had no reply as to how they view the situation, what measures they are putting in place to safeguard their producers, and how to assist any DFA producers who want to transition to organic production.

*Continued on page 8*



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Leave Organic or Leave DFA, Says DFA to Member-Owners shipping to Horizon Organic

*continued from page 7*

There are so many consequences of this action by DFA. Currently, there is no public knowledge or transparency of what Horizon will be offering as an alternative to DFA. It is relatively easy for brands to set up their own software systems for managing payments to producers but more complicated to provide the other necessary systems and services. Generally, brands do not provide those services and other programs because of the expense of attracting experienced staff to administer them, and deep resources to finance them. DFA, as the number one dairy company for milk sales in the US in 2023, owner of multiple brands, processing facilities and milk haulage companies, can supply many services to its members, for example, insurance, buying/farm inputs, risk management and lending programs that are difficult to replicate.

For those farms looking for a safety net in returning to conventional production, Upstate and DFA have been the only way that could easily happen in the Northeast. DFA has now blocked that opportunity for their member owners. Since the consolidation of the dairy industry, with the merger of Dairyalea and DFA in 2014, and the dissolution of Dairy Marketing Services LLC in 2017, there are few alternatives in the Northeast, apart from NFO or small cooperatives like Middlebury Cooperative Milk Producers.

For those organic dairies that are allowed by their buyer to market some of their milk themselves, either as a value-added product or to other value-added dairy producers, there will always be the problem of balancing. The domination of DFA on the dairy supply and manufacturing side, and their recent purchase of a milk hauling company, makes any balancing for small scale value-added production more problematic.

The increase in the cost of trucking and the loss of independent milk hauling has led companies to charge farms more for their share of the trucking costs; to impose a higher minimum volume for each farm pick-up; and to impose a requirement on smaller operations to have storage for at least 2 days of milk to avoid everyday pick-up. This is an added problem for any farm



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

wanting to diversify its income into their own dairy products, become a seasonal dairy, or downsize their dairy herd to move into selling other farm products or services since they must maintain a certain volume of milk and have the infrastructure to keep it chilled to the appropriate temperature, losing some of the benefit of downsizing or restricting what they can do on the value-added enterprise.

This move by DFA does restrict organic dairies who are members of DFA from being able to use their last option to improve their pay price - move to another buyer. For DFA members, any move, even to CROPP, Lactalis or Maple Hill, would mean ending their relationship with DFA with all its long-term benefits. For new entrants into organic production, especially those transitioning from conventional production, their choices of a cooperative handler would be limited and tied to their buyer. Any DFA member who wants to transition to organic would have to leave DFA. DFA holds a monopoly on the conventional supply and processing side of dairy so any re-entry into the conventional market will be difficult.

The recent actions by DFA with Horizon Organic producers and, effectively, all organic dairy producers who are members

of DFA, reflects the established and continuing consolidation of the dairy industry at the expense of the small to mid-size dairies, both organic and conventional. There needs to be financial support for those cooperatives and processors who can still operate relatively independently, increased financial support for regional infrastructure initiatives, and greater federal support by state and federal programs for small to mid-size dairy farms because of their importance to the rural economy and the future security of the food supply. ♦

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

### Pay and Feed Prices May 2024

*By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director*

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has published estimated organic fluid product sales nationally, for January and February, 2024. They show a continued increase in the sales of Whole Milk packaged fluid products of 8.5% percent over January 2023, with a 7.8% reduction in Reduced-Fat Milk over the same period. US sales of organic whole milk products in January 2024 were 135 million pounds, up 8.5% from January 2023; and sales of Reduced-Fat Milk were 122 million pounds, down 7.3% from January 2023. In February 2024, sales of organic packaged milk were 235 million pounds, up 7.8% from February 2023. In February 2024, organic packaged Whole Milk sold 120 million pounds, up 12.9% from 2023. Sales of organic Reduce-Fat Milk in February 2024 were 113 million pounds, up 2.5% from

February 2023. The continued increase in sales of organic whole milk reflects the general industry trend within all of dairy for consumers' preference for whole milk.

The average retail price for organic milk has ranged from \$4.58 per half gallon in 2022 to \$4.88 per half gallon for 2023, and in March and April of 2024 the average retail price was \$4.82. In April, the highest retail price was in Pittsburgh PA at \$6.59 per ½ gallon, and the lowest in 9 separate cities was \$3.99 per ½ gallon. The retail prices were collected by the FMMO based on a survey conducted between the 1st and 10th of each month in selected cities or metropolitan areas. The largest and second largest food store chains are surveyed.

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	January 2024	2024 Year to date	January 2023	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	135	135	8.5%	8.5%
Flavored Whole milk	1	1	22.7%	22.7%
Organic Reduced-Fat Milk (2%)	81	81	-4.5%	-4.5%
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	24	24	-9.4%	-9.4%
Organic Fat-Free Milk Skim	12	12	-13.2%	-13.2%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	5	5	-31.1%	-31.1%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	0	0	5.9%	5.9%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	122	122	-7.8%	-7.8%
<b>Total Organic Milk Products</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	February 2024	2024 Year to date	February 2023	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	120	255	12.9	10.5
Flavored Whole milk	1	1	-0.8	11.1
Organic Reduced-Fat Milk (2%)	76	157	8.3	1.3
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	21	45	-3.6	-6.8
Organic Fat-Free Milk Skim	11	23	-10.6	-11.9
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	5	10	-14.3	-23.2
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	1	1	215.2	69.6
Total Fat Reduced Milk	113	236	2.5	-3.1
<b>Total Organic Milk Products</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>3.7</b>

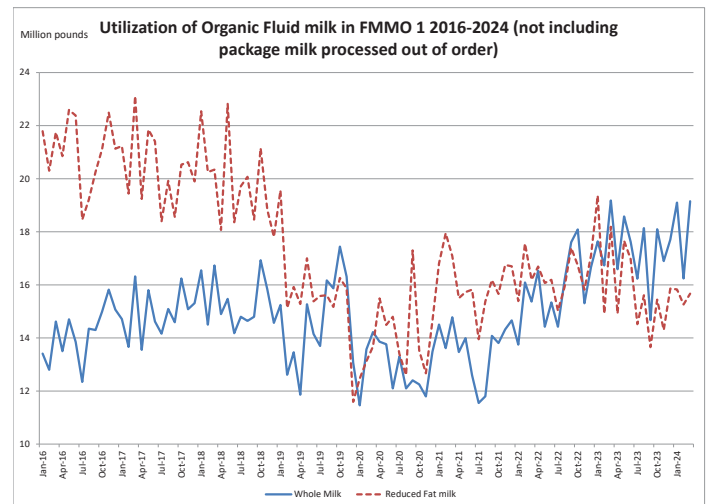
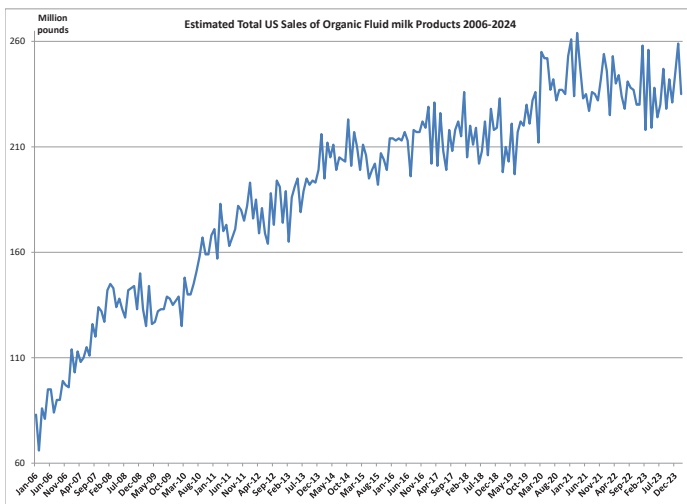
## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

UTILIZATION OF ORGANIC FLUID MILK PRODUCTS AND CREAM BY POOL PLANTS (Million pounds) in FMMO 1 (Northeast) not including packaged out of order					
Month	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2024	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2023	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2022	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2021	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2020
JANUARY	34.93	37.00	29.14	31.32	23.93
FEBRUARY	31.50	31.65	33.65	31.56	26.69
MARCH	34.82	37.37	31.56	31.87	27.90
APRIL		31.51	33.23	28.97	29.35
MAY		36.24	30.49	29.72	28.25
JUNE		34.59	31.53	28.41	26.90
JULY		30.75	29.44	25.50	26.70
AUGUST		33.75	32.12	27.18	24.70
SEPTEMBER		28.32	35.00	30.26	29.70
OCTOBER		33.54	34.83	29.47	25.78
NOVEMBER		31.19	31.13	31.07	24.47
DECEMBER		33.56	33.78	31.36	28.13
ANNUAL		399.47	385.90	356.68	322.50

Federal Milk Market Order 1, in the Northeast, reports utilization of types of organic milk by pool plants for products packaged in the FMMO 1. Data on milk in the other classes are not separated by production practice, neither is milk that comes into the order already packaged to be sold in the order. FMMO 1 reported that in March 2024, fluid organic Whole Milk utilization totaled 18.19 million pounds, on a par with the previous year of 19.177 million

pounds. In March 2024, the utilization of fluid organic Reduced Fat milk, 15.67 million pounds, decreased from 14.92 million pounds in March 2023. In March 2024, there was 135.35 million pounds of milk marketed as Class 1 in FMMO 1 from outside the FMMO 1 marketing area, approximately 18.98% of total Class 1 utilization in the Order.

*Continued on page 12*





## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

UTILIZATION OF ORGANIC FLUID MILK PRODUCTS AND CREAM BY POOL PLANTS (Million pounds) in FMMO 32 (Central)									
Month	2024	2024 in order	2024 out of order	2023	2023 in order	2023 out of order	2022	2022 used in order	2022 used out of order
January	56.23	6.41	49.82	55.21	6.51	43.63			
February	51.88	5.77	46.12	49.11	5.49	43.98			
March	53.96	5.93	46.29	52.73	5.59	45.35			
April				49.18	5.64	45.44	51.93	5.54	46.39
May				48.21	5.40	42.78	51.13	5.84	45.29
June				45.20	5.57	39.63	51.58	5.62	45.96
July				48.45	5.70	43.64	49.67	6.04	43.64
August				48.47	5.63	42.85	52.16	6.20	45.96
September				48.75	5.58	43.18	51.04	6.31	44.73
October				49.73	5.48	42.48	52.06	5.86	44.53
November				49.60	5.48	42.48	52.31	5.96	46.35
December				54.17	6.08	48.10	55.94	6.29	49.55
Annual Total				598.81	68.14	523.53			

## Pay and Feed Prices

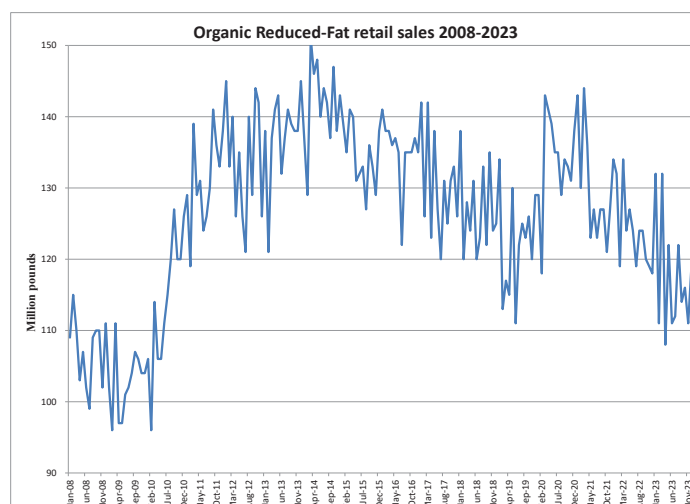
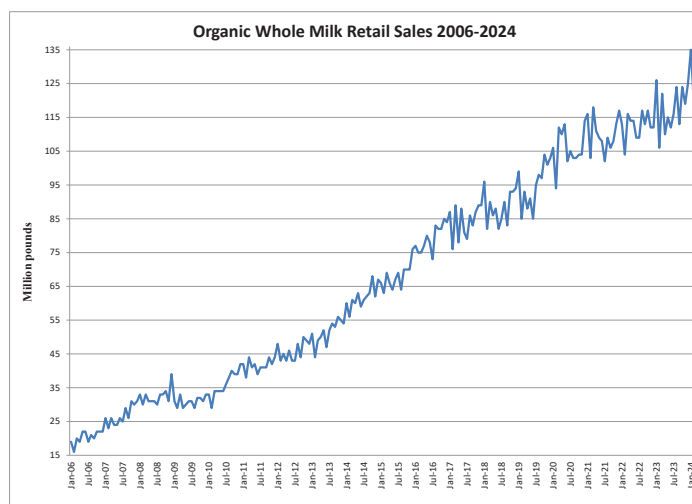
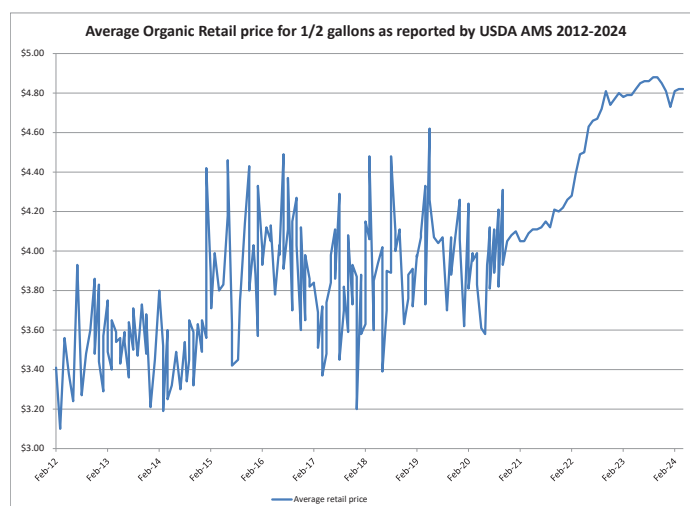
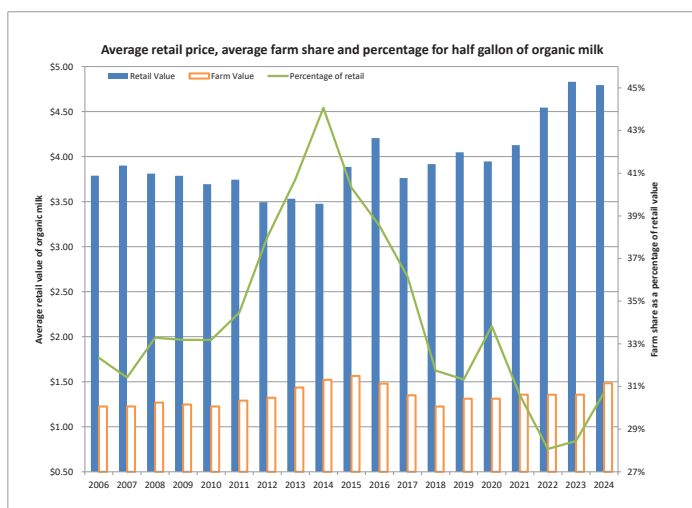
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Central Federal Order (FO) 32 and California FO 51 are the only two Orders that publish reports that breakdown the volume of Class 1 organic milk that is used in the Order, and what is used outside the Order. FO 32 includes reporting from both Aurora plants in Colorado and Missouri which sell packaged products in many parts of the country including the Northeast and California. The chart above shows a consistent volume of organic packaged milk marketed out of Order FO 32, although there was less sold as Class 1 in 2023 than there was in 2022 for the months that are available in the published reports. Sales of packaged organic fluid milk are increasing nationally. In the Northeast, sales of organic whole milk packaged within the region, continue to increase steadily while sales of Low-Fat dairy products appear to be level but the number of organic dairy farms in New England and New York are decreasing (anecdotally, except for VT which has published state data). Without more information on packaged organic milk coming into the area, there is no way to make calculations as to the potential for increasing production to support Northeastern organic farms and infrastructure. Processors in the Central Federal Milk Marketing Order sold 523 million pounds of organic packaged milk outside of their order in 2023. We can only assume that retail buyers are using that ready-

made supply to provide product for any increase in retail sales in their stores.

In recent reports from a NOFA-NY-certified livestock auction in New Berlin, New York, organic cull cows traded, on average, above conventional cows in April 2024. The average price for conventional cull cows ranged from a low of \$98/cwt to a high of \$105 /cwt. The average price for organic cull cows ranged from a low of \$97/cwt to a high of \$115/cwt. Organic milking cows were selling well at an average of \$1,325-\$1,900 each in April 2024. A USDA AMS report from a Pacific Northwest livestock auction disclosed that the top 10 organic cull cows traded lower than conventional cull cows, while the overall average for organic cull cow prices traded higher than the overall average for conventional cull cows. The average price for the top 10 organic cows auctioned was \$129.71/cwt, compared to an average price of \$131.71/cwt for the top 10 conventional cows. The average weight for the top 10 conventional cows was 1413 pounds compared to 1285.5 pounds for the top 10 organic cows. The overall price for organic cows auctioned was \$121.02/cwt with an average weight of 1238.2 pounds, while the overall price for conventional cows auctioned was \$107.16/cwt and had an average weight of 1290.9 pounds. Producers and auctions are continuing to report high prices for Angus cross dairy calves. Reports during April are that beef cross calves brought as high as \$9.50 per pound at some auctions. Considering a week-old animal may weigh around 100

## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS



pounds, the income has never been better for farmers. The price for Holstein bull calves has also skyrocketed, climbing from an average of \$1.50 per pound a couple years ago to a high of \$5 per pound today.

### News on Organic Dairy

Platinum Equity announced on April 2, 2024, that the acquisition of a majority interest in Horizon Organic and Wallaby from Danone has been completed. Byrne Dairy recently increased their direct supply of organic dairy farms in New York. Maple Hill reports increased signing of producers in Pennsylvania as they expand their supply in that region.

### Update on DMC and ODMAP Programs

There was a Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) Program Tier 1 payment of \$1.02/cwt in January 2024 and \$0.06/cwt in February 2024, with no payment for March 2024. February and March 2024

conventional feedstuff and milk prices were almost the same with a milk margin above feed cost of \$9.44 and \$9.65, respectively. The All-Milk price is staying at around \$20/cwt, with soybean meal averaging \$365 per ton, alfalfa conventional hay at \$275/ton and corn at 4.36/bushel.

There are no further updates on any next payment from the Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) from the funds that were not used from the \$105 million allocated to the program in January 2023. Most of the advocacy work has shifted to the 2024 Farm Bill in the unlikely attempt to get one passed in this Congress.

### Organic Milk Exports

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) releases monthly export data which includes export volumes and values for organic milk

*Continued on page 14*

## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

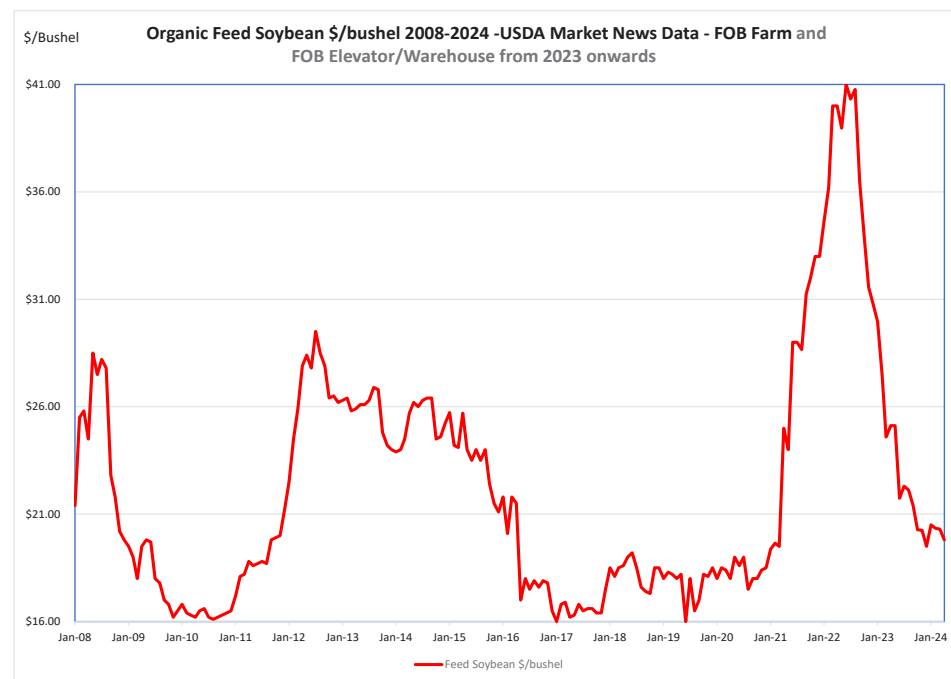
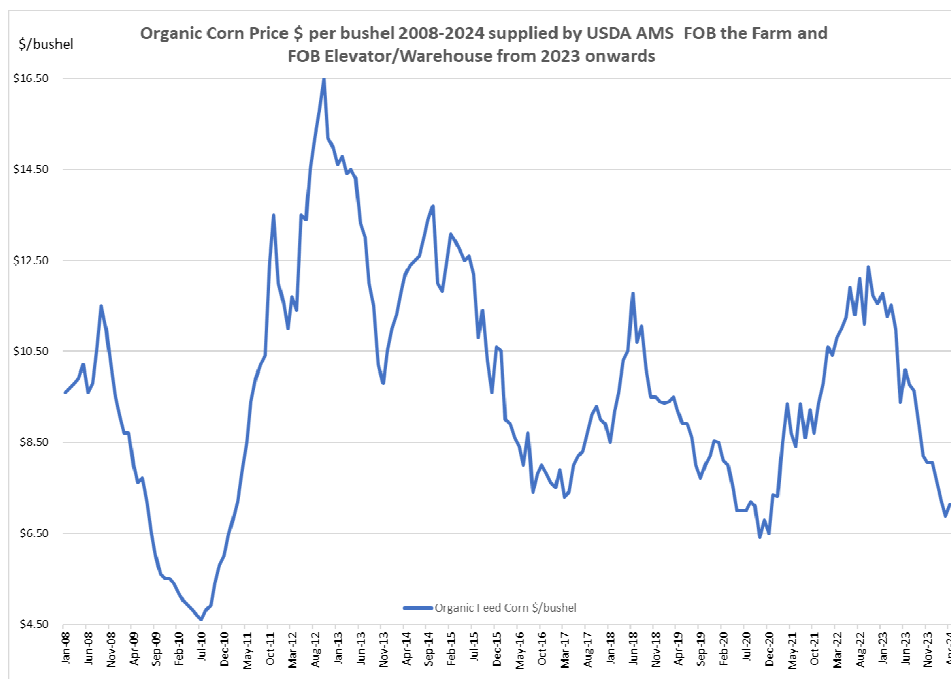
## Pay and Feed Prices

*continued from page 13*

categorized as HS-10 code 0401201000. Data for February 2024 indicated organic milk exports were 116,554 liters, up 83.9 percent from the month prior, and up 102.5 percent from 2023. Data for March 2024 indicated organic milk exports were 132,223 liters, down 44.0 percent from the month prior, and down 18.9 percent from 2023. Exports of organic milk from the start of the year through March are up 7.3 percent, compared to the same period one year ago.

### Requirement for electronic ID for Certain Cattle and Bison Moving Interstate

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced on April 26, 2024 a Final Rule that requires official ear tags to be visually and electronically readable for official use for interstate movement of certain cattle and bison, and revises and clarifies certain record requirements related to cattle. USDA maintains that traceability of animals is necessary to establish disease-free zones and facilitate re-establishment of foreign and domestic market access with minimum delay in the wake of an animal disease event. In a press release, USDA commented; "USDA is committed to implementing a modern animal disease traceability system that tracks animals from birth to slaughter using affordable technology that allows for quick tracing of sick and exposed animals to stop disease spread. USDA will continue to provide tags to producers free of charge to jumpstart efforts to enable the fastest possible response to a foreign animal disease." The final rule applies to all sexually intact cattle and bison 18 months of age or older, all dairy cattle, cattle and bison of any age used for rodeo or recreation events, and cattle or bison of



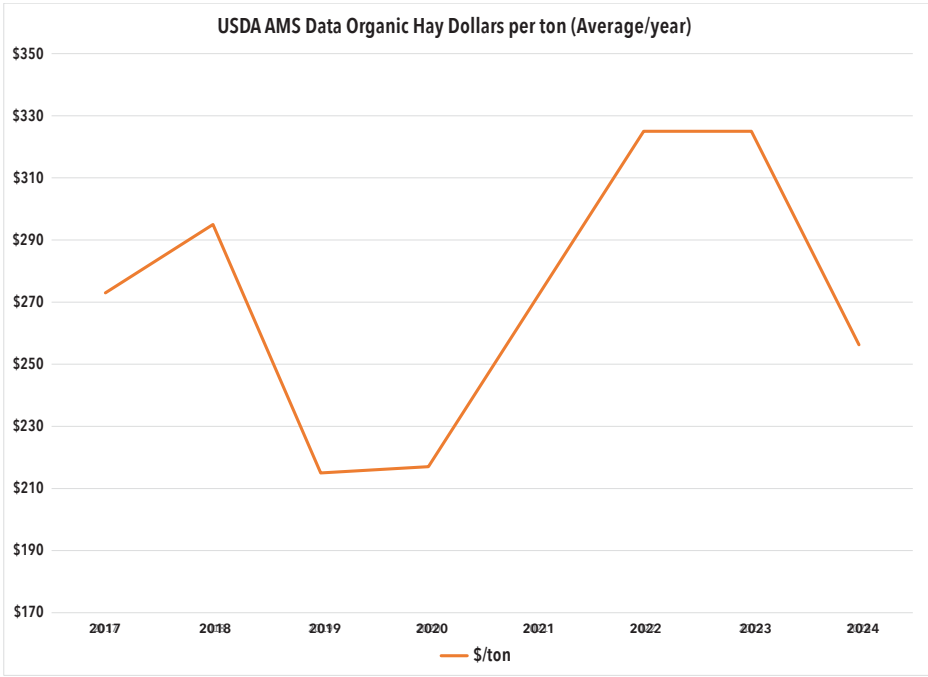
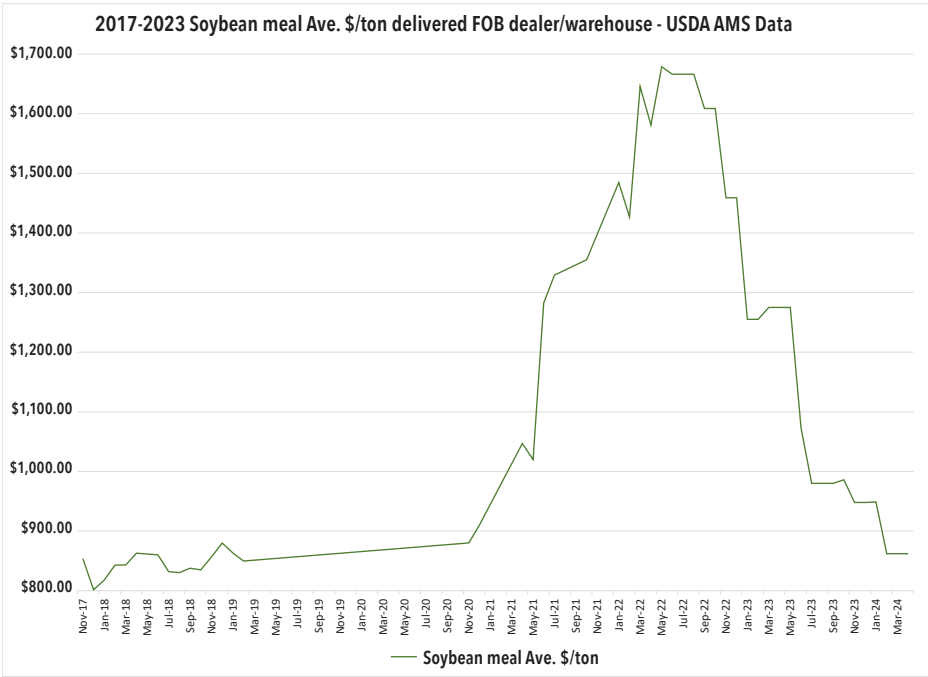
any age used for shows or exhibitions. This rule will be effective 180 days after publication in the Federal Register, which has not happened yet.

### Addition of new pain relief drug for use in organic livestock

CROPP Cooperative reports that, with the support of Stonyfield/Lactalis, Horizon Organic and Aurora Organic



ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS



Dairy and in consultation with the veterinarian community and numerous stakeholders, they have submitted a petition to the National Organic Program (NOP) to add the treatment aid/agent Meloxicam to section 205.603 of the NOP’s National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (National List). The NOP affirmed acceptance of a complete petition for Meloxicam on February 12, 2024. Posting to the NOP Petition Substances Index is imminent and NOSB review process is

expected, initially in the Livestock Subcommittee. They state that, “Meloxicam is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agent with a preference for COX-2 receptors which means it is less likely to cause side effects. It can control pain, inflammation and fever and is used widely in humans and animals. With a therapeutic effect of 24 to 48 hours in cattle, this treatment aid has a long clinical result with a single dose and is far superior to current approved NOP pain treatment options. As a treatment aid used extensively in non-organic dairy production to address pain, disbudding inflammation, and elective procedures, Meloxicam is proven extremely effective and readily available. While some pain relief options do exist for organic livestock, they are viewed as cumbersome to administer and offer limited relief or metabolize quickly.”

Jason Johnson, Senior Manager, Direct Supply Milk Procurement and Farm Practices, Stonyfield / Lactalis US Yogurt has sent a letter of support for the addition of Meloxicam to the National List at \$205.603 as it would be an important step for ensuring animal welfare on organic dairy operations. NODPA will cover this in further detail as it progresses through the approval process.

Feed

National data from USDA has organic feed corn delivered to the elevator prices averaging \$7.14 per bushel in April 2024, down approximately \$3.85/bu. from 12 months prior. Organic feed soybean delivered prices averaged \$19.80/bu. in April 2024, down approximately \$5.32/bu. from 12 months prior. Soybean meal is currently trading at \$862/ton, about \$4.13/cwt. lower than 2022. These take no account for the cost of transport. Costs of organic Alfalfa are about the same as conventional at \$225 per ton. ♦

**24<sup>th</sup> Annual NODPA Field Days**

Save the Date - September 26 &amp; 27, 2024

**Demystifying Succession Planning for Organic Dairy Farms**

Nichols Volunteer Fire Department Hall, 106 W. River Rd, Nichols, NY 13812

*By Nora Owens, NODPA Field Days Coordinator*

Above: Madeline and Bruce Poole and their children walking through the pasture in spring. Owego, NY

**F**arming is unique among professions. In most careers, a person reaches a time when they decide to retire and move on to the next phase of their life. Most farms in the Northeast are family owned and managed. Retiring from farming requires much more thought and planning. Is there someone who wants to take over managing the farm? Is that person a family member or trusted employee? Are they qualified to do so? What will my life be like if I 'retire'? How will I know what I need, financially, to live out my life? Where will I live? These are just a few of the questions the retiring generation may be asking.

The generation taking up the responsibility of ownership and management are asking questions, too. Is the farm in a secure financial position to transition to my family? What will I need to earn in order to support my family and assume farm debt? If it's a family member, they may be wondering what their relationship with their parents, siblings, and extended family will be, moving forward. How will the family react if we chose to change direction or employ different farming practices? Who can guide me through this complicated process so I don't make any big mistakes?

Recognizing the complexity of succession planning and the critical state of organic dairy farming in the Northeast, NODPA is devoting the 24th Annual NODPA Field Days to demystify the whole process. Workshops will all be geared to hearing from professionals and the farmers who have worked with them on their farms' transfer. Members of the Plain Community will discuss the opportunities and challenges of farm transfer in their community, and both tours will be at farms that have recently completed generational transfers.

MK Dairy, LLC, in Owego, NY will be the site of our Thursday morning farm tour. Join Madeline and Bruce Poole to tour their farm and learn about their experiences of taking over the operation of the dairy from Madeline's family.

Following the tour at noon, we head over to the Nichols Volunteer Fire Hall for registration and a delicious lunch featuring Engelbert Family Farm's organic ground beef. Following lunch, the educational program begins at 1:00 pm with NODPA's Executive Director, Ed Maltby, setting the stage in his brief presentation, The State of the Organic Dairy Industry in the Northeast and the Importance of Succession Planning

## 24<sup>th</sup> Annual NODPA Field Days

Now. This will be followed by Ted LeBow's presentation, Where to Start? Farmers regularly hire Ted to assist them with the process of transferring their farms and his session will focus on the most important questions that need to be asked, and how to begin the process. Ted, the 23rd NODPA Field Days keynote speaker and well known to farmers throughout the US, is Co-CEO of Kitchen Table Consulting, Bala Cnwyd, PA.



**Ted LeBow**

Christopher Anderson, owner of Nordic Geo Solutions, Marathon, NY, has successfully shepherded farm families through the succession planning process and will describe the structure that he finds most helpful and how the process actually unfolds.



**Christopher Anderson**

Madeline Poole of MK Dairy, Owego, NY, who has transferred ownership from her parents, and Liz Bawden, Bawden Family Farms, Hammond, NY, who is in the beginning stages of the process, will each share their personal experiences. There will be plenty of time for questions.

Having the right team to assist farm families through this process may be the most important factor to success. In the Building Your Team workshop you will learn about the nuts and bolts of assembling a team of professionals to hire, when and why, and the costs to expect. This will include where to look for financial assistance, if it's available. We are fortunate to have the following experts who will lead this discussion:



**Jen Miller**

Ted LeBow, Kitchen Table Consulting, Jen Miller, NOFA-VT Farmer Services Director, and Chris Anderson, Nordic GeoSolutions, LLC.

The late afternoon will be devoted to the Social Hour and Trade Show, giving everyone the opportunity to catch up with old friends, and to make new ones, as well as visiting our trade show vendors. We are so appreciative of their participation and support for the NODPA Field Days, and hope you all will take time to learn more about their organizations and products. The NODPA Annual Meeting and banquet follows.

After dinner, we will have a round table discussion featuring farm families that are in the midst of transferring their farms or have negotiated the process. There will be success stories, not-so-successful stories, and transfers that don't involve families, and plenty of advice flowing. Everyone will have the opportunity to ask questions, share concerns, and, hopefully, leave feeling energized to take their own next steps.

Friday morning begins early, with a continental breakfast at 6:30 am for those attending the Producer-Only meeting at 7:00 am. Breakfast will remain available until 9:00 am, at which time the morning's first session starts.

*Continued on page 18*

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## 24<sup>th</sup> Annual NODPA Field Days

### The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual NODPA Field Days

*continued from page 17*

It's critically important to understand the farm's finances and exactly how this information shapes the whole succession planning process. Jen Miller, NOFA-VT Farm Services Director and Sarah Flack, Sarah Flack Consulting, will lead the session on Demystifying the Financial Investigation: the nuts and bolts of your farm's business analysis and what you will need to know and do. Both Jen and Sarah have extensive experience working with farmers on business analysis and "crunching the numbers", so come prepared with lots of questions.



**Sarah Flack**

Our next session spotlights succession planning within the Plain Community. Nathan and Alex Weaver of Madison County, NY, and George Wright will share their insights and experiences, and Sarah Flack will be facilitating this session. Alex and Rita Weaver recently purchased Nathan and Kristine Weaver's farm, while Nathan and Kristine, along with the remaining children at home, have moved to their new farm about 5 miles away. George

and Linda Wright sold their farm in Hermon, NY to a Plain Community family, and will describe their successful non-family farm transfer done with great success.

Before we break for lunch, our last session features the Engelbert family. Their farm, now run by brothers Joe and John, will be the site of the afternoon farm tour. The Engelberts will give a preview to their farm and discuss their generational transfer experience.

We close with lunch and final announcements, then head over to the Engelbert's farm, less than a mile down the road from our meeting site.

There will be much more information in the coming months, especially in the July NODPA News and online, [www.nodpa.com](http://www.nodpa.com). Information for sponsors and supporters, including trade show information will be going out by mid-May. If you'd like information beforehand, or if you have any other questions, please contact Nora Owens, NODPA Field Days Coordinator, at 413-772-0444 or at [noraowens@comcast.net](mailto:noraowens@comcast.net).

For now, mark your calendars and plan to join us for the 24th NODPA Field Days on Thursday and Friday, September 26th and 27th! Remember, it's never too early to look for lodging if you are coming from a distance. You will receive better rates and have more options, too. There are hotels in Owego and surrounding communities, including the Tioga Downs Casino and Resort in Nichols, and there are a number of Air BnB's in the area, too. ♦

**The Engelbert family at their farm in Nichols, NY**



## ORGANIC PRODUCTION



## Ask the Vet

*There are so many different kinds of vaccines out there, How do I go about choosing the right ones for my herd?*

Dayna Locitzer, DVM



This is an important question for many reasons. It is complicated to answer, but it is critical to think about as we consider a multipronged approach to preventative medicine. So, NODPA readers, I'm glad you asked! First off, I'd like to say that this is a great topic to discuss with your veterinarian since they know your herd and can supply you with the vaccines that are available for use. Veterinary suppliers are experiencing a lot of shortages, so unfortunately this question will depend on what is in stock. But for now, I will go over the basics to help you start to think about your vaccine program.

The first question to answer is: Do you have an open or closed herd? A closed herd is when no animals have been introduced to your farm in a number of years. If you buy a heifer from a neighbor or bring in a bull or send your heifers away to a heifer grower or take your animal to the fair and back, then you do not have a closed herd. When cows have the ability to interact with cows from other farms, they have the ability to pick up novel infectious diseases from those animals. This comes in the form of "shipping fever," or bovine respiratory disease complex. When you have an open herd, it is important that you are well vaccinated for pneumonia and abortion causing diseases.

What is "well vaccinated"? Basically, it means that you are providing your cows with a vaccine that will create a strong and lasting immune response in the face of disease. This is best accomplished with a modified live vaccine (MLV). A MLV contains active, replicating virus that has been altered to not cause disease in the host but, rather, to introduce the host to elements of the virus. When you are using a whole intact (but modified) virus, it creates more targets for the immune system to study and prepare its response. This translates to a more robust and lasting immunity.

But it comes with some downsides. MLV has live virus and sometimes can revert to virulence and cause diseases similar to what you are trying to prevent. Also, the creation of this immunity is taxing on the animal and can cause a vaccine reaction resulting in animals that are a little "off" for a short period of time. When using an MLV, it is important to plan how many doses you need because when you mix up a bottle you have to use the whole contents right away. This can be hard when you only have a small number of animals to vaccinate.

The alternative is a killed vaccine which has chemically altered virus that is no longer able to replicate when injected as a vaccine.

While they don't come with the risks of live virus, they also don't provide as long lasting effective immunity, and they always need to be "boosted" after first administration.

Killed vaccines are similar to bacterins, which are vaccines for diseases caused by bacteria. Bacterins also contain chemically altered non-viable pathogens, in this case bacteria. They can have variable efficacy depending on the pathogen. For example, bacterins for E.coli causing diseases do not provide long term immunity and only decrease the severity of disease. This is in contrast to clostridial bacterins (for tetanus, black leg, redwater, etc), which can actually prevent disease and provide long term immunity.

There is another type of vaccine folks might be familiar with: mRNA vaccines. Many of the vaccines preventing severe disease

*Continued on page 35*

# THIS MARK MATTERS.

DFA Northeast is pleased to provide continued support to NODPA and organic farms.



## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Residue Testing For Import Organic Compliance Verification

*By Julia Barton, Farmer Services Director, Organic Farmers Association*

### THE PROBLEM

For the last decade at least, a chief concern of organic producers has been fraudulent, but certified, “organic” grains being imported to the U.S. Conversations on this topic have occurred at kitchen tables, farm gates, winter conferences, in Zoom rooms, at the National Organic Standards Board meetings, on the Hill, and at USDA. This is not a new problem, it’s still here, and it’s still impacting domestic organic farmers in different ways based on their role and type of production.

The U.S. is a net exporter of conventional commodities and a net importer of certified organic commodities. The domestic demand for organic products, especially grains for livestock feed, has consistently grown for the past decade. U.S. farmers have invested in organic transition to meet this local demand with domestic production. The USDA recently invested \$100 million in technical assistance to help U.S. farmers meet this

growing organic demand. Organic commodities, which typically command a price premium over conventional, based on increased production costs, encourage U.S. transition to organic, but the price premium has also lured fraudulent players into the marketplace based on economic incentive. Fraud has caused significant price fluctuations and destruction in recent years and an unstable organic market for domestic organic producers.

While import fraud appears across commodities in the organic sector, organic feedstuff commodities (whole soybeans, soybean meal, corn, cracked corn, rape, rape meal, whole sunflowers, hulled sunflowers, sunflower oil, and sunflower meal) are hit the hardest. These products often enter the U.S. market through high-risk, complex, and opaque supply chains. In the past year, 1.3 million metric tons of organic feedstuffs<sup>1</sup> were imported via maritime vessels<sup>2</sup> 80% of which originated from countries with underdeveloped agriculture sectors, poor infrastructure, and corruption challenges (not that we don’t struggle with corruption here, too!). This influx equaled 800,000 acres of organic production and almost \$1 billion lost by U.S. farmers.

These organic grain import quantities, matched with the supply origins, heighten the risk of organic import fraud, adding volatility to an already fluctuating system, and harming U.S. farmers’ ability to compete in the premium market. The justification for prioritizing the creation of the USDA Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule (SOE) was built on the fact that maritime imports represent the most significant risk by volume. A single ship of cracked corn can represent \$1 million bushels or 10 million dollars. SOE provides enhanced supply chain traceability by requiring importers, brokers, and previously exempt handlers to obtain organic certification and provide import certificates for every imported load of organic commodity. While the SOE provisions will help, they are not enough.

### THE IDEA: RESIDUE TESTING AT PORTS

Legislation requiring USDA to provide Congress with a full report on residue testing for imported organic feedstuff commodities transported via bulk could help to protect U.S. producers from this type of fraud. Because of the large quantities of organic feedstuff imports matched with their high-risk supply chains these imports should be classified as high risk. Because of the risk, testing to verify compliance on bulk<sup>3</sup> organic feedstuff maritime vessels should be prioritized. To prevent additional fraudulent

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

grain from entering the U.S. supply chain, grain testing positive for prohibited substances should not be unloaded, so exclusion from organic sale would need to be part of the plan. Testing would need to take place quickly, so as to not disrupt supply chains. Such an effort could serve to curb volatility and help stabilize organic feed prices over time.

While this seems like a new idea, it would actually be a typical stateside practice, newly applied to imported bulk shipments at the ports. Domestic grains are already being regularly tested at grain mills as required, not by the National Organic Program (NOP), but rather by mills and marketers. USDA is legally responsible for ensuring the NOP has adequate regulatory standards, enforcement guidelines, and residue testing procedures. Residue testing is already an essential and required tool for verifying compliance with organic regulations, with certifiers required to test 5% of the operations they certify each year. The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) and USDA organic regulations include authority and guidelines for Accredited Certification Agencies (ACAs) to collect residue samples and respond to sample results. Organic certification is also already intended to be a risk-based assessment process and places scrutiny on high-risk operations. Additional compliance verification through residue testing of imported organic commodities would help to level the playing field which is the next needed step.

### WHAT WE NEED

U.S. organic farmers need continuous improvement in oversight and enforcement to strengthen the integrity of the organic movement and marketplace, and continuous improvement beyond the SOE rule. Residue testing is a tool that, if conducted consistently and expeditiously at ports, could help in compliance verification for organic regulations and in the stabilization of organic markets. We also need to set up a system that ensures the testing costs of international shipments do not fall on the backs of domestic organic farmers. U.S. producers have invested time and money into organic transition and production and deserve to operate in a stable and equitable marketplace. Residue testing of imported organic commodities would subject all farmers to the same testing, whether domestic or international organic producers, and further secure organic consumers' trust in organic integrity. By leveling the playing field, we can retain US organic producers, rather than losing them to market volatility, and leverage the investments in the Organic Transition Initiative to grow the number of organic farms in the US.

Organic Farmers Association (OFA) was grateful to Amy Bruch of Cyclone Farms, who shared her thinking and ideas about this proposed next step with OFA farmers on a webinar supported by the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP).

You can view it here: <https://tinyurl.com/OrganicImports>. It seems this idea will evolve into a marker bill<sup>4</sup>, which could then potentially be included in the farm bill. Check out the webinar, discuss it with your organic colleagues, and let us know your thoughts. ♦

*1 Source: S&P Connect Global Trade and Commodity Analytics Suite/ Maritime and Trade.*

*2 Maritime imports represent approximately 67% of organic feedstuff imports.*

*3 Bulk: Loose feedstuffs in ship holds, containers, super sacks, etc., not packaged goods.*

*4 A marker bill is a bill introduced in Congress to signal policy ideas and gather support for those ideas, most often with a goal of inclusion in an omnibus bill like the farm bill.*

Julia Barton serves as the Farmer Services Director of the Organic Farmers Association. She loves working with farmers to identify challenges and find solutions! She can be reached at [julia@organicfarmersassociation.org](mailto:julia@organicfarmersassociation.org)

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## FEATURED FARM

## Cows on pasture at MK Dairy LLC

**MK DAIRY LLC - OWEGO, NY***continued from page 1*

farm, originally established by her grandparents in 1943, where she was raised.

Although Poole grew up milking cows on her parents' dairy, her experience there didn't necessarily mirror the dairy farming herd management practices she learned at college. Her parents weren't using today's technology to monitor their cows, only used bulls for breeding, and parlor and housing facilities were outdated. Her parents didn't use a nutritionist, and didn't rely on a veterinarian for pregnancy checks, nor did they have a thorough vaccination plan. They milked about 40 cows. Her mother also worked full time off-farm as a middle school English teacher.

When her parents decided to sell the dairy farm, they gave Madeline and Bruce the option to purchase it. If she didn't want to lose that part of her heritage, they needed to return home quickly and find a way to transform the dairy into a profitable venture which could support their young, growing family, and provide Madeline's parents with a financial basis for their retirement years.

"I loved my job," Madeline said of the 60 - 70 hours per week she was working as a dairy herdsman for "a really wonderful family" and was learning a lot about animal husbandry and the operations of a large modern dairy farm. Taking that working knowledge, her college degree, her husband and the determination to make the transition work both for her parents and for her own growing family, Madeline returned home. But it wasn't easy. And not everything stays the same.

**Going Home**

Although Madeline wanted to keep the farm in the family, she didn't want to make poor business decisions and end up with a dairy farm that wasn't financially viable. Bruce and Madeline took six months to decide whether or not the purchase would be feasible, enlisting experts to help them remain focused during what was going to be a challenging transition between generations.

Her parents did not want to stick around for years during a long transition period. Her dad helped with field work and he milked once a week for the first year Bruce and Madeline returned to the dairy. They also wanted to retire comfortably, and felt the dairy farm was a worthy investment for Madeline. But conditions at the farm were not on par with the standards Madeline and Bruce had come to expect. The couple would need to find a way to upgrade



## FEATURED FARM



facilities as the dairy was “very hard to operate,” and they needed to ensure that the herd they would be purchasing was sound.

One of the first steps they took was adding a nutritionist and a veterinarian. They began to monitor the herd, added a routine vaccination protocol and pregnancy checking, and enlisted a team of experts via Cornell Cooperative Extension

Pro Dairy. Knowing that infrastructure - particularly a bulk tank which was in danger of failure - needed to be replaced, they also applied for money through the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center, receiving \$50,000 towards the replacement cost.

During the first year being back on the farm with her parents, Madeline and Bruce - a diesel mechanic - found that they were unable to make financial decisions, sign for purchases or otherwise legally transact business for the farm even though they were now the ones operating the farm and calling the shots. In late 2017, they formed an LLC with her parents as partners, so they would legally be recognized as operators of the dairy. They had begun working with a Farm Credit agent for the transition and also changed to another bank. In 2018, they began to work with a Profit Team, which included agricultural consultant Anna



**George, 4, and Sophia, 6.**

Richard of 2020 Consulting, Cornell Cooperative Extension Dairy team, a nutritionist from Holtz- Nelson, and their veterinarian.

Mediation was a necessary part of ironing out the terms of the transition, and Bruce and Madeline highly recommend an experienced team to provide support to all parties involved in family succession planning. Having a team of people to answer questions and understand the issues that arise with transitioning a dairy farm to the next generation was invaluable. “We would not have been able to do it without them, and their help,” Madeline said. “Mediation is really important.”

The transition was complicated. Accepting the financial data was difficult for her parents. Getting what both parties needed out of the transition was complex, particularly when the parties were parents and child and business needs mix with emotional ones.

*Continued on page 24*



## FEATURED FARM

**MK DAIRY LLC - OWEGO, NY***continued from page 23*

After hashing out the financial aspects of the transition plan to everyone's satisfaction, Madeline and Bruce purchased the dairy, including 180 acres of farmland, in 2022. Within the next four years, they will finalize the purchase of the remaining 320 acres of land from her parents as part of the succession plan.

"Make sure that the farm can support you in the end. Being the younger generation you are more vulnerable," Madeline advised anyone taking over the family farm.

It wasn't smooth sailing once the transition occurred, however. It seems Mother Nature had other plans.

"The last two years were awful," Madeline said. It was too wet to harvest the corn for silage last year, and in 2022 they experienced the worst drought, and plowed the corn under. In order to feed the herd without their own corn silage, they purchased high-

quality organic oatlage and a rye and alfalfa mix from a farmer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and were very happy with the quality.

**New Beginnings**

Madeline and Bruce just started to officially rent the remaining land from her parents, and also rent 230 acres of land from two neighbors. About 160 acres of land either owned or rented from her parents are in permanent pasture, with 150 acres of woods and the remainder of tillable land. Of the 230 acres rented from neighbors, 40 are in permanent pasture with the remainder tillable land.

They don't have any bunks, so "we do all baleage," Madeline said. Their land is on a mountain, and has clay soils, so clovers and a primarily fescue grass mix are what grows best. They do grow and feed corn silage which is stored in 2 upright silos, which their neighbors and fellow organic farmers the Engelberts harvest for them.

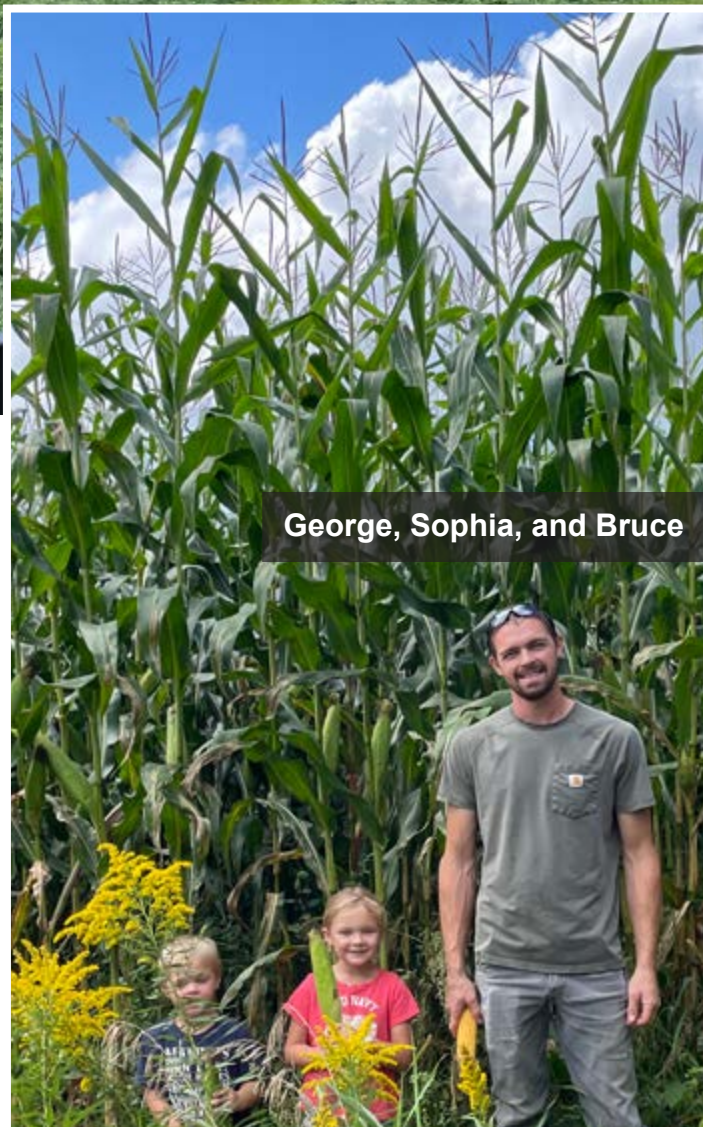
They've had no luck with alfalfa, which don't yield well in their heavy clay soils. They are now experimenting with an annual rye



## FEATURED FARM



After five to seven years, hay ground is rotated into corn for two seasons.



George, Sophia, and Bruce



Madeline, George, and Sophia working in the field.

cover crop - the yields are very good, but they just need to figure out the best way to handle oatlage and ryelage, as it doesn't dry down very well. They try and rotate hay ground every five to seven years into corn for two seasons and then back to hay. The corn acreage is fertilized before planting with chicken manure and their own pack barn compost. The hay fields are fertilized with their liquid manure in the spring and the fall.

They planted forage turnips four years ago to aerate some pasture needing rejuvenation, and had great results with the pasture renovation, seeding to a pasture mix consisting of fescue and red clover the following year. After they till a pasture and plant new seeding they take a few cuttings off the ground to make sure the grasses are established enough before letting the cows graze the paddock.

*Continued on page 26*



## FEATURED FARM



The herd has been expanded by raising their own heifers and purchasing cows from a neighboring organic herd.

## MK DAIRY LLC - OWEGO, NY

*continued from page 25*

There are plenty of other changes being made on the farm, too. They are working on one project per year to improve the dairy. The first big project was to update the milking parlor. The parlor is a double eight herringbone, but the auto take-offs didn't work, and other parts weren't functioning well, either. Once they upgraded the equipment, they saw "such a dramatic difference with milk quality," Madeline said.

The next big change was installing Pasture Mat cow mattresses and flexible stall loops in the freestall barn for the milking herd. They now bed with kiln dried sawdust, instead of raw sawdust. When they purchased the new bulk tank, they opted to make a change from a top fill to a bottom fill tank, adding energy efficiency. They also installed a new plate cooler and a new cooling compressor for the bulk tank.

There are still a lot of improvements - "big goals which are not achievable right now" - to be made. The milking herd housing consists of two barns joined together. The original circa late 1800s tie stall, with a haymow above, was joined to a freestall barn with a center feed bunk with an elevator over it during the 1960s. The milking parlor was built in the middle where the two barns join, sometime in the 1960s.

Next, they expanded the herd, purchasing 47 cows. The only way for the dairy to remain financially viable was to grow the herd. They already had extreme internal growth by raising many heifers, but an opportunity arose to purchase cows from

a neighboring organic herd. It was the perfect boost to have the farm operating at full capacity.

Bruce and Madeline did contemplate another change: making a switch to robotic milking. It can be difficult to find hired help in their area, particularly for an early morning milking, and they do have three young children competing with the cows for their attention. The cows are milked twice per day, milking at 4:30AM and 4:00PM. Robots would solve the time and labor issue, but after some consideration they've opted not to take that route, and to plan improvements for other areas of the dairy.

One improvement will be adding a new freestall housing facility for the milking herd, although that is probably a decade away. Adding a simple structure for the dry cows and heifers, who are now unhoused 365 days/year, is planned within the next five years. They do a good job with stalls, so a simple stall design or maybe a bedded pack for the dry cows will improve herd health, keeping them out of the wind and rain, and reduce incidents of heat and cold stress, while protecting them from the frostbite that occurs due to the windy conditions they experience on the farm.

## Organic Foundations

One positive attribute was that the dairy had been certified organic since 2007, when her parents began shipping NOFA-certified organic milk to Organic Valley. Madeline was a youth at the time, and doesn't remember there being any real changes switching from conventional. Her parents weren't big on feeding grain and the cows were already grazing rotationally, and they didn't really use any antibiotics.



## FEATURED FARM

Working on a large, conventional dairy has been beneficial, Madeline said, as she learned to recognize health concerns early and can apply that knowledge to her own herd, although it is rarely needed. Displaced abomasum happened frequently in the conventional herd, and ketosis and metritis were much more common in that herd than they are in her organic herd, where they rarely occur.

“It gave me that broader view to see more problems that we don’t see on a smaller farm,” Madeline said of her herdsman experience. “We’re ahead of the game” health-wise on the smaller, organic dairy.

The biggest difference she encountered was the conventional dairy’s use of hormone treatments. The conventional herd relied on hormones to keep the cows bred and manage fertility. That doesn’t happen in organic dairy farming. Not relying on hormones is a change she has readily made.

Madeline and Bruce are very satisfied with the organic dairy experience. Organic Valley seems to have their pulse on the desires of the consumer, and “we always have a pretty good idea of what’s coming down the pipeline.”

### Making Milk

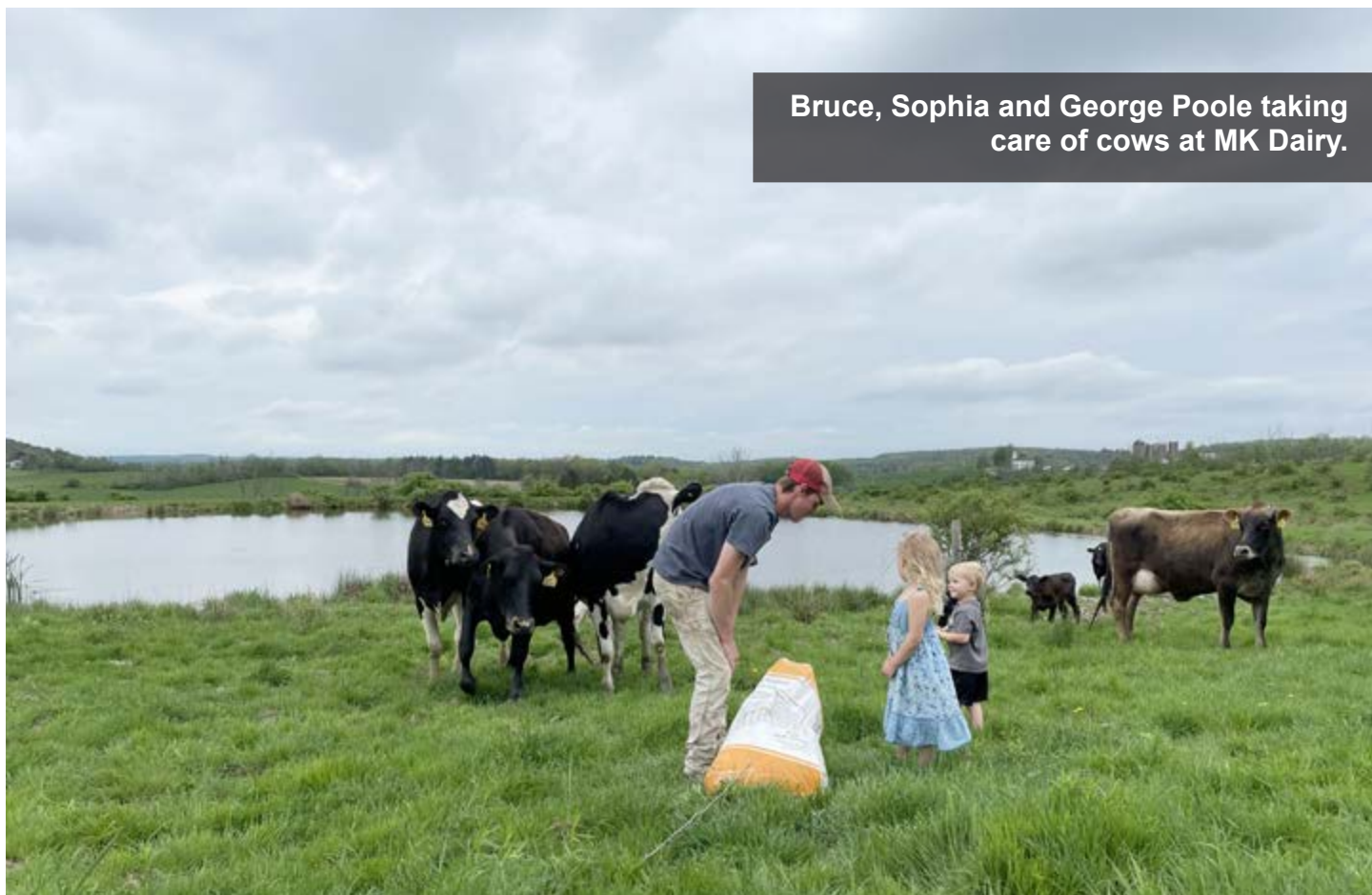
The milking herd averages 125 head at any given time. Currently, however, they are only milking 80 head. All of their cows got pregnant within one month, which was not the plan, and now they have an excess of dry cows. The herd is predominantly Holstein, with about 15 percent Jersey cows and five percent of a “mixed bag” of genetics, including Norwegian Red and Dutch Belted genetics. Once in a while, Madeline will crossbreed Holstein and Jersey genetics.

Her parents had more Jersey cows, and they bred using whatever bulls were locally available. Madeline uses artificial insemination for the milking herd, selecting for good feet and legs, for smaller stature Holstein cows, and for high components and longevity. Fertility and calving ease are important traits, she said. “We very rarely have to pull a calf.”

She has used Select Sires, but found the Holsteins to be “too leggy,” and those cows don’t do well in their management system. She now uses Genex genetics for all their semen. They have been relying on heat detection twice daily during chores,

*Continued on page 28*

**Bruce, Sophia and George Poole taking care of cows at MK Dairy.**



## FEATURED FARM



**Cows relax in the shade near the woods. They make their way to the barn if they need water.**

## MK DAIRY LLC - OWEGO, NY

*continued from page 27*

which has resulted in a high pregnancy rate above 25% at all times and a herd conception rate at 1.5 services per conception. They have been using a Holstein bull to breed their heifers out on pasture but as of this year they have installed Cow Manager and are going to breed all their heifers artificially. They breed most heifers to sexed semen. The milk cows are bred according to their performance in the herd. Any cow serviced more than 2 times receives beef semen.

The herd's average production per cow is 16,000 pounds per year. Butterfat is 4.4 percent, with 3.2 percent protein and 5.7 percent other solids. Somatic cell count typically is 100,000, but they are now struggling to keep it at 180,000 - 190,000. They test for milk quality and components six or seven times annually.

The milking herd consumes 57 percents of their dry matter intake from pasture, on average. While pasture makes an "easy feed," it also makes the herd healthier, she observed. "It's always above 50 percent," Madeline said. "Even during the worst drought year it was 38 percent. We always want to do better though when it comes to our pastures.

Early May until early to mid-October, is their grazing season. The cows receive no more than eight pounds of grain, year-round, in their fed ration. Corn silage helps to slow down their digestion, Madeline said. They try to feed it as part of the summer ration, but

they have run out by May the past few years, including this season. As a replacement, they'll try to feed the drier baleage bales of fescue or mixed grasses. And their nutritionist will try to put together a ration mix, based on protein levels. A Mineral package is also included in their grain.

The cows are fed while they wait their turn to milk, as there is no holding area in the barn. Instead, the cows are in the stalls, where they have access to the feed bunk and water troughs, keeping them content. After milking, they go out to graze fresh paddocks. In

the summer heat, they may stay in the barn during the day, and resume grazing in the evening. Cows are fed once per day during the grazing season. The winter ration consists of a total mixed ration of baleage, corn silage and eight pounds of grain, fed twice per day.

Pastures for the milking herd are close to the barn, and the cows are allowed access into the barn all day and night. There is no water in their pastures, but two troughs are readily accessible just inside the parlor and throughout the barn. No adverse effects from the cows having to return to the barn to drink have been noted.

The pastures are surrounded by high-tensile fencing, and broken down into paddocks with temporary fencing. Smaller sections of fresh grass are provided at a time, to prevent excessive trampling from the cows grazing any area for too long a time frame.

Dry cows, as well as pregnant and bred heifers – there are usually about 20 animals in this group – graze together and receive close to 100 percent of their DMI from grazing. This group has 36 acres in one pasture and 25 acres in another. It is not divided into paddocks, and has access to water from a 300-gallon tank. In the past, this group has grazed behind the milk cows. Either way, the group continually grazes and is outwintered on pasture, at this time.

Young heifers, aged six months to breeding age, are pastured during the grazing season on their own 15 acres behind the calf barn, where they can be readily trained.



## FEATURED FARM



### Calf Care and Herd Health

The herd has been healthy, with a vaccination program put into place and a clean environment for the cows, right from the start. Madeline is happy with the setup they have for their calves. They use Calf-Tel hutches for the first few weeks, and bottle feed the calves with raw milk from higher SCC cows, or with fresh cow milk. Colostrum is provided for the first two days and then the calves are on transition milk up to a week, depending on availability.

The calves then move into group pens, after they are trained on a bucket for milk, bedded with kiln dried sawdust, with five to ten animals per group. They are fed calf starter starting at 5 days old to three months, then transitioned to heifer grower from three months to seven months of age. Around 3 months of age, they are introduced to dry hay and baleage. Heifers are gradually weaned off milk between three to four months of age.

Calves receive two nasal vaccines and a First Defense pill at birth. They use Crystal Creek's Replena-Lytes to provide additional nutrition during times of stress, and both Madeline and Bruce are able to spot issues quickly. As long as scours is caught early, they can usually stabilize the calf, she said. Pneumonia is rare, but during weather conditions that favor its development, they might see a case in the calves in which they use Bovi-Sera and Banamine.

Mastitis isn't a real issue in the herd, despite the shift to higher somatic cell counts seen recently. Mastitis is cultured when spotted and 90 percent of the time it is *Streptococcus uberis*. They believe most of their issues originate from the dry period and not being able to control the dry cow environment as they are always outside.

Their veterinarian is used for pregnancy checks and to answer questions, and about once per year there is a "weird case" where the veterinarian's input is "invaluable," Madeline said. She and Bruce can both start IVs, so they can treat a lot of issues themselves.

While they were growing the herd, they had a replacement rate of 110 percent. They've adjusted back to a rate of 65 – 70 percent, and will sell bull-bred heifers if needed, being more selective with replacements. Two years ago, they sold 26 pregnant heifers. Culls are sold to the local sales barn, to the Cargill meat plant, or to Nicholas Meats a few hours away in Pennsylvania. They have been getting more money selling on the conventional market, rather than the organic one.

"We need to focus and feed the good cows, and get the most out of them," Madeline and Bruce said.

Madeline and Bruce have found a way to return home and raise their three children - Sophia, six; George, four; and Henry, eight months old - on her family's land, and successfully transitioning the family dairy farm to the next generation. Returning to her roots and dedicating herself to a small, organic dairy farm, has been the right decision for her family.

"I'm happy we're doing it. Our cows are healthy. We're doing it well. We'll always have high standards and that's okay." ♦

*Madeline and Bruce can be reached at MK Dairy, LLC, Madeline (607)744-9939, and Bruce (607)744-1695. The NODPA Field Days Thursday morning farm tour (9/26/24) will be at MK Dairy, and Madeline will be participating in a workshop on transition planning.*



## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS



Photo: Lukas Hartmann, Pexels

## Organic Roots, Regenerative Growth: Uniting Farming Principles for a Sustainable Tomorrow

*By Elizabeth Tobey, Organic Farming Research Foundation*

In recent years, the term “regenerative agriculture” has surged into public consciousness, captivating both consumers and policymakers seeking sustainable solutions to the challenges posed by climate change. However, amidst the growing enthusiasm for regenerative practices, there is a pressing need to ensure its alignment with established organic agricultural principles. This urgency stems from the realization that not all practices labeled as “regenerative” truly embody the holistic, environmentally-conscious approach that the term implies.

### Organic Agriculture: A Cornerstone of Regenerative Practices

Organic is an age old, holistic system of farming. Many organic practices are rooted in Indigenous land stewardship and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Organic is principles-based, works with nature, builds healthy soil, and enhances clean water, biodiversity, and farm communities. Farmers have been using these practices since long before the terms “organic” or “regenerative”

were coined. Yet, as a wave of climate-change awareness sweeps over decision-makers in food and agriculture policy, organic farming is often overlooked as a climate solution. It is imperative that organic farmers are recognized as the climate heroes they are, and that they receive federal funding and support accordingly.

The state of California is in the process of trying to define regenerative agriculture, claiming that incorporating a definition of regenerative agriculture for state policies and programs provides a science-based criterion for the designation or recognition of the term “regenerative” in agriculture-related policies of the state. In order to preserve the holistic essence of regenerative and avoid greenwashing it is essential that organic certification is recognized as a baseline. Organic certification provides a solid foundation for defining regenerative practices, ensuring measurable outcomes, contextual relevance, and universal applicability. If you’re interested in this process, the State Board has centered public input and we encourage you to get involved. The next Public Listening Session

## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

is Wednesday, May 29, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. PST and recordings of previous sessions are available on the CDFA website.

### Understanding the Landscape

Although the term regenerative has gained traction, definitions vary widely. Currently the term does not have a legally binding definition or system for enforcement. Unfortunately, the lack of a legally accepted definition leads to confusion among consumers, dilution of the meaning, and vulnerability to greenwashing. For instance in some cases it is used to describe conventional agriculture that adopts a single conservation practice, such as no-till, and labels it regenerative. Changing one practice and calling it regenerative misses the mark of what truly whole-system, regionally-adapted, thoughtfully-practiced organic and regenerative agriculture can be.

Proponents of regenerative farming systems point to its focus on minimizing external inputs while maximizing practices that work with nature and the ecology. Organic farming does both of these things, and does them very well. They are part of what is legally required for organic certification. This is part of what makes organic a verifiable legal standard that can be relied upon in the journey towards creating more regenerative farming systems.

### Aligning Regenerative Agriculture with Organic Certification

The symbiotic relationship between organic and regenerative agriculture is apparent when we look at the goals of both. The NRDC conducted a Scientific Literature Review of Journal Articles on the term “regenerative agriculture.” Looking at 229 sources they identified the 5 top cited practices associated with regenerative agriculture and their desired outcomes. They are: 1. Reduce Tillage (40.9%); 2. Integrate Livestock (40.9%); 3. Use Cover Crop (36.4%); 4. Use Crop Rotations (31.8%); 5. Low to no external inputs (31.8%). The top five desired outcomes were: 1. Improve Soil Health and Fertility; 2. Increase Carbon Sequestration; 3. Increase Biodiversity; 4. Improve Water Health; 5. Improve soil and/or economic wellbeing of communities. Organic agriculture employs these practices and achieves these goals. In short, organic farming practices support the same goals as regenerative farming: building healthy ecosystems and communities.

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) recently released a messaging toolkit, Organic is Regenerative, to help convey the ways that organic practices embody purported regenerative goals. The toolkit includes resources for organic advocates to share these messages with their networks, such as a social media kit, a slideshow presentation, an informational flier, and an introductory memo, as well as additional resources and science- and standards-based evidence supporting the messages. The toolkit is available at [www.ofrf.org/organic-is-regenerative](http://www.ofrf.org/organic-is-regenerative)

In the toolkit OFRF identifies three pillars of organic agriculture and illustrates how they align with regenerative goals. These pillars are: Organic Agriculture Supports a Resilient Planet, Organic Agriculture Builds Healthy Communities, and Organic Agriculture is Trustworthy.

### Organic Agriculture Supports a Resilient Planet



Organic farming holds tremendous potential to serve as a bulwark against climate change, fostering resilience and vitality in agricultural ecosystems. Through methods such as cover cropping, diversified crop rotation, and meticulous soil management, organic farmers bolster soil health, sequester carbon, and safeguard biodiversity. The emphasis on whole-system health underscores organic agriculture's role in nurturing a resilient planet.

**Organic is Climate Friendly:** By building healthy soils that retain water and store carbon, organic agriculture builds resilience and stabilizes our food supply in the face of drought and other extreme weather conditions that will occur with increasing frequency in a changing climate.

**Organic is Healthy for Soils:** Organic farming practices contribute to the long-term fertility of the soil. The deeper, more biologically active soils of mature organic systems that have higher SOC can improve crop and livestock resilience to drought and other weather extremes. (Lori et al., 2017, as cited in OFRF soils report, pg 24). Cover crops, a staple in organic farming, play a crucial role in soil

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Organic Roots, Regenerative Growth

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protection and carbon sequestration. Studies have shown that nearly 90% of organic farmers incorporate cover crops into their rotations, resulting in reduced soil erosion and increased carbon storage.

**Organic Safeguards Biodiversity:** Organic growers prioritize crop diversity and intercropping, contributing to high levels of diversity in plant and animal communities above and below ground, and further enhancing ecosystem resilience and fertility. Research has found that organically managed lands have higher rates of both species richness and abundance when compared to conventional cropping systems.

**Organic is Systems-Focused:** Organic agriculture is based on whole-systems thinking, not on any single practice. The emphasis on whole-system health underscores organic agriculture's role in nurturing a resilient planet. As the Organic Farmers Association put it: "Organic farms are managed in concert with natural systems to enhance the ecology of our local ecosystems, including clean air, water, soil, and food."

## Organic Agriculture Builds Healthy Communities



Beyond environmental stewardship, organic agriculture fosters vibrant and thriving communities. The economic impact of organic farming reverberates throughout the supply chain, generating jobs and bolstering local economies. Moreover, organic practices prioritize the well-being of farmworkers, rural residents, and consumers alike, by minimizing their exposure to harmful synthetic chemicals used in conventional agriculture.

**Organic is Good for the Economy:** Organic agriculture provides economic benefits and opportunity for growth. The organic sector has witnessed exponential growth in recent years, with sales surpassing \$60 billion in the United States alone. This surge in demand reflects a growing consumer consciousness about health, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility.

**Organic is Safer for Farmworkers and Rural Residents:** Organic protects the health of farmers, farmworkers, and people in agricultural areas by ensuring safer working conditions and healthier food options for consumers. Organic farmers guard health by avoiding nearly all synthetic pesticides and fertilizers commonly used in conventional farming, which ensures that people are less exposed to harmful chemicals, whether in their workplaces, in their communities, or at the dinner table. (NRDC report, pg 23)

**Organic is Better for People:** Eating organically helps protect people from toxic pesticide and herbicide residue on food products. Diet is a primary source of pesticide exposure. Data shows that pesticides

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

disrupt healthy functioning of our bodies. Many of the pesticides widely used in our food supply are known to cause cancer, affect the body's hormonal systems, disrupt fertility, damage children's developing brains, or cause Parkinson's, depression, or Alzheimer's as we age. Organic farmers grow abundant food without the use of these toxic synthetic pesticides.

Given the cancer, neurodevelopmental, and other health risks associated with synthetic pesticides, organic agriculture is an important alternative approach for protecting farmworkers and their families.

**Organic is Better for Animals:** Organic farming prioritizes healthy animals. Organic management reduces stress in livestock, reducing the incidence of diseases and supporting animal welfare. Use of antibiotics and hormones is prohibited in organic production. Instead, organic producers must use holistic practices to maintain the health of livestock, such as providing a forage-based diet on certified organic pasture for at least 120 days per year; providing adequate space and year-round access to outdoors; allowing livestock to engage in natural behaviors; and choosing appropriate breeds based on site-specific conditions such as resistance to the region's prevalent diseases and parasites. (Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production, 2018, and Livestock health care practice standard, 2018, as cited in CCOF report, pg 32, ref 267 & 268).

### Organic Agriculture is Trustworthy



Central to the ethos of organic farming is transparency and accountability. Rigorous third-party certification ensures adherence to sustainable practices, providing consumers with confidence

in their food choices. Organic agriculture's roots in traditional ecological knowledge underscore its time-tested efficacy, and the organic standards are designed to evolve and improve, ensuring continued relevance in a changing world.

**Organic is Third-Party Certified:** The National Organic Program (NOP) provides integrity and accountability. Organic farming has a clear and accepted legal definition which makes it a solid tool for holding farmers and food producers accountable to sustainable practices, and letting consumers know what they are supporting with their food purchases. In order to sell products labeled "organic" farmers and food processors must undergo a rigorous certification process which includes working with a USDA-accredited third-party certifier who reviews a comprehensive organic systems plan and conducts annual inspections. This level of accountability fosters consumer confidence and strengthens the organic market.

**Organic is Non-GMO:** Organic is the choice for consumers wanting to avoid GMOs. Organic certification prohibits farmers from using genetically modified seed and requires practices that prevent contact of organic crops with GMOs. To meet the USDA organic regulations, farmers and processors must show they aren't using GMOs, and that

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Organic Roots, Regenerative Growth

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they are protecting their products from contact with prohibited substances, such as GMOs, from farm to table.

**Organic is Tried and True:** Organic agriculture is time-tested and scientifically supported. Organic farming is not new, Indigenous Cultures the world over have been practicing organic methods of caring for land and cultivating crops since time immemorial. The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA) created a National Organic Program (NOP) that provides a consistent framework and third-party certification system for agricultural products labeled “organic,” informed by decades of experience of farmers and ranchers, soil and plant scientists, food system workers, environmentalists, and consumers. (NRDC report, pg 4)

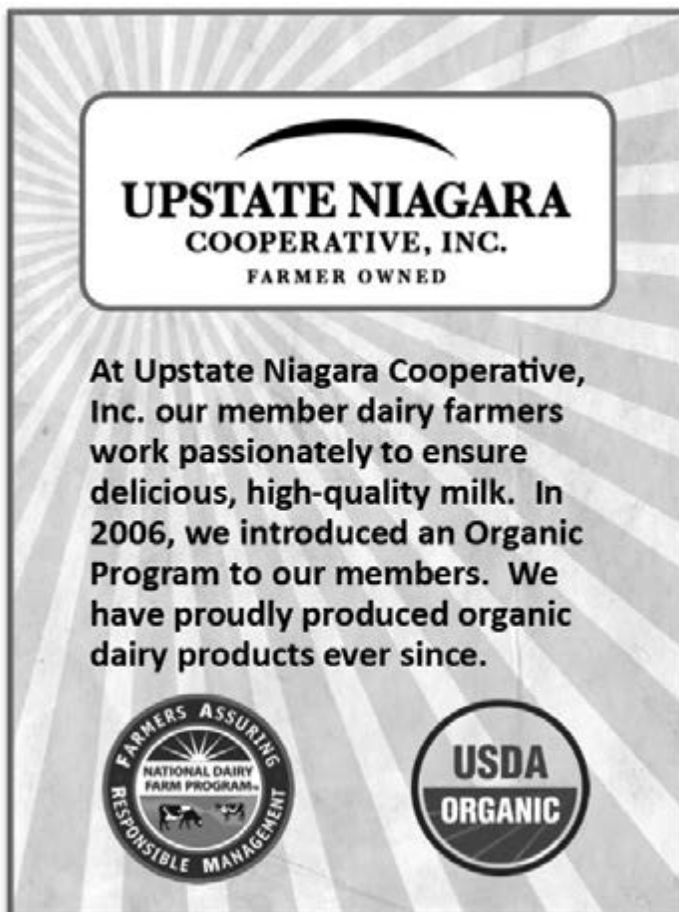
**Organic is Evolving and Improving:** The organic standards are designed to be responsive to changing needs. There are built-in pathways for improvement within the organic standards.

Established by the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) and governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), the NOSB considers and makes recommendations on a wide range of issues involving the production, handling, and processing of organic products. The NOSB also has special responsibilities related to the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

### Looking Ahead

As one of the largest agricultural producers in the United States, California’s approach to regenerative agriculture carries significant implications for the broader industry as we seek to transition towards more sustainable agricultural systems. This leadership role underscores the importance of aligning regenerative agriculture with organic certification and ensuring the integrity of sustainability claims in the marketplace.

Proponents of organic agriculture have worked for decades to establish the legal framework of the organic standards and certification process. We can build on this to cultivate a future where agriculture thrives in harmony with nature, nourishing people and the planet. ♦



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## Classified Ads

### ANIMALS

**FOR SALE: Certified 100% Grassfed Organic Spring-calving Herd.** 30 of the 55 are A2A2. Holstein, Friesian, Normande & Jersey crosses. Cows Bred to Holstein, Heifers to Black Angus. A2A2 \$3,500 each, others \$3,000. Contact Rob Moore, 607-699-7968, [cowpoke2@verizon.net](mailto:cowpoke2@verizon.net)

**Location: Nichols, NY**

**FOR SALE: 17 month certified organic Jersey bull**, polled, all grass, not grass fed certified but all we do is graze and hay, no silage no dried grains. Has been with the herd since birth and has successfully bred 16 of the cows. Would like to get \$1500 for him if possible. Call Courtland & Jenny Rocco, 330-235-3953, BlueLoon Farm.

**Location: Wayne County, Ohio**

**WANTED: Looking for a small organic milking herd** - we anticipate a starting ship date of 9/1. Enthusiastically await your responses. Thank you! MacLean Family Farm, [danthemanmaclean@gmail.com](mailto:danthemanmaclean@gmail.com), 607-592-1581.

**Location: Ithaca, NY**

### EQUIPMENT

**FOR SALE: 100 gallon mobile bulk tank.** New milkplan bulk tank set up to be mobile with automatic wash system. \$13,500, OBO. Contact Allen Healy, [allenhealy@gmail.com](mailto:allenhealy@gmail.com), 508-939-0140.

**Location: Chilmark, MA**

**FOR SALE: 3 bottom Kuhn rollover plow**, needs some points otherwise has little use. \$9,500, OBO. Contact Allen Healy, [allenhealy@gmail.com](mailto:allenhealy@gmail.com), 508-939-0140.

**Location: Chilmark, MA**

**Equipment Wanted: 200 gallon vat pasteurizer** for on farm processing. Would like to purchase by end of year. Will pick up or arrange shipping. Please call or email Travis (434) 249-1420, [Hurt.tr@gmail.com](mailto:Hurt.tr@gmail.com)

**Location: Chicago, IL**

### FEED AND GRAIN

**FOR SALE: We sold our cows and have feed left over.** We have 46 certified 2nd and 3rd cutting and 20 1st cutting bales. All are wrapped baleage the 1st is in a tube. the 2nd and 3rd are individually wrapped. Call Shannon at (845)702-8942, [kofarm8987@gmail.com](mailto:kofarm8987@gmail.com)

**Location: Holland Patent, NY**

### EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**HELP WANTED: Livestock Manager** at Balfour Farm, Pittsfield, ME. This is Full Time and Year Round. Balfour Farm is a diversified organic dairy farm and creamery located in Pittsfield, Maine and established in 2010. We milk up to 20 Normande cows. All milk is processed on site. The farm is off grid. We milk year round. Whey from our cheesemaking is fed to our pig herd and we have a flock of 200-350 laying hens. We use rotational grazing and put up our own hay. We are in the process of becoming part of the DGA network. Livestock Manager primary duties include milking, animal health, feeding, watering, fencing, AND record keeping. Full details can be found on our website: <https://www.balfourfarmdairy.com/employment>, call (207)213-3159, or email: [balfourfarm@gmail.com](mailto:balfourfarm@gmail.com)

**Location: Pittsfield, ME**

## ORGANIC PRODUCTION

### Ask the Vet

*continued from page 19*

and illness from COVID-19 were classified as mRNA vaccines. This type of vaccine has a strand of directions called mRNA that instructs the immune system cells to build a harmless piece of the offending virus. In the case of COVID-19, that piece is a spike protein. The immune system then learns to recognize the pathogen and prepares to mount an immune response if and when it is confronted with the actual disease. While I don't want to get into a discussion about the controversy around this type of vaccine, I will say that there are currently no mRNA vaccines that are approved for use in cattle. This means that none of the vaccines recommended to you by your veterinarian are mRNA vaccines. It is also important to remember that all vaccines have a 21-day meat withhold, preventing any recently vaccinated animal from entering the food system.

A tenant of successful organic dairy farming is taking a multipronged approach, whether it's for soil health, pasture management, or preventative medicine. Providing good preventative care includes excellent animal welfare, appropriate nutrition, protocol development and planning for disease. Vaccines are a preventative medicine tool that can help prepare for the real possibility of disease on farm. Organic farming is limited when confronted with diseases common in dairy cows. It is valuable to utilize all strategies to prevent these diseases. Vaccines are safe to use, and all cattle vaccines available are approved for use in organic. I encourage you to talk with your veterinarian to better understand what vaccines would be best suited for your farm's needs. ♦

*Do you have a question for Dr. Locitzer, or an area you'd like her to focus on in future issue? Please send them to the NODPA News editor, [noraowens@comcast.net](mailto:noraowens@comcast.net) who will share them with her.*



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