NODPA News

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

January 2025 Volume 25, Issue 1 WWW.NODPA.COM

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:
Organic Industry News

Organic Production

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The Annual NODPA Fund Drive is Underway!

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Reserve Champion cow at North East All Breeds Spring Show , Teresa, Warren (grandson), Kinley, Henry, Marjorie (daughter), Elsie (granddaughter), Ashlie (daughter)

FEATURED FARM: HARDY FARM

FARMINGTON, ME

Owned and Operated by the Hardy Family

Ayrshires: Not just for Show

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

Hardy Farm has been proud of their registered Ayrshire dairy herd, established in the 1940s. While the Ayrshires rule the roost, the herd also has registered Holsteins. But the Ayrshire genetics are the farm's "strong point," Henry Hardy said, and "we are well known for the genetics now, and we sell quite a bit."

Just don't tell that to the 18 current Holsteins, which are "about 20 too many," joked his

- continued on page 26

To All Certified Producers, Dairies and Other Commodities.

We need your opinion on your certifier's inspection requirements. Please help!

We have been hearing from many certified producers that their certifier's requirements have increased dramatically in 2024, along with the cost. The requirements, from certifier to certifier, have varied in format, content, and detail. We support Strengthening Organic Enforcement and Origin of Livestock but the implementation can be problematic, with increased burden for small to mid-size operations. WODPA and NODPA are collecting information regarding certification as well as OOL & SOE implementation. Please complete the form or follow the link **as soon as possible** to help us advocate with policy makers, stakeholders and the NOP. **Please go to Page 19 or online at** https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfMpKq_ALdoa9DpF0_q-QdPrA3kSlvKdcTjCLbby9nm3gWI5A/viewform?usp=sf_link ◆

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Message from NODPA Co-President

Feed Those Cows

If you're 100% grass fed and you want to make money at it, you need to feed your cows. They need to be stuffed at all times, especially in cold weather. Working for Maple Hill Creamery the last couple months, I have been on a lot of farms. Most cows are too thin and most dairymen wish there would be more milk in the tank. This year, with the shortage of grass in pasture and the shortage of hay in the field, there are a lot of farmers that seem to be skimping on feed.

Hay quality is hard to manage especially when you buy it. And good hay is pricey, but you need to feed those cows. Remember that calories from grain are much denser than calories from hay. Cows on 100% grass diet eat a lot of hay. Skimping on hay is kicking yourself and your cows. Don't do it. Feed them lots of hay and keep them stuffed.

Roman Stoltzfoos, NODPA Co-President

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NODPA News is Published Bi-Monthly

January, March, May, July, September & November

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Organic Dairy News: January 2025

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

There is continued movement of producers to different buyers, mostly under Grass Fed organic certification but also those that do not have the add-on certification. Transparency on Pay Price and market conditions from the milk buyer serves the farmers and the organic dairy market far better than rumors spread from farmer to farmer or by the milk truck drivers. More shared information allows producers to make clear choices for their operation and future security. Buyers and producers: please share information with NODPA, a trusted source for independent information over the last 24 years, either by email or on Odairy.

Maple Hill reports that they continue to sign more and more producers in Pennsylvania, New York, and are now expanding into Ohio, with their unique incentive plan and higher Pay Price. The expectation is that most will finalize the move within 6 months. The one big question that producers ask before moving to Maple Hill is how secure their market is after it crashed in 2022, leaving many producers with no market. Maple Hill representatives reassure producers that they now have completely new management, tighter controls on supply, access to capital and are expanding in response to market demand.

Horizon is also signing up larger operations in central New York that are closer to their processor and have good access for tractor trailers, with a Pay Price reportedly up to $45/cwt, a signing bonuses and no-interest loans on top of the higher milk price. Representatives for Horizon's new owners, global investment firm Platinum Equity, have not responded to questions about their future or their recent recall of packaged products, which raise questions about their supply chain and choice of processor.

CROPP Cooperative producers are moving to other buyers and are upset about CROPP's new move to encourage larger operations with its recent volume incentive and unconfirmed reports that a 1,200+ cow dairy in Texas will be in the Reserve Pool, giving the cooperative more flexibility in paying a higher Pay Price. Reports

- continued on page 18

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Cost of Production on Grass-fed Dairy Farms in the Northeast in 2023

By Heather Darby, Sara Ziegler & Sarah Flack

Introduction

Since 2018 our research team has been collecting and analyzing financial data from 100% grass-fed dairy producers in the northeast with the goal to better understand the cost of producing milk in this production system. With several years of data, we have been able to create a useful benchmark for northeast grass-fed dairy producers.[1] This article will summarize the 2023 dataset and begin to explore management system and production practice impacts on cost of production and profitability.

Dairy farms located in NY, NH, and VT that are shipping 100% grass-fed milk were able to participate in the study. Data are presented as an overall average for all farms in the study and also divided into groups by total cost of production. Three groups were created representing low (<$45), medium ($45-$55), and high (>$55) production costs on a hundredweight equivalent (cwt eq.) basis. Total cwt eq. shipped for each farm was determined by converting dairy-related non-milk income (i.e., crop sales, calf sales, etc.) into an equivalent number of milk hundredweights which is then added to the milk hundredweights sold. While our focus is on the cost to produce grass-fed milk, the data collected included information on changes in inventory (herd, equipment, etc.), and asset values allowing net farm income from operations (NFIFO), return on assets (ROA), and operating profit margin (OPM) to be calculated. These data are reported in Table 1 (page 6).

2023 Farm Demographics

Participating farms were selling milk to Organic Valley (58%), Maple Hill Creamery (19%), and other local markets (23%). The herd size ranged from 30 to 123 milking cows with an average of 60 cows per farm. Farms were managing an average of 295 acres resulting in 4.5 acres available per mature cow (Figure 1). The farms estimated they purchased on average 34.2% of their herd's forage needs.

Herds were mainly composed of crossbreeds, however, there were farms milking pure-bred Holstein, Jersey, and other breeds which differ in milk and fat production. While most farms milked year-round, there were some fully seasonal herds (16%) and herds milking at frequencies other than twice daily (16%).

Income and Expenses

Farm production practices and management varied widely among the farms and for obvious reasons this influenced farm income and expenses. Farms shipped an average of 513,321 lbs of milk per year (Table 1). Milk sold averaged 8,503 lbs per cow per year but ranged from 2,338 to 12,984 lbs per cow per year. These values reflect only milk that was shipped off the farm and does not include milk fed to youngstock or diverted for other uses and therefore does not reflect total milk production. Since the quantity of milk being diverted to youngstock was collected in 2023, that amount can be added to the pounds of milk sold to estimate total milk produced. The average total milk production for the farms was 568,627 lbs compared to the average milk sold of 513,321 lbs. Therefore, milk production per cow averaged 9,250 lbs/cow while milk shipped averaged 8,503 lbs/cow. In 2023, farms fed an average 1.76 gallons/calf/day for 5.25 months which equated to 2,407 lbs/milk/calf. These farms raised on average 17 calves which consumed $15,173 worth of milk per farm. With an average herd size of 60 cows, these farms could raise only 12 calves to meet their replacement rates. The extra 5 calves (21% cull rate) represent $4,824 of lost milk income for each farm on average. If extra animals are going to be raised to sell, the quantity of milk and high-quality forage fed prior to sale needs to be considered as this may not be a profitable venture.

The average pay price farms received for their milk was $40.47 but ranged from $31.03 to $47.10 per cwt of milk sold. There

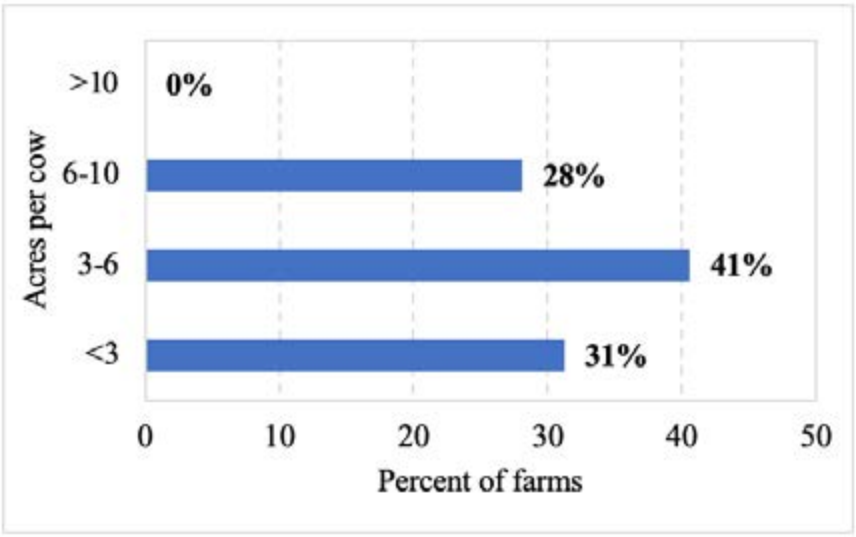


Figure 1. Distribution of acres per cow for participating farms

[1] https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Northwest-Crops-and-Soils-Program/Articles_and_Factsheets/2018-2020_COP_Report_1_Cost_of_Grassfed_Production.pdf

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

were several different milk buyers which pay different premiums and base rates, and it is important to note that some of the farms included were not receiving a grass-fed premium and therefore were receiving a lower price per cwt. Gross farm income averaged $230,061 with $205,469 from milk sales and an additional $24,592 of other income (i.e., calf sales, crop sales, cull beef and other income). Note that COVID-19 grant funds and federal and state milk insurance program payments were not included in the data, however, other dairy program income (e.g. organic certification reimbursement) was included in the other income category.

Data were collected using the Dairy TRANS financial analysis tool with a standardized method (https://www.extension.iastate.edu/dairyteam/files/documents/DairyTRANS4PPT.pdf). In-depth interviews were also conducted for each participating farm in 2023 to gain additional details relating to management on grass-fed dairies. In addition to cash expenses, this method includes

Table 1. Average farm summary statistics by cost group, 2023.

	Low cost <$45 per cwt eq. Average (n = 12)	Medium cost $45-$55 per cwt eq. Average (n = 12)	High cost >$55 per cwt eq. Average (n=8)	All Average (n = 32)
Farm Information				
Herd size	61	64	55	60
Acres	218	350	330	295
Acres per cow	3.32	4.84	5.76	4.50
Fertilizer & seed expense ($/cow)	$140	$117	$149	$134
Fertilizer & seed expense ($/acre)	$46	$26	$26	$34
Purchased forage expenses ($/cow)	$568	$399	$90	$385
Purchased forage expenses ($/acre)	$217	$134	$20	$137
Milk Information				
Milk sold (lbs/year)	597,809	483,730	430,976	513,321
Milk sold (lbs/cow/year)	10,009	7,831	7,252	8,503
Milk sold (lbs/acre)	3,443	2,069	1,425	2,423
Fat sold (lbs/cow)	436	365	327	382
Fat sold (lbs/acre)	150	98	65	110
Labor Efficiency				
Full-time Equivalents (FTEs)	2.16	2.29	2.52	2.26
Cows managed (cows/FTE)	31	28	24	28
Milk sold (cwt eq. per FTE)	3,367	2,546	1,830	2,675
Unpaid labor (hrs)	5,077	5,229	6,848	5,577
Unpaid labor ($)	$73,791	$71,331	$91,486	$77,292
Return to labor	$73,990	$25,532	$8,757	$39,510
Labor earnings ($/hr)	$14.24	$7.50	$1.81	$8.61
Farm Income				
Milk price ($/cwt)	$39.08	$41.13	$41.57	$40.47
Gross Milk Income	$233,802	$197,646	$174,704	$205,469
Gross Cull, Calf, & Livestock Sales	$11,741	$12,548	$12,885	$12,330
Gross Crop Sales	$3,441	$283	$1,452	$1,759
Other Income	$9,184	$15,986	$4,256	$10,503
Total Gross Income	$258,168	$226,423	$193,296	$230,061
Net				
Net Cash Income (NCI)	$107,855	$74,606	$62,045	$83,934
Inventory Change	-$10,823	-$13,329	-$19,390	-$13,905
Net Farm Income From Operations (NFIFO)	$97,032	$61,277	$42,655	$70,030
4% Equity Charge	$23,042	$35,745	$33,898	$30,520
Return on Assets (ROA)	3.10%	-1.70%	-7.10%	-1.25%
Operating Profit Margin (OPM)	7.20%	-6.80%	-38.00%	-9.38%
Asset Turnover Ratio (ATR)	51.11%	31.63%	22.69%	36.70%
ATR length (years)	2.16	3.76	5.06	3.48

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

an unpaid labor charge per owner/operator and per additional unpaid full-time worker (3,000 hours). It also includes inventory change adjustments (to factor in changes in herd size or equipment inventory and value), and a 4% charge on the farm's assets instead of loan and interest payments. These standardizations allow farms with no debt and farms with significant debt to be more evenly compared. The unpaid labor charge of $40,000 has been used in previous years, however, to account for cost-of-living increases this has been increased to $46,045 in 2023. This unpaid labor charge standardizes owner/worker income allowing for fair comparison between owners who draw an income, and those who rely on off-farm income or another enterprise to cover living expenses.

With these standardizations, the average total cost per cwt eq. across all farms was $49.63, which is very similar to what has been observed in previous years. The average pay-price per cwt of milk sold was $40.47, however it should be noted that some farms in the study were not receiving a grass-fed milk premium. The additional non-milk income per farm ($24,592 per year per farm on average) may be due to farmers trying to diversify their income with other enterprises which can subsidize the dairy business. Of the participating farms, only 28% relied solely on the dairy enterprise for income. Farms were raising other livestock, producing maple products, growing bedding plants, processing meat, and running other on-farm enterprises. Some farms (9%) also indicated they earned off-farm income. The lowest cost group, representing approximately 38% of farms, had a total cost per cwt eq. of $39.57, slightly below the average pay price of $40.47. The other two groups (62% of farms) had a total cost of production which exceeded the average pay price. It is important to recognize that this includes the standardized family living draw which may differ considerably from what they may choose to pay themselves. Many participants in the study here were paying themselves significantly less or nothing at all.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Looking at some of the expenses in more detail, cash expenses ranged widely across farms (Table 2). Note that in Dairy TRANS a 4% charge on the farm's equity is included instead of interest. The largest cash expense on farms was purchased forage which accounted for 15.7% of cash expenses. Other major expenses included repairs, supplies, and hired labor.

Acreage ranged from 1.9 to 9.5 acres per mature cow, with some farms purchasing a significant portion of their forages, while other farms produced all their own feed and even sold hay. Some of the lowest expense categories included breeding fees, machine rental, veterinary expenses, and energy supplements (e.g. molasses) which each accounted for <2% of cash expenses respectively. Interestingly, in previous years energy supplements accounted for approximately 2% of cash expenses and 3-4% for the high-cost groups. Supplemental energy costs increased in 2022 compared to 2019 and 2020 levels which may be due to farmers utilizing energy supplements to balance poorer quality forage. In 2023, however, supplemental energy only accounted for 1% of cash expenses on average and while the high-cost group is still spending significantly more than the other groups on energy, it still only accounts for 2.3% of cash expenses. This may be due to higher quality forage being produced or farmers deciding not to purchase energy due to its significant cost. In previous years we have found that farms that purchased supplemental energy had a cost of production that averaged $11.25 per cwt eq. higher than those who did not, and they did not ship more milk per cow. However, if those farms were utilizing supplemental energy to overcome poor quality forage perhaps the milk shipped per cow would have been significantly lower.

Table 2. Average of cash expenses ($/cwt eq.) by total cost group, 2023.

	Low cost <$45 per cwt eq.	Medium cost $45-$55 per cwt eq.	High cost >$55 per cwt eq.	All
Bedding*	$1.00	$0.76	$0.72	$0.84
Breeding fees	$0.12	$0.22	$0.28	$0.20
Custom hire	$0.69	$1.13	$0.72	$0.86
Machine rental	$0.17	$0.32	$0.31	$0.26
Land rental	$1.46	$0.72	$1.01	$1.07
Dairy supplies	$1.62	$2.63	$3.25	$2.41
Farm insurance	$0.27	$1.05	$1.25	$0.81
Fuel, gas, and oil	$1.55	$2.05	$2.51	$1.98
Hired labor	$1.91	$3.39	$1.63	$2.39
Property taxes	$0.78	$1.66	$2.20	$1.46
Purchased forages	$5.32	$4.57	$1.16	$4.00
Minerals	$0.71	$0.88	$0.90	$0.82
Energy supplements	$0.17	$0.18	$0.63	$0.29
Repairs	$2.35	$2.63	$3.50	$2.74
Seed and fertilizer	$1.23	$1.32	$1.59	$1.35
Utilities	$0.62	$0.84	$1.34	$0.88
Veterinary and medicine	$0.12	$0.34	$0.52	$0.30
Stop and hauling	$0.75	$1.23	$1.43	$1.10
Other	$3.71	$4.27	$6.28	$1.16
Total cash expense ($/cwt eq.)**	$22.20	$27.42	$27.22	$25.41
Total cash expense ($/cow)	$2,482	$2,423	$2,145	$2,376
Total cash expense ($/farm)	$150,314	$151,857	$131,251	$146,126
Total cost ($/cwt eq.)***	$39.57	$49.72	$64.59	$49.63

*Costs and cost groups expressed on a $/CWT eq. basis adjusted for additional non-milk income.

**As calculated in Dairy TRANS; interest expenses are not included

***Total cost per cwt eq. includes balance sheet adjustments such as inventory change, a 4% charge on farm equity in lieu of interest payments, and a standard charge for unpaid labor.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Labor efficiency

The average number of full-time equivalent (FTE) workers operating a farm was 2.3. One FTE is defined as 3,000 labor hours per year and includes both paid and unpaid labor. Therefore, the average number of cows managed by 1 FTE was 28. This metric had an enormous range from 11 to 51 cows per FTE, indicating large differences in labor efficiency. Some of these differences may be attributed to inefficient milking systems. Fifty percent of farms in the high-cost group milked in tie stalls compared to only 25% in the low-cost group. Similarly, the high-cost group milked on average three fewer cows per labor hour compared to the low-cost group. However, we must also consider milk production to better understand the economic implication of these labor differences. The average milk sold per FTE was 2,675 cwt eq./FTE but ranged from 1,118 to 4,620 cwt eq./FTE across all farms. The average milk sold on the high-cost farms was 1,830 cwt eq./FTE while it was more than twice that at 3,367 cwt eq./FTE on the low-cost farms. As described previously, some of this discrepancy may be due to milk being diverted to feed youngstock and possibly too many replacement animals being raised. As grass-fed dairy farms work to find ways to be financially sustainable, labor efficiency is clearly one of the areas that will benefit from additional focus.

Farm Financial Health Metrics

The Net Cash Income (NCI) is the farm's total gross income minus the farm's total cash expenses. Dairy TRANS does not include the farm's interest expense in NCI, instead it uses a 4% equity charge on assets in the calculation of total cost. The calculation of NCI also does not include adjustments for inventory change, principal payments on loans, or unpaid labor (family living expense). Assigning a 4% equity charge and assigning $46,045 per owner/operator and per FTE of additional unpaid labor allows farms' total cost of production to be compared on a more level playing field.

Net Farm Income from Operations (NFIFO) is the farm's NCI plus inventory change, depreciation, and other capital adjustments. So, this calculation includes changes in numbers and value of feed, livestock, machinery, equipment, accounts payable and receivable, and real estate from the beginning to the end of the year. The average NFIFO was $70,030 but ranged from -$26,001 to $185,691. For easier interpretation, this value can be looked at per cwt of milk sold. In doing so the average NFIFO was $11.97 per cwt eq. and ranged from -$7.23 to $21.64 per cwt eq. The NFIFO is not farm profit; it is just what is left over after cash expenses and inventory changes to pay the opportunity costs of unpaid family labor and unpaid equity.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Return on Assets averaged -1.25%, however it ranged from -17.6% to 12.7%. This indicates that on average grass-fed dairy farms are losing 1.25 cents on every dollar of assets on the farm. Operating Profit Margin (OPM) averaged -9.38% but ranged from –106% to 19.3%. The low-cost group had a positive OPM average of 7.2% while the medium- and high-cost groups were negative with the high-cost group averaging -38%. The OPM is the percentage of profit generated from every dollar of output prior to paying interest and equity costs. This means on average grass-fed dairies are losing 9.38 cents on every dollar of output before interest and equity payments are made. However, in both ROA and OPM calculations here, it is important to remember that the total cost calculation used does not reflect the farm's actual family living expense or interest but instead uses the standardized $46,045 per operator and additional FTE of unpaid labor as well as a 4% equity charge. Many of the farms that participated here were paying themselves substantially less than this standardized wage or nothing at all, meaning they were relying solely on off-farm or other enterprise income. The standardizations provide a fairer assessment of the dairy enterprise alone.

Next Steps

As we gain a better understanding of this production system and the range of management practices within it, we continue to refine our data collection and analysis to gain better insights into the most widely successful strategies for grass-fed dairy farms in the northeast. The information presented here is just the beginning of more in-depth analysis that will continue to develop over the next few years as we explore the connections between management, cost of production, and profitability.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dr. Larry Tranel for his collaboration on this project and for providing access to the Dairy TRANS tool. We would also like to thank Jen Miller and Bill Cavanaugh from NOFA-VT and Kurt Cotanch from Barn Swallow Consulting for their collaboration. Finally, we would like to thank all the farmers who graciously participated in this project. The information gathered through this project is helping us identify aspects of successful grass-fed dairy management critical to helping farmers be successful in this system. This project is part of a larger research project led by the University of Vermont, supported by funding from the USDA's Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI), titled Enhancing the Viability of Grass-Fed Dairy Production in the U.S. Through Comprehensive Research and Extension (Project no. 2023-51300). For more information about the grass-fed project, contact Heather Darby at heather.darby@uvm.edu or 802-524-6501.

Farmers who would like to participate

Dairy farmers in Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York who are certified grass-fed and shipping wholesale milk are eligible to participle. Participating farmers receive a report on their own farm's cost of production as well as the group's averages and ranges for the year all kept confidential and anonymous. If you are interested in participating in this project, contact Sara Flack at sarahflackconsulting@gmail.com or 802-933-6965. ◆

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Grass-fed Dairy Production Practices and Farmer Perceptions

Results from a survey of grass-fed dairy producers in the US

By Heather Darby and Sara Zeigler, University of Vermont

Background

Over the last decade, organic grass-fed dairy production has grown rapidly in the US. Since 2016, we estimate that the number of grass-fed organic dairy farmers in the US has expanded by over 400% and, for the first time since 2018, new markets for both organic and organic grass-fed milk are now open. In 2019, the first national survey of grass-fed dairy producers provided an initial overview of farm demographics, production practices, and research and technical assistance needs of this group of producers. While this and other research has produced valuable insights into this unique production system, with more farms looking to enter this market, more in-depth knowledge is required for all aspects of the production system (i.e., soil, forage, herd management, economics, milk quality, etc.).

To continue to capture current information and build our knowledge, the project team developed and distributed a survey via mail to 509 grass-fed farms throughout the US in 2024. The survey included some similar questions as the 2019 survey regarding farm characteristics, farmer demographics, and perceptions, but included more detailed questions regarding youngstock rearing, herd health, and grazing management. One hundred forty-four farmers returned the survey for a response rate of 28.3%. This article summarizes some of the results of this survey.

For the purposes of this publication, grass-fed dairy is defined as dairy production in which the ration does not contain any grain or grain byproducts. Nutrient needs on these farms are met with grazed and stored forages.

Farmer Demographics

Farmer responses represented nine states, with most farms located in NY, OH, IN, and PA (Figure 1). Other states (<5% respondents each) included VT, WI, MD, VA, and MN. While farmers from 16 states responded to the 2019 survey, the regional concentration was very similar and reflects the location of grass-fed milk buyers, processing, and markets. The average age of respondents was 46.4 years which is similar to the 47.6 years found in 2019 and is younger than the national average of 58.1 years. Also similar to 2019 was the prevalence of farmers that self-identified as belonging to the plain community. In 2019 this group represented 61.0% of respondents and in 2024 this was 75.0%. The majority of farms had been certified organic for 13.6 years and certified grass-fed for 5.0 years. However, farmers reported that they had been practicing grass-fed management for an average of 7.0 years despite certification.

Herd Characteristics

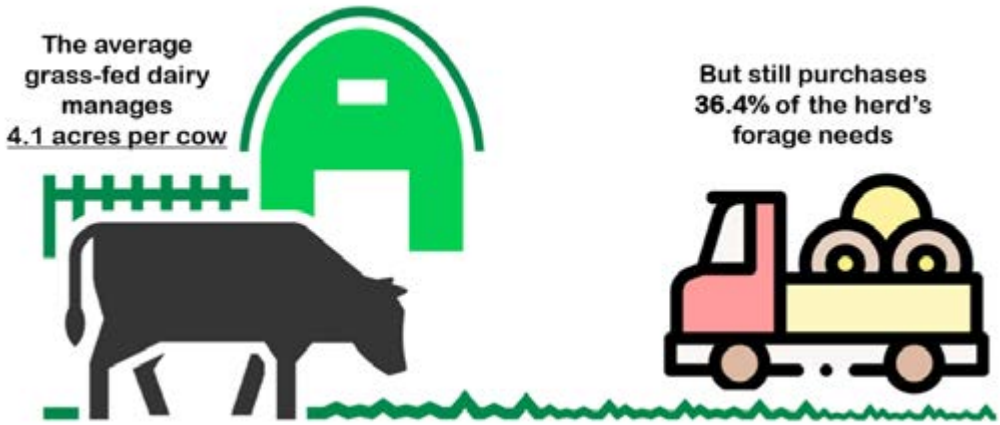
Herd size and composition were similar to the 2019 survey with the average farm managing 48.0 milking cows that were predominantly crossbreeds (44.4%) including Jersey (85.9%), Holstein (84.4%), Fleckvieh (31.3%), and Normande (29.7%) genetics. Other prevalent breeds included purebred Holstein (32.6%) and Jersey (25.0%) with many additional breeds such as Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, and Fleckvieh, representing <5% each. On average farmers estimated their annual (self-reported) milk production to be 10,599 lbs per cow, an increase of 1,294 lbs from the 2019 survey. Most farms (88.9%) produce milk year-round and milk twice or more daily (87.5%).

Average milk butterfat and protein content was 4.4% and 3.4% respectively. As was found in the previous survey, Holstein cattle produced the most milk followed by crossbreeds and then Jerseys

Figure 1. Percent respondents from each state

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

with Jerseys producing the highest fat and protein content. Additionally, farms milking twice or more per day reported higher milk production and lower somatic cell count than those milking once per day.



Land and Soil Management

Farms were producing forage on an average of 197 acres of pasture and crop land which equates to 4.1 acres per cow. Despite this land base, 72.3% reported that they still needed to purchase 36.4% of their herd's forage needs. In addition to perennial pasture and hay, 51.4% of farms also grew annual forage crops. This was substantially higher than the 32.5% found in 2019. The increase may be due to farmers seeking climate resilient strategies to enhance forage production. Additionally, farmers were harvesting bedding from an average of 10.6 acres. The need to purchase extra forage for the majority of farmers (72.3%) was similarly found in the previous survey and other research conducted by this team. Forage purchases are often required to have sufficient high-quality forage to maintain cow health and productivity without grain supplementation. While farms may have adequate land base to produce the quantity of dry matter required to support the herd, if the quality of that dry matter is not sufficiently high additional forage purchases will be required. Some farms (32.1%) also utilized off-farm custom grazing services which can help reduce a farm's forage needs.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

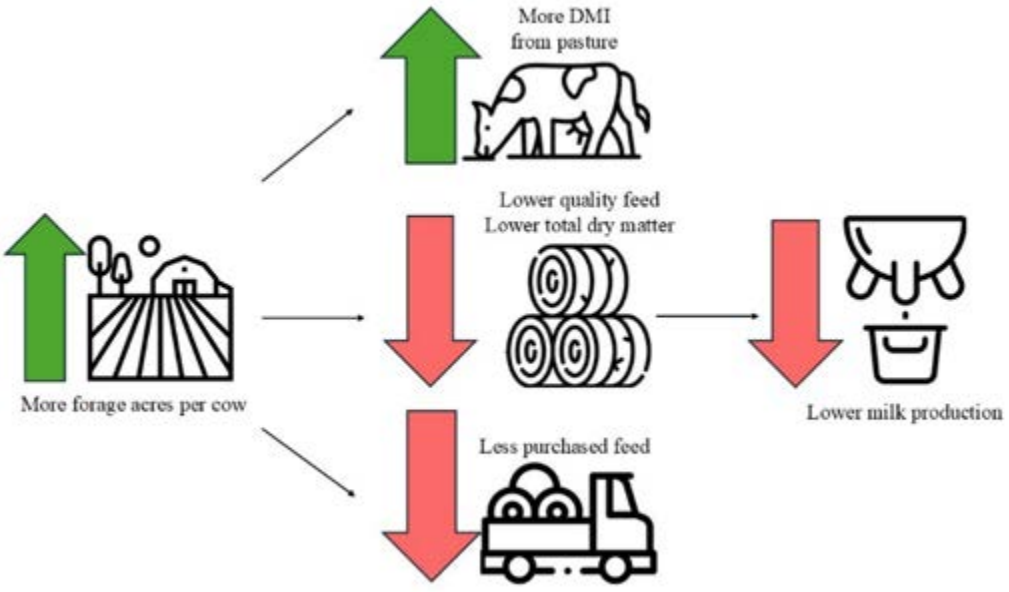
Most farmers (60.0% and 52.7% respectively) felt that their soil health and forage quality have increased as a result of becoming grass-fed. However, less than 15% reported a decrease in soil fertility and forage yields since becoming grass-fed. Most (77.2%) farms reported testing their soil and 81.8% reported purchasing fertilizers, manures, or other soil amendments, however, only 52.3% of these farms based their fertilizer purchased on their soil test recommendations. Farmers mostly used a variety of different amendments (66.9%) including poultry manure (74.1%), blended fertilizers (41.1%), lime (41.1%), and foliar sprays (20.5%). Farmers that followed soil test recommendations and those who purchased soil amendments self-reported significantly higher annual milk production than those who did not. In addition, farmers who utilized a variety of soil amendments reported higher annual milk production than those who only used poultry manure. Finally, 30.0% of respondents said they felt their current forage yield and quality was limiting their milk production and farm income. These data reveal potential opportunities for farmers to enhance forage productivity, and ultimately farm economics through implementing a more robust soil fertility program. Given that some farms indicated low to very low knowledge levels regarding interpreting soil tests (33.8%), selecting fertilizers (21.5%), and improving soil nutrients (29.9%) there are opportunities for technical resources and education in these areas.

Grazing Management

While the grass-fed standards currently require 150 days of grazing for the lactating herd, farmers reported grazing for 195 days or 6.5 months. Consistent with the management necessary to maximize forage quality, 79.2% of respondents indicated they gave the lactating herd a fresh paddock two or more times per day. In addition, farmers allowed pastures to recover between grazing for an average of 23.8 days in the spring, 32.7 days in the summer, and 34.7 days in the fall. On average, farms stocked the lactating herd at 52.7 cows per acre. Pre-grazing height averaged 12.7 inches and post-grazing residual 5.0 inches. However, post-grazing residual ranged from 1.0 to 12.0 inches and just over half (52.1%) of respondents reported maintaining a post-grazing residual greater than 4.0 inches. These data suggest that some farms may be grazing plants too short, which can damage the growing points and energy storage regions of the plants and over time can contribute to a decline in pasture productivity.

Heifer calves began grazing at 3.8 months of age with a range from 0-12.0 months. Certified organic and grass-fed dairy farms are required to graze all animals beyond 6.0 months of age. The most common grazing system for youngstock included moving them to a new paddock every few days (38.1%) or weekly (32.1%). Pastures used for youngstock grazing were allowed slightly longer recovery periods between grazings compared to the lactating herd at 28.6 days in spring, 36.6 days in summer, and 38.0 days in fall. Similarly, pre- and post-grazing sward heights were slightly taller than the lactating herd's. Average pre-grazing height was 14.3 inches with post-grazing residual ranging from 1.0 to 15.0 inches with an average of 5.2 inches. A slightly higher proportion of respondents (57.8%) reported maintaining a post-grazing residual height greater than 4.0 inches in the youngstock grazing system compared to the lactating herd.

Half of the respondent farms indicated that their herd receives 80-100% of its dry matter needs from pasture during the grazing season. Interestingly, higher acres per cow managed and higher dry matter intake from pasture through the grazing season were correlated with lower annual self-reported milk production. Furthermore, farms managing more acres per cow purchased less feed. These data suggest that farms with larger acreages purchase less forage, rely more on pasture during the grazing season, and make less milk. With the constant changes in pasture quantity and quality throughout the season, farms that supplement more dry hay or baleage during the grazing season may be more able to maximize total dry matter intake or better balance cow nutrition to support higher milk production. In addition, managing a smaller land base can make harvesting higher quality forage easier as harvest timing and speed are two critical factors in forage quality. Farmers who managed more acres per cow were less satisfied with their level of milk production.



ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

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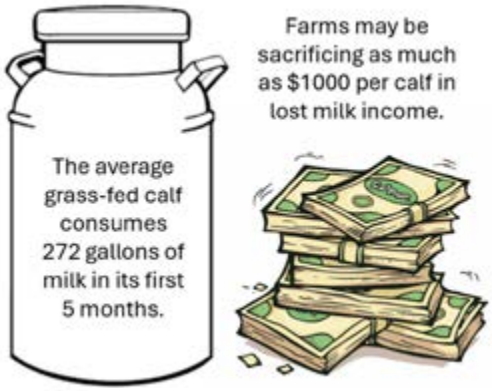
Youngstock Management and Herd Health

Seventy-five percent of farms reported keeping enough heifer calves to meet the average cull rate of 18.8%, however, 23.6% reported keeping all heifer calves. Without supplemental grain, calves are fed milk and high-quality forages to support early growth and development. In addition to milk, calves were offered hay after 11 days and minerals after 41 days. On average calves were fed 1.75 gallons of milk per calf per day for 5.1 months. This equates to 272 gallons per calf which represents a substantial investment in lost potential milk income being diverted to these youngstock. In addition, breeding age averaged 16.5 months but ranged from 11 to 30 months. Farms waiting longer to get heifers bred will have additional stored forage and pasture needs as all animals beyond 6 months of age are required to graze per the grass-fed standards. These data represent the significant costs of raising replacements, especially extra animals beyond what is needed to meet replacement rates. Calves were most commonly fed milk in groups (52.8%) and individually (23.9%). Nurse cows were utilized on just 18.3% of farms and dam raising on only 4.9% of farms. Nurse cow farms typically used a ratio of two calves per nurse cow.



Scours was identified as the most important health issue for youngstock by 44.8% of respondents followed by respiratory disease and internal parasites. However, these responses were influenced by calf rearing system. For example, respiratory disease was less of an issue for farms raising calves on nurse cows but more of an issue for farms raising calves individually with bottles/buckets. Internal parasites were less common on farms raising calves on dams or nurse cows, but external pests and pinkeye were more common in these instances perhaps resulting from increased contact between animals. Pinkeye was more of an issue for farms using group feeder systems and less for farms using individual bottle/buckets, again likely due to contact between animals.

The most common causes of calf mortality were scours (39.4%), dystocia (23.3%), and respiratory disease (20.2%). Despite this, 71.5% of respondents did not administer any vaccinations to calves and did not impact herd cull rates. For farmers who administered vaccinations, the most common vaccinations targeted respiratory disease (10.4%), scours (5.6%), and pinkeye (4.2%). Fifty-five percent of respondents managed pests and parasites in youngstock, most commonly targeting flies, worms, coccidia, lice, and mites. For fly control, essential oils were most common (29.6%) followed

Calf Rearing System	Respiratory disease	Internal parasites	External pests	Pinkeye	No health issues
Dam raised	–	↓	↑	↑	–
Nurse cows	↓	↓	–	–	↑
Individual bottle/bucket	↑	–	–	↓	↓
Group feeder system	–	–	–	↑	↓

Arrows indicate which health issues were reported as more common (up arrow) or less common (down arrow) on farms using different calf rearing strategies. Dashes indicate no association between variables.

by garlic salt (18.8%), 'fly spray' (unidentified agent but presumably botanical) (12.5%), and sticky tape (9.4%). Internal parasites were most commonly treated with diatomaceous earth (38.1%) herbal/ essential oil products (16.7%) rotational grazing practices (7.5%), and garlic (7.1%). Essential oil products were also most common to treat coccidia, lice, and mites.

When asked what aspects of their operation they were most satisfied with, most respondents indicated cow body condition, herd health, quality of youngstock, pests and parasites, and reproduction and calving. These also aligned with farmers current knowledge levels which were highest in relation to cow body condition scoring and youngstock management.

Next Steps and Acknowledgements

This survey provides farmers, technical service providers, researchers, and other stakeholders valuable insights into the status of the grass-fed dairy industry regarding production practices, herd and land management strategies, and farmer perceptions. We will continue to utilize this information to develop resources and tools to help farmers and stakeholders to support the grass-fed dairy industry. This survey was conducted as part of a research project funded through the USDA's Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI), titled Enhancing the Viability of Grass-Fed Dairy Production in the U.S. Through Comprehensive Research and Extension (Project no. 2023-51300). Our research team is currently developing and implementing other research to address calf rearing and development, farm financial success, soil nutrient cycling and crop fertility management, and milk sensory quality and nutrition. ◆

For more information about the grass-fed project, contact Heather Darby at heather.darby@uvm.edu or 802-656-7613.

Grass-fed Dairy Informational Resources

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT EXTENSION

Grass-fed Dairy webpage

Visit our website to access all our grass-fed dairy resources, research, and information:https://www.uvm.edu/extension/nwcrops/grass-fed-dairy

A Farmer's Guide to Grass-fed Dairy Production

Electronic version:
https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Northwest-Crops-and-Soils-Program/Grass%20Fed%20Dairy/FINAL_DESIGNED.pdf
Request an in-print version by calling Sara Ziegler at 802-656-7627.

Online Grass-fed Dairy Production Course

Learn more about grass-fed dairy production at your own pace through this 7-part course. Each module consists of pre-recorded video lectures with Q&A and discussion. Topics include soil fertility, forage management, herd health and reproduction, farm economics, and more.

https://campus.extension.org/course/view.php?id=2287
*you will need an email address to make a free account to access the course materials

Don't have a computer, listen to the modules by phone: Call 1-712-432-8774
When asked for a conference ID number, enter 5246501#

You then must enter the number for the recording you want to listen to. Below is the list of sessions and their corresponding numbers.

0# Menu and instructions
1# An Introduction to Grass-fed Dairy
2# Land Base Assessment
3# Soil Fertility and Agronomy
4# Dairy Nutrition
5# Nutrition Q&A and Supplementation with Molasses and Seaweed
6# Herd Management and Monitoring
7# Cost of Production
8# A Review and Farmer Insights
9# Other Course Information

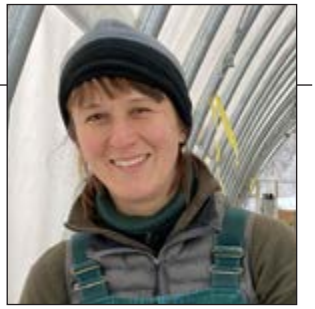
While you are listening to a session, you can pause the recording by pressing 1. To end a session, press 5. If you would like to end a session and listen to another one, you will need to press 5 to end the current session, then re-enter the conference ID, and then enter the session number from the list above.

This course was created by the University of Vermont Extension with funding from the USDA Organic Research and Extension Initiative. Additional information and materials supporting these recordings were originally designed to be accessed through the internet. If you would like access to any of the supplemental materials mentioned through the course, or you have trouble accessing the recordings, please contact Sara Ziegler at 802-656-7627.

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Ask the Vet

Dayna Locitzer, DVM



What precautions should I take with my calves when it is cold out?

Photo by Amber-Kipp, unsplash.com

Last issue we talked about the basics of calf care. I think this is a great follow up question on the quest to take the best care of our calves, especially as we get into the coldest months of the year. In previous issues I have talked about the thermoneutral zone (TNZ) of cows related to heat stress (and how my personal zone is similar to cows). Adult cows have a TNZ of about 32-70 degrees and are quite cold tolerant. Pre-weaned calves have a TNZ of 50-77 degrees. Once the temperature is below 50 degrees, calves will need to expend extra energy to keep their vital functions working properly. It is important to keep this fact in mind in how you prepare for calf care in the winter months. Knowing that calves are less cold tolerant than cows, there are some basic additions to their care.

When a calf is born in very cold weather, it is very dangerous for that calf. While you might want to let the cow clean off her calf, you also want to make sure the calf is dried off quickly. When the temperature is below their TNZ, the calf should be indoors, dried off by a towel, and a calf jacket applied. If it is below freezing, you might need to wipe off the navel dip so it doesn't freeze and create a frostbitten umbilical cord. The navel dip only needs to contact the skin for 5 minutes to do its antibacterial work. Making sure the newborn calf is dry and warm will prevent frostbite and help their immune system make the best use of colostrum.

During the first three weeks of life, calves are not good at thermoregulation. This means they are a little more amphibian like than your typical mammal. The outside temperature will have more effect on their internal body temperature than an older animal. In the cold months calf jackets become a useful tool. When you feel like you need a jacket outside, the young calf likely does too. A good rubric to go by is the "90 degree rule", meaning that if the combined high and low temperatures for 24 hours does not exceed 90 degree, then the calf needs a jacket. For example, if the calf is under three weeks old and the daytime high is 50 degrees and the nighttime low is 30 degrees, she needs a jacket. Make sure the calf and the jacket are dry and make sure the jacket fits properly. Improper use of this tool will be more trouble than help.

Because calves will need to expend more energy to keep themselves warm during the winter time, they will need more energy inputs. Pre-weaned calves can get more milk in the colder months. You can give them an extra meal of 2-4 quarts or provide them with 1-2 quarts extra at each meal. Milk should always be fed at a temperature of about 100-105 degrees, an especially important point at this time of year. At this temperature the calf does not have to expend any extra energy warming the milk inside her body.

Speaking of warm liquids, you should provide the calf with warm water at least twice daily. Pre-weaned calves should always be provided with potable water meaning it should be clean and not frozen. A good way to ensure the calf has some time to drink water before it freezes is by providing her with warm water directly after milk feeding when she is in a liquid drinking mindset. If you bucket feed your calves, the water can go directly into the bucket. If you bottle feed them or use a mob feeder, you can put some of the water in the bottle or feeder and satisfy her urge to suckle at the same time! Providing them with small amounts of warm water multiple times a day will encourage drinking and prevent you from having to defrost frozen calf buckets.

Respiratory disease can also be an issue in the winter months. This is true for a number of reasons. Their immune system is taxed from using extra energy to keep themselves warm (so feed them that extra milk!), especially when there are extreme temperature swings. Another wintertime respiratory disease risk factor is poor ventilation. If calves are indoors and barn windows/curtains are

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

closed for warmth, there is a risk for poorer air quality unless ventilation is accounted for. With these increased risk factors, it is wise to make sure the calves are vaccinated. The best vaccine for young pre-weaned calves is an intranasal vaccine. Consult with your veterinarian about which one is best for your farm.

Extra bedding can also help with those cold temperatures. Extra bedding that is clean and dry is very important during these winter months. A hefty amount of straw provides excellent insulation. Providing ample bedding and using calf jackets makes it possible to deliver appropriate ventilation when it is cold outside.

OK, but what happens if your calf does get too cold? You might see her shivering, hunched and standing in the corner with no other signs of disease. Or she might have been born outside on a cold rainy day. Make sure the calf is dry, has a dry jacket on, and her pen is filled with deep bedding. If she is wet, you could use a hair dryer to dry her off and warm her up at the same time. While I am not a fan of the latest internet craze of bringing your cows inside your kitchen, a hypothermic sick calf might benefit from some time next to the wood stove or at least a heated area of the farm. There are also calf warmer boxes that you can buy. They might be a little pricey, but one saved animal will pay for the warmer with the current market price for calves. Doing whatever you can to dry them off and keep them warm is crucial. Leaving them wet and cold puts them at high risk of frostbite and other illnesses.

As we enter the deep dark months of winter keep in mind these strategies to keep your calves healthy during cold weather. A little babying of your calves will help them grow to become strong and resilient cows. Keep them warm, keep them dry and fill their bellies. ◆

Dr. Dayna Locitzer has over 10 years of experience working with pasture-based dairies in the Northeast. She worked on organic dairy farms in the Hudson Valley of New York for six years before starting vet school. After veterinary school, Dr. Locitzer spent four years in the Brattleboro, Vermont area serving the small dairies in that region. She recently moved back to the Hudson Valley to join Columbia Veterinary Services in Hudson, NY where she works exclusively as a farm animal veterinarian.

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 who will share them with her.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Organic Dairy News: January 2025

continued from page 3

are that CROPP is buying spot milk at over $40/cwt in the mid-west and recently talked of a second "loyalty" pay increase of $2/cwt for the months of March through October 2025 that requires signing a special contract agreeing to remain with the coop another year.

Some producers are moving to the secure market and higher Pay Price offered by Upstate Niagara, long time leaders in the northeast in responding to producers' needs and their ability to offer security as a handler with their own processing and large conventional operation. For those that are concerned about the limited market for organic milk that Upstate has, notably Wegman's, which Upstate supplies with fluid organic milk, are planning to open three more stores in the northeast, plus Upstate continues to export organic dairy to Canada. Their 2025 Pay Program offers a base price of $29.5/cwt, an Organic Market Adjustment Premium of $2.75/cwt and a $2/cwt Seasonal Production Incentive for 5 months of the year. They have a volume premium of $.15/cwt over 75,000 pounds up to $0.50/cwt for over 300,000 lbs. and an SSC quality program that maxes out at $3/cwt for a monthly average of under 100,000/ml. Their Incremental Growth Adjustment program will pay $4.00/cwt each month for incremental milk production over the prior year. They also have an incentive program for those transitioning to organic certification. There is no hauling charge for every-other-day pick-up.

Producers who sell directly to Stonyfield report that their Pay Price and incentives are comparable to Upstate and higher than CROPP Cooperative.

Update on DMC and ODMAP Programs

The DMC Decision Tool on USDA's Farm Service Agency website had not been updated with its DMC margin forecasts for 2025 yet. Hoards Dairyman reports that CME futures indicated that 2024's large drops in the DMC feed cost formula components will not be repeated this year and that any significant DMC margin changes this year will be driven mostly by changes in the All-Milk prices.

On December 23, 2024, the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) recently announced the second round of payments through the Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) 2024. Of the $58 million allocated for the 2024 ODMAP, the first round of payments totaled $23 million. The second payment will be made automatically to those that applied for the first 2024 payment and if you have not received it, you should contact your local FSA office. The ODMAP 2024 has been paid out in two payments of 75% of the $1.68/cwt initially determined by FSA for a producer's projected marketing costs in 2024 based on their 2023 costs, and the other 25% in this second round. FSA projects that the second round of ODMAP 2024 payments provides an additional $8.7 million to dairy producers, bringing total payments from ODMAP 2024 to over $31 million, still leaving $27 million of the revised amount available. Of the $105 million allocated to the program in January 2023 approximately half has been paid out over a two-year period. Again, this highlights the lack of data on organic dairy expenses published by USDA. Unfortunately, for some reason, the most recent Continuing Resolution in Congress in December 2024 to keep the Federal Government working, excluded a very small amount of increased money for organic data collection.

H5N1 avian flu

Having been very slow in adopting any measures to control the spread of H5N1 in dairy livestock, USDA is now increasing testing at processing plants and bulk tanks. Transmission to a virus that can be spread by humans has not happened yet, but livestock workers who directly handle dairy cows have been affected. The most current advice is to have and implement a biosecurity plan; limit movement of all animals; restrict visitors and any crossover of dairy workers with domestic poultry exposure. The other piece of advice is just plain common sense – ensure a stress free environment for all affected animals. ◆

Farmer Feedback Survey for SOE and OOL

The goal of this survey is to collect information and feedback regarding the newly implemented Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) Rule and the Origin of Livestock (OOL) Rule. It has come to WODPA & NODPA's attention that there are more ramifications affecting organic dairy farmers than originally expected or intended with the implementation of these two new rules passed by the National Organic Program (NOP). Please take some time to complete the survey below so we (WODPA & NODPA) can better understand how to promote organic dairy farmers and advocate for you, especially with the NOP.

Name:	Farm Name:
E-mail:	Phone:
Physical address of farm:	

1. Who is your organic certifier? _____
2. How long have you been certified organic? _____
3. Have you had your organic inspection yet this year (2024)?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

   ☐ I'm not sure.

4. Were there any questions or requests asked by your inspector during your onsite inspection that seemed more invasive or specific than usual?
   _____
   _____
   _____
5. Were there any questions or requests asked by your in- office reviewer during your onsite inspection that seemed more invasive or specific than usual?
   _____
   _____
   _____
6. Are you familiar with the newly implemented Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) Rule?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

7. Are you familiar with the Origin of Livestock (OOL) Rule?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

8. Did you provide oral comments or written comments to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) regarding either of these rules (SOE or OOL)?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

9. Did your certifier provide you with a list of changes due to SOE and/ or OOL?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
10. Were you asked to provide any information from prior years during this year's inspection? If yes, what information?
    _____
    _____
    _____
11. Have your certification costs increased since becoming organic?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

    ☐ Costs have stayed the same.

12. If so, how much have they increased? _____
13. Have you ever reached out to NOP regarding your certifier?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

14. Have you ever had an NOP inspection?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

    ☐ I'm not sure. Is this the same as a regular organic inspection?

15. Are you a paid- in Farmer Member of WODPA or NODPA?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

16. How many milking & dry cows do you have? _____
17. Can WODPA or NODPA contact you if we have follow-up questions regarding any of your answers?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

Please return survey to Lia Sieler at Lia.wodpa@outlook.com or emaltby@comcast.net or by Fax to

866-554-9483 or by mail to NODPA, 30 Keets Road, Deerfield , MA 01342

Thank you so much for your participation & feedback!!

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

The Leatherstocking Cattle Exchange

The inaugural public auction dedicated to the nurturing and advancement of Grass-based dairy cow genetics, Canastota, NY, Friday, November 15, 2024

By Robert Yoder, Contributing Writer

This article originally appeared in Small Farmer's Journal, Sister's Oregon, and is reprinted with the author's permission. Due to space constraints, this article has been edited for length.

Here, in Central New York, from the Finger Lakes to the west, to the Hudson on the east, the Catskills south, and the Adirondacks north, is the land known as Leather Stocking Country--named for the Leatherstocking Tales, five novels of his frontier hero, Natty Bumppo, written by James Fenimore Cooper.

Over the past thirty years, New York State has lost over seventy percent of dairy farms, while increasing milk production by thirty percent. Every so often while traveling through the state you'll see long buildings, housing thousands of dairy cows. These mega farms have a lot of purchasing power and can bypass their local suppliers for products they need. Think of how much positive effect on local economies thirty one-hundred cows, or sixty fifty cows dairies have.

In 2004 and 2005, a group of Amish dairy farmers from Ohio started exploring farmland in neighboring states for possibly relocating to start a farm community. Hoards Dairyman magazine, in the 1980s and 1990s published statistics on the top dairy counties in the U.S. At that time, they published both cow numbers and number of farms of the top 25 counties. From these statistics, Madison County, NY stood out as a small farm area.

The first two families moved from Ohio to Madison County, NY in the Spring of 2006. By the end of the year, two more families had moved into the area. By late 2008 the community had grown to 7 families. All of these either were, or wanted to be, farmers. Most of us had experience with rotational grazing. Central NY is a land of hills and valleys, with enough rainfall and moderate temperatures to keep cool season grasses growing all summer. Very seldom do we have dry times and extended heat, with brown pastures in July and August as many areas of the south do. Generally, we have good grazing for 6 months, often several weeks more. As I am writing this on December 11, we have rain this morning and the snow we have had for a week is mostly gone. The pastures are all still green. Often in Spring, when the snow finally melts, the grass is green, instead of brown and dormant.

We now have over forty families in the Madison County towns of Smithfield, Fenner, Lincoln, and one farm in Eaton. The community has twenty dairy farms--24 families making their living with dairy. Four young families are either in partnerships or work for their parents. Of these 20 farms, 18 are all-grass, feeding no grain to their cows. One farm is organic and feeds some grain. The all-grass farms are also organic. One farm is conventional, with grazing their main feed. One of the all-grass farms has Holstein cows, with a lot of old-time genetics, proving the assumption that Holsteins cannot also be good grazers, wrong. Several have purebred Jerseys; two are developing Ayrshire herds from their crossbreds, while the rest of the farms have crossbreds, with a mix of Holstein, Jersey, Brown Swiss, or Shorthorn genetics. The fieldwork – clipping pastures, mowing,

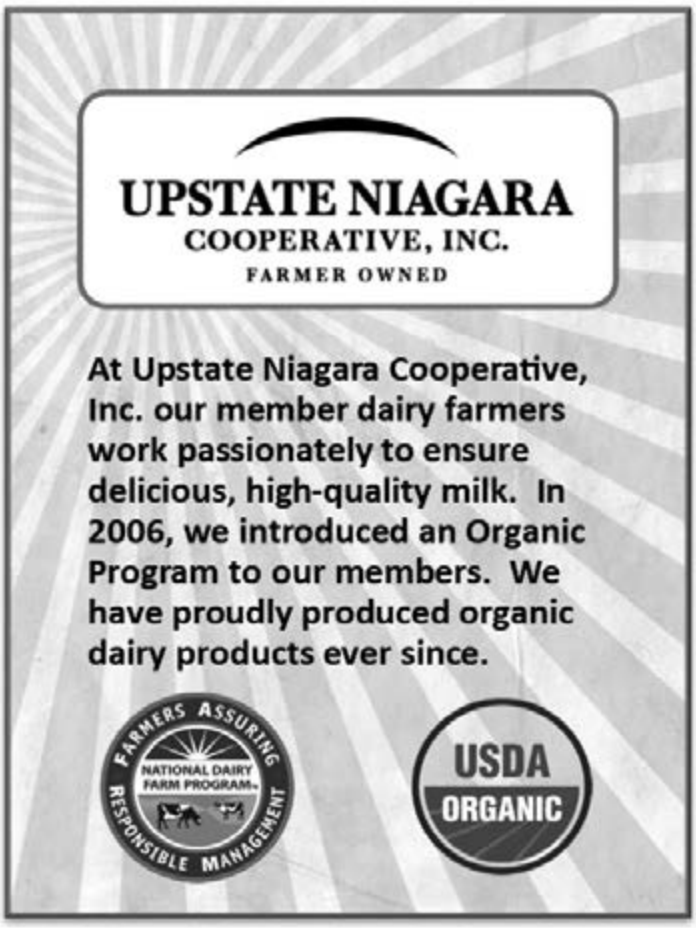
ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

raking, and baling hay and hauling manure is done with horses or mules.

a2a2 Milk

We have been hearing of a2 milk for probably close to 20 years. Most AI companies publish the a2 status of their bulls with their genetic information. A small company in Ohio sells a2 milk, although not organic or grassfed. A company from New Zealand sells a2 milk in America, and has patented the term a2; forcing other companies to identify milk they sell as a2a2, which is what it is. Milk has fat and protein, with grassfed milk containing higher CLAs – conjugated linoleic acids – and omega 3's, both healthy fats. Now that the myth of animal fats being the cause of heart disease has been debunked – by the way, where are the apologies from the scientific and medical establishment? They should be published in all major newspapers and magazines. Old W.D. Hoard was right when saying he trusts the cow more than the chemist.

The protein content is where a2a2 is found. The two major proteins in milk are casein and whey. Casein accounts for about eighty percent of the protein in milk. There are also different types of casein, one of which is called beta-casein, which is about thirty percent of the casein protein. a1 and a2 are two variants of beta-casein. All mammals, including humans, except some dairy cattle, have a2 milk. It is hypothesized that several thousand years ago cows were also all a2. The theory goes that some cows in Europe had a genetic mutation – possibly from the stress of farming – that caused the cows to produce the new type of beta casein we call a1. Now most milk is a variant of a1, either a1a1 or a1a2. Old breeds in Asia – with humps – produce all a2 milk. Many Asian people cannot tolerate milk that contains a1.



It is claimed that many of the common health problems stem from the a1 protein in modern milk. Scientific proof? Not much. But remember W.D. Hoard's take on animal fats versus the scientists. The intuition of old peasants is often right. There is case after case that people felt much better, with better long term health with a2 milk. Enzymes break protein down into amino acids, which are absorbed into your bloodstream and used to build and repair things in your body such as skin or muscles. The a1 beta-casein protein breaks down into a peptide called BCM7, which is considered a risk factor for the nervous, endocrine and immune system. The list of chronic health issues related to BCM7 is extensive, such as digestive problems, autism, schizophrenia, type 1 diabetes and heart disease. A lot of this information comes from a blog written by Aaron Miller, pulled up and printed by Tom Rankins.

Testing cows or bulls for a2 status is fairly simple. All that is needed is a hair sample sent to a lab that does this kind of testing. Costs have come down to less than $20.00 per sample. Jerseys and Guernseys have a higher prevalence of a2, with some herds sixty percent or more. Other breeds, with judicious breeding, can become a2 as well. Several farms from our community culled their non a2 cows and are shipping milk to Family Farmstead.

Auction Day

Friday, November 15, 2024, dawned mild with a little breeze. The sun came up through thin clouds, a very nice day for Central New York in November. Trucks with trailers, vans, and buggies converged on the Alex Weaver farm. It was Auction Day, the first – hopefully annual – Leatherstocking Cattle Exchange. Its inaugural public auction was dedicated to the nurturing and advancement of grass-based dairy cow genetics with all females certified organic, most animals tested for a2a2 status, most breeds represented and with dairy bulls consigned by the foremost breeders in grassfed dairy.

Ron Holter Seminar

An opening seminar was presented by Ron Holter, grazier and Jersey cattle breeder, from Jefferson, Maryland. Ron started grazing cows in 1996, with Holsteins and Jerseys. In '97 he took the herd to seasonal – all freshening in spring. As time went on, the Holsteins left, the Jerseys stayed. He started using New Zealand genetics on the herd, using a lot of Dukes Landy, a well-known NZ bull. He also used North Coast Genetics, from a group of breeders centered in Ohio. Dr. Reber, whose farm was 3 miles west of us

in Ohio, was a major influence on his thinking. The Reber's were known for their polled, wide-bodied cows. aAa (AKA Triple A) was important to them for breeding decisions.

Ron is not fond of crossbreeding. Usually, the first cross works well because of hybrid vigor, after that, not so much. He finds it difficult to develop an efficient, uniform herd from crossbreeding. Many serious breeders consider themselves not smart enough for crossbreeding. Ron stresses that you should know what you want to make the right decisions. He advises using old knowledge, such as Newman Turner's book titled Herdsmanship and Reproduction and Animal Health by Gerald Fry. He adds, the wisdom of the past leads us to what a grass cow should be.

Further thoughts – Longevity is probably the most important trait. Modern genetics have developed a high producing cow that often only lasts a lactation or two, often not long enough to pay for raising her from a calf. Dull eyes are a beef trait, thick coarse bones put fat on their back instead of milk in the tank. Bulls should have masculine characteristics, wedge shaped, deep and wide fronts, tapering to back. Many modern bulls have too much feminine type. Remember, bulls provide 50% of the genes in your herd. Cows should be wedge shaped from back to front, the opposite of bulls. She should still have a deep, wide, chest and belly, 60% body, 40% legs, with strong udder attachment. The udder should not extend below the hock, unless she is an older cow.

All of us dairymen love a cow that stays in good flesh and puts a decent amount of milk in the tank. A no-nonsense cow that has her head down and is grazing as soon as she is in grass, that has a calf every spring, with no complications, that is neither a bully nor too timid with her herdmates.

Ron likes to do linebreeding to set the traits he wants in his cows. Newman Turner, in the book Herdsmanship, started with ten heifers that were half-sisters, with a linebred bull. Ron finished his talk with some nuggets of wisdom, such as "Always be cautious around bulls." A neighbor had a saying, "Never trust a bull farther than you can throw it by the tail" – which is, not at all. "Keep good grass in front of the cow and a good bull behind her".

A question came in for Ron – "What is your milk production?" The answer – "First of all, milk production is not the most important trait. If everything is close to right, she will have adequate milk production." His grassfed Jerseys produce an average of 6000 lbs. with 5.6 butterfat – 336 lbs. of fat. He cautioned when buying or evaluating cows, you should always look at her production versus her herdmates, not another herd with different management.

Well done, Ron, much to digest. Thank you.

The Auction and Results

Excitement built as cow-selling time approached, the culmination of all the preparation and planning. After all, this was the first all-grass dairy auction for Canastota, and perhaps anywhere, that is not a normal farm dispersal. Nathan and Alex Weaver, along with more all-grass dairy farmers, have long felt the need for an auction like this. Thus far, grass-fed cows have been lumped into the general organic or conventional auction stream. Many of the dairy farmers here are seasonal and often have perfectly good cows and heifers to sell that did not fit their narrow freshening window. Also, with the low stress life that a grass-fed cow has, there is much more longevity. This makes it easy to keep extra stock in summertime to sell in the fall.

Some of the young dairymen here prefer to keep enough cows to utilize all of their land, instead of investing in machinery for haymaking, thus buying all of their hay. Bought in hay also brings in nutrients, and is a good way to boost the fertility of our land. They have taken to heart the advice to not invest in anything that rusts, rots or depreciates. It is amazing how little equipment it takes to operate a well-run grass-based dairy. Another reason for an auction like this is to stimulate each other into producing better cows. It has long been Nathan Weaver's goal to breed a perfect – maybe I should say a better – grass-fed cow.

Nathan made a short prelude to the auction, thanking all for coming. He mentioned looking over the cattle and seeing room for improvement. Then he turned it over to the auctioneer—Orus Mast of Ohio. The moment of truth was at hand. We all had a pamphlet of animals, numbered and identified. The bidding was fast and intense. Always at an auction, the speed at which bids come in shows the tenor of the sale. Slow this was not, ringmen's voices came in fast. Prices were, to this old man, jaw droppingly high. Very few cows sold under 3,000 dollars, many over $4,000.

Time went fast, and soon the bulls came through. Some of them young, some not - one mature, regal Jersey bull from Jeremy Yoder, Morris, NY, brought $4800. Surely the a2a2 test helped this one. Another, a 2 ½ year old ¾ Ayrshire, also a2, consigned by Nathan Weaver, brought $4500.

In a rush, all at once the auction was over. Let us look at some of the numbers. 108 total head sold, average $2985. 49 dairy cows average $3400. Top selling cow, from Rob and Pam Moore, Nichols NY, Friesian-Holstein, a 3-year-old a2a2, sold for $5750. Heifers, mostly bred, average $2990, top sale price was $4200. 16 bulls, averaged $1640 each, top sale price was a Jersey a2a2 from Jeremy Yoder at $4800. 20 cows headed to a farm in Lancaster PA, with another 11 to a different farm elsewhere in PA. Some of these cows were also bought by homesteaders for family use. Several cows stayed within our community. What an auction, truly an amazing event. Obviously the grassfed dairy animal market is strong, which means the milk market is strong, which means farming is good. But then, farming is always good, high prices or low. The buggies, trucks and vans wended their way home. Chore time.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Introduction of the Cattle Exchange Vendors

Between Ron Holter's seminar and the auction, Nathan Weaver introduced all the attending vendors—the first one up being Family Farmstead. The newest of the three buyers of organic, grass-fed milk in our region, Tom McGrath, owner of Family Farmstead, described their mission statement: Produce the most natural and nutritious dairy foods possible. Preserve and strengthen local family farms. Regenerate the land, our bodies, and local communities. Family Farmstead's milk checks all the boxes. 100% grassfed organic, non-homogenized, full fat, low temperature pasteurized, certified regenerative, and, most rare of all, all their milk is a2a2.

Noah Hershberger, farmer from Guilford, NY, was here to sell dairy semen from John O'Brien Genetics.

Maple Hill was the first dairy marketer to offer all grass milk products. They started approximately 10 years ago; grew rapidly; had some growing pains, and eventually were sold to an investor group. They are growing again, signing up farmers in Ohio and Pennsylvania. They have grown twenty-five percent the last three years and are actively looking for farmers. They see $45 mailbox prices coming and remind us that an organic herd can transition to all grass in 90 days.

Jeremy Yoder, grass farmer and Jersey breeder, was here from Morris, NY. A lot of his cows stem back to Butter Valley, the high testing Phil Miller herd. He also used polled genetics from Dr. Reber's herd, and some from Denmark. He is well known for his high component herd bulls and semen. He is concerned about the modern frail low butterfat cows.

Ann Phillips, Organic Valley's eastern NY representative. Ann, here with her husband Jim, wears two hats – one as OV's representative, the other as grass dairy farmers, in the Cortland-Marathon NY area. Most of us know OV's history, starting with 8 farmers in Wisconsin, now grown to almost 2000 farmers, with over a billion dollars in sales. They also market produce, eggs and beef, and are one of the main marketers of organic milk. They have also been marketing grass milk for over 10 years.

Jacob Beachy from Coshocton County, Ohio, grazier and breeder of old line Holsteins, was here to sell semen and talk of his passion for the right kind of cow. Jacob read a poem to us, a long one, gently satirizing modern dairy genetics. Yes, you read correctly. Poetry. In a farm meeting.

Michael McCaffrey and William Isle of aAa® Weeks Animal Analysis provided information on what they do. They don't sell a product out of a box or bag, they sell knowledge - knowledge that has been a big help to a lot of dairy farmers. By looking at a cow, heifer or bull's traits they assign numbers, usually three. Bulls are assigned numbers for the traits they have to offer, with the first number their most dominant trait. Cows are assigned numbers on the traits they need, the first number what they need the most. Most AI companies publish the triple A numbers of the bulls they offer, thus the farmer can make very informed decisions on breeding for a balanced cow.

A representative from Sea 90, a company that produces sea salt with many trace minerals that is used by almost all grazers, was on hand to answer questions.

Rounding out the vendor presentations was David Beachy of Ohio with his Nutra-Glo minerals which is used by many of us for horses and some for cattle. ◆

Robert Yoder, retired farmer and contributing writer, can be reached by phone at 315-684-3422.

Classified Ads

FEED, GRAIN, HAY

FOR SALE: CERTIFIED ORGANIC HAY
- Small square bale bedding or mulch hay at $3 per bale or $4 per bale (no weeds)

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- Round bales 4' x 5' twine wrapped 1st cutting dry grass hay at $40

All hay is stored under cover or wrapped. Forage tests available. We ship throughout the east coast and have multiple delivery quantities or pickup at the farm. Samples available. Call ore text: Tony Marzolino, 315-378-5180.

Location: Berkshire, NY.

FOR SALE: Certified Organic BALEAGE, Dry HAY, and BEDDING hay. 2024 product. Call Jeff @ 607-566-8477 for pricing and qualities.

Location: Avoca NY (Steuben County)

FOR SALE: Certified Organic, Leafy Alfalfa hay, 2024 Second Cutting in 3x3x8 bales, fully enclosed storage directly from baling. All hay grown here on our 5-generation family farm. $217 per ton in semi-load quantities. RFV is 147 and we'd be happy to send you the full DairyLand test results. Call, email or text with any questions. Galen Ackerman, 785-547-7072 or galen.ackerman@gmail.com Added 11/27/24

Location: Sabetha, Kansas

EQUIPMENT

FOR SALE: Round Bale Grabber. Quick Attach. Bought a few years back but only used for 4-5 bales. Brand new condition. $1950. Call Jeff, 607-566-8477.

Location: Avoca, NY (Steuben County)

EMPLOYMENT

HELP WANTED: Part Time Job Offering with Housing!! We are searching for a kind person to work with us! We offer a sweet/tiny furnished apartment and a livable hourly wage. You will enjoy working with cows and mostly by yourself. Ideally you have milked cows before but happy to teach someone as well! We are hoping that you would work three a.m. milking shifts, starting at 4 a.m. ending around 10 a.m.; days of the week are flexible! Would love to offer cows/calves as part of the hourly wage if of interest. Lots of knowledge to share about rotational grazing, homeopathy, herd health, etc. If you do not absolutely love cows and calves this probably isn't the place for you. Send along any information and interest and I'll get back to you ASAP! Contact Walter Rankin, at smith_tara1@icloud.com or 802-730-7915.

Location: Johnson, VT

NODPA News is Published Bi-Monthly
January, March, May, July, September & November

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Full Page Ad (7.5" W x 9.75" H) = $660
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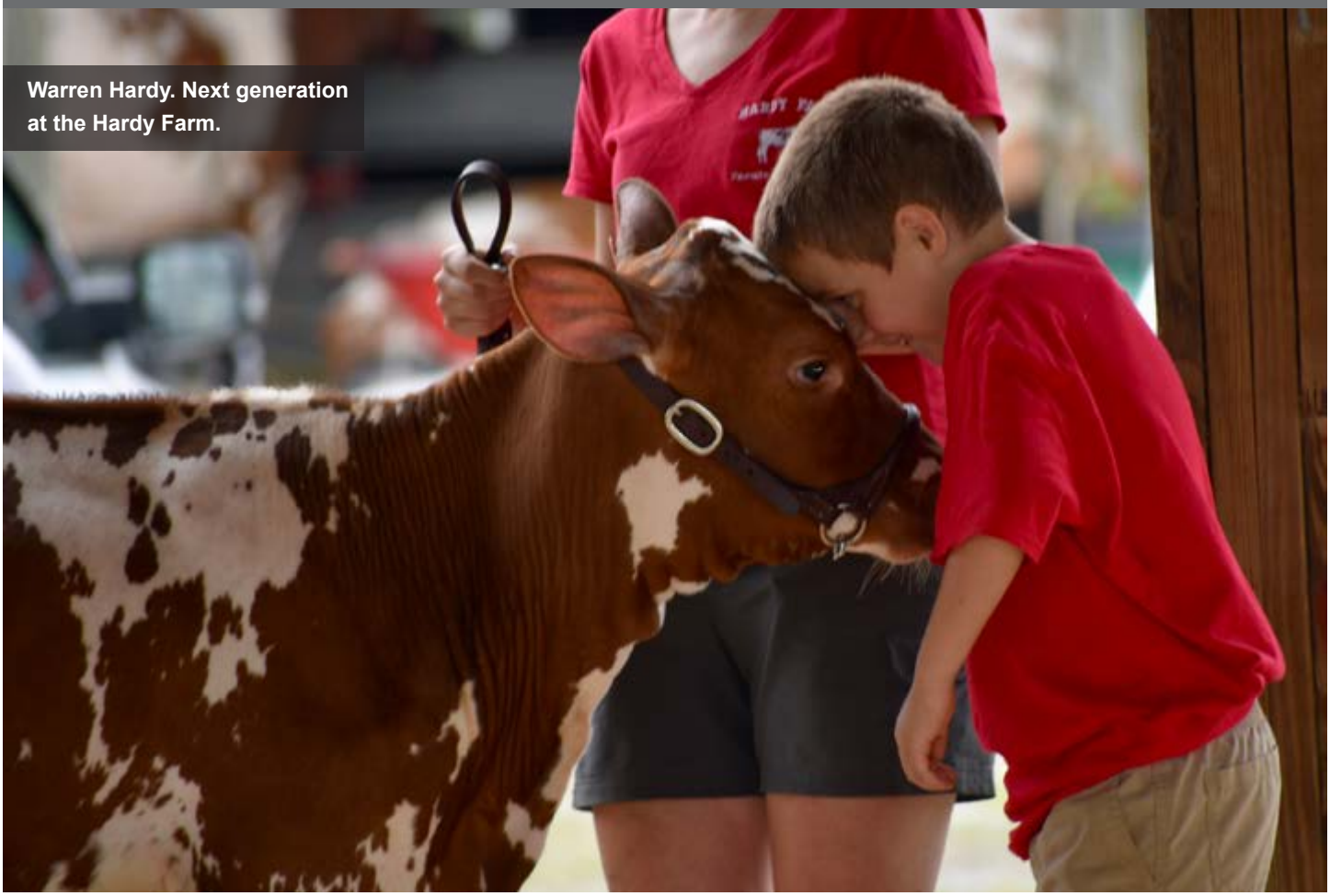

Warren Hardy. Next generation at the Hardy Farm.

HARDY FARM

FARMINGTON, ME

continued from page 1

wife, Teresa. The Holsteins were acquired "due to a 4-H project gone awry."

Ayrshires are definitely the favored breed here. They show several cows per year, however four or five cows per year go to the bigger, national shows. In fact, the high-genetic Ayrshires have become a family focus, as the couple works with their daughter, Marjorie, to enhance the dairy's Ayrshire genetics. They also consult daughter Ashlie and other Ayrshire breeders to continually improve their herd genetics. The herd's classification average is VG-87 points for the Ayrshires, and VG-86 points for the Holsteins. They do not purchase any cows, primarily due to their certified organ herd status.

Ayrshire sales are direct to interested buyers, and cows are also consigned to sales. The sales are also a means of diversifying the income stream, hedging against those times when milking the cows isn't a money maker.

Those Ayrshires became important when Henry's dad began seeking Bang's disease- free cows in the 1940s, when brucellosis was a common concern. Brucellosis is a bacterial disease that has mostly since been eradicated in the United States. It causes abortion, sickly calves, retained afterbirth, poor conception, joint swelling and decreased milk production. In order to begin a dairy herd illness free, he mixed and matched some Guernsey and Holsteins, but really preferred those Ayrshires.

Although the dairy is known for prime Ayrshire genetics, "the genetics is the hobby," while the dairy is the primary business, Henry said. But breeding cows to enhance the genetics is simply a part of producing high-quality milk, and not a separate line of business.

While most of the current herd has been shown, not all of them are good enough for the big shows. Teresa estimates that ten percent of the cows are in the top genetic tier, while others have competed locally. Every cow is bred for type, production and longevity.

"Just because they are a show cow doesn't mean they get any more pampering than the rest of the herd," Teresa said.

Finding accolades on the show circuit has led to the selling of some of these high genetic cows each year. They recently sold five cows at a sale in Rutland, Vermont. The demand for organic Ayrshire cows is there and is growing, as the dominant breed of cow being milked in the United States - organically or not - is Holstein.

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But for grazing ability and organic milk production, the Ayrshires are better. Their milk tends to have more total solids, fat and protein. The breed tends to be hardier - no pun intended - and more vigorous. They are better at turning forage into milk, and are aggressive grazers, unlike most Holsteins, who simply prefer to be fed than to find their own forages, Henry said. Ayrshires eagerly graze, and are a pretty cow.

Their animal sales are direct marketed from the barn. They have more demand for cows than cows for sale. This year, they sold more than they have in the past, selling 14 total animals. And the demand has not stopped. They are on Facebook and other social media sites and have sold cows to breeders all over the country.

The Hardy's artificially inseminate almost the entire herd. They most recently borrowed a bull two years ago, from daughter Marjorie, when they had a hard time settling a group of heifers, Teresa said. They do some embryo work, and have flushed some cows in the past. They also co-own a few cows with Marjorie, and those cows have been flushed, and they've used those embryos.

"With the Ayrshires, we have to base our selection on the pedigree as far as cow family and bulls coming from select farms and cows, because numbers aren't reliable in the Ayrshire bull proofs," Teresa said. Holstein genetics are selected for high fat, high solids, and the red and white coloring, which she prefers.

Milk averages 4.0 percent fat, and 3.1 percent protein. The average cow age is 6.3 years old, and 47 percent of the herd is five years or older. The rolling herd average for the Holsteins is 17,703 pounds of milk, and is 15, 152 pounds of milk for the Ayrshires.

Growing the Dairy

Hardy Farm had a herd of 35 cows when Henry and Teresa - who have been married for 38 years - joined the dairy, farming with his parents until his father's death in 1991. They have been expanding the herd, keeping all of their replacement heifers, and clearing more of the farm's wooded acreage - with its preponderance of rocks - for increased pasture and hay ground as needed.

The dairy now has a total herd of 115 animals. The 400 acre farm has 135 acres of open land, 60 acres of which are permanent pasture, and 75 acres of cropland with all but 30 acres of that being used for pasture by the end of the season. They also rent another 75 acres for hay, and 25 acres of pasture.

The cows were originally housed in a tie-stall barn, built in 1953, which the couple gutted just over 10 years ago. The oldest part of this barn had small 3.5 feet by 5 feet stalls, and cows were getting injured.


Hardy Farm

In 2012, they turned this into a double five swingline herringbone milking parlor, complete with a holding area. They then built a new freestall barn with 30 stalls, and an option to do another 30 in a mirror image if needed, and which was built completed in 2018.

They've been milking in the parlor since May 2012, and the cows are so much healthier. They have no injuries, the incident of feet issues has decreased dramatically, and hocks and legs are looking good now that the cows can freely move around.

When it's time to milk, slow cows, as well as later lactation cows, are separated from the rest of the 60 cow milking herd, and put into the remaining 1970s era tie stalls - which are bigger than the old demolished ones - to wait their turn. This way, the slow and low cows are milked as a group and don't hold up the rest, increasing efficiency.

Eliminating the old tie-stall also meant a positive change in their feeding strategy. They now feed round baleage, using a skid steer, in the freestall. The old tie-stall had made it difficult to feed the round bales.

Opting for Organic

When milk prices weren't covering expenses in the early 2000s, the Hardy's "needed to figure out how to be sustainable," Henry said. They had been juggling bills and struggling to keep afloat, when others in their area told them that the organic market was strong.

They were already grazing cows and those cows were getting a decent amount of dry matter intake from the pasture, so having enough pasture available wasn't a concern. They couldn't grow their own grains on the farm's rocky grounds, so they purchased what they needed for fodder. They were able to find certified organic grain to replace conventional sources. They already were focused on growing quality hay and pasture, so they had good quality forages.

"The farm's focus is on the health and longevity of the cows, and on milk components rather than volume production", Henry said. Even when conventional, they didn't often use antibiotics and they weren't using natural hormones for optimizing cycles and supporting reproduction. The transition really didn't require any significant changes.

They opted into organics, and began shipping certified organic milk, through Horizon, in 2003. They shipped to Horizon until 2015, when Organic Valley began opening up routes in their area. They switched over just prior to the period when Horizon began dropping Northeast producers.

They actually saw an increase in milk production once they made the transition to certified organic. As nothing else really changed on the dairy, it seems the certified organic grain may have had a positive impact on milk production. As organic rules changed, and the DMI from pasture was set at a minimum of 30 percent year-round, they did eventually need to expand pasture as the herd itself grew.

Production Practices

Some dry hay and baleage is fed to the milking herd as they graze, in order to slow down their digestion a bit, Henry said. During the non-grazing season, cows are fed three bales of baleage per day. They rotate the cuttings - utilizing first, second and third cuttings each day. Being paid on milk solids means it's important to keep up with the hay.

The herd gets some grain supplementation in the milking parlor. They use a high-energy grain concentrate from Morrison's.

The grazing season for the milk cows runs from May first through the second week of November, typically. They are outside on pasture 24/7 except for twice per day milking, at 6 a.m. and 5 p.m.. Dry cows remain on pasture until January first, where they are fed baleage, and then are moved to a compost bedded pack. Heifers are put on rented land further away, and begin grazing at the end of April.

In the non-grazing season, the milking herd is housed in the freestall barn, with open access to the heavy use area concrete pad. The free-stall barn is bedded with dry shavings in the winter and a sand base in the warmer months. "The cows prefer the shavings in the winter months," Teresa said.

Calves are tied in front of the holding pen until they are trained to the bucket. Then, while still on milk, the calves are moved to individual stalls. On good weather days, these calves are led to a 12 foot by 12 foot "playpen" for the day. Calves are started on two quarts of milk twice per day for two days, which is increased to three quarts twice per day until they are on the bucket, and increased again to four quarts of milk twice per day. Once they are two months old, they are then cut back to two quarts of milk twice per day. Calves are weaned at 12 weeks of age.

Calves are also offered free choice hay and 18 percent grain. Once the calves eat all of the grain, the amount of grain is increased to three pounds per day. The grain is top-dressed with soybean meal for additional protein.

Once off milk, the calves rotate throughout the small pens in the tie stall barn. When they are old enough, they are moved to a compost bedded pack barn, where they are trained to a hot fence, and have some pasture where they can roam and graze.

Pre-bred heifers, beginning at about seven months of age, as well as some open heifers and dry cows, are winter housed on the compost bedded pack, which is divided in half and shared with the calves. In summer, older heifers and dry cows pasture together.

The compost bedded pack is cleared out each summer and left to "cook" before it is spread on newly cleared fields, where it helps build

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The milking herd on pasture at Hardy Farm.

up the organic matter. Manure from the barns is scraped into a pit, and ultimately spread on hay fields or pastures.

The biggest health issue in the herd is mastitis. They keep their somatic cell count below 150,000, and are "paid on quality," so anything more than a mild case results in the cow being culled, Henry said. They vaccinate with J-VAC® coliform mastitis vaccine when cows dry off. Young stock is vaccinated with Triangle® vaccine, for protection from respiratory disease, as are all show cows.

When they have too many calves and things get crowded, scours or respiratory issues can arise. They have noticed that E. coli can also occur when stalls get crowded, and recently did have an issue in a calf pen, but a quick response and thorough cleaning and sanitizing of the calf pen resolved the issue. Getting the calves outside as soon as possible has also helped keep diseases at bay.

Milk fever, or hypocalcemia, is rare, but they can treat it with calcium, and calving issues do occur, but are not common. Otherwise, they don't have many issues with herd health, and will "take it as it comes," Henry said.

Teresa and Henry do most of the work on the farm themselves, with one older gentleman and two or three younger teenagers who regularly assist with milking or chores, and family available nearby to pitch in if needed.

Pasture

The Hardy's have had Sarah Flack help them improve their pasture and forages, and continue to learn and perfect their intensive rotational grazing. They have fixed paddocks, and also use temporary wire fencing to divide those paddocks when needed. They have increased the number of paddocks, and worked with Sarah on stocking density rates. They continue to strive to improve pasture yields, improve pasture nutrition, increase the DMI the cows get from pasture, and increase the herd health through intensive pasture grazing.

The decisions they make on when to move cows "depends on so many things," Henry said. "There are a lot of things that factor into it. Get the best use of pasture that you can."

The milking herd changes pasture after each milking. They have night pastures near the barn, and day pastures across the road. They also hay these pastures as needed. If the pasture - particularly the faster growing orchard grass fields - get ahead of the cows, they will take hay off of them. They will also take second cuttings of hay if needed. Pastures are a combination of orchard grass, timothy, rye grass, Kentucky bluegrass and a variety of clovers.

They frost seed a clover into some of the pastures as they need it, but "maybe I shouldn't tell all my secrets," Henry stated, jokingly. Seriously, however, they try to grow pasture that can provide

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2022 Fryeburg Fair- Receiving award for 75 years of exhibiting at Fryeburg Fair

"whatever the cows need. They are the dictators of what we do and how much they get. We always strive to make things better."

The Hardy's have some proof that their grazing efforts are working, and that their forages are top quality. Their dry hay was just announced as the first place winner in the first ever Maine Hay Contest.

"Raising our own protein is much more cost-effective than buying it in," Henry said. "We put up really good forage. We're after energy, and to retain body weight," therefore their fed grain is 12 percent protein with high energy, year-round.

They also sell a fair amount of feed to local farms and horse owners.

Organic Community

Henry is concerned that something is missing in the organic industry: Competition. He is concerned that in his neck of the woods, Stonyfield is buying milk from Organic Valley, so they are basically the same thing. Horizon notoriously left the area. Losing the competition negatively affects producers.

"You need competition to help the pay price," he said.

Organic grain is another example of lack of competition. The Hardy's purchase high-quality grain, but if that outfit decides to no longer deliver to Maine, what would happen? In the past, they had a much lower quality grain source, with few if any other options in their region. Henry reports that a group of farmers in the region purchased an old grain mill with the hope of restoring it and rebuilding some infrastructure needed in the area, but it became too costly to do so.

Henry Hardy and 2021 Skowhegan State Fair Dairy Grand Champion

He also feels that the pay price for organic milk is no longer matching the demand for the product. "They want increased milk production, but don't want to pay for it," he said of the organic dairy industry.

The Hardy's know that unless they hang on until their grandchildren are old enough and might decide to become dairy farmers, they will have to have a different succession plan.

They have been working with the Dairy Grazing Apprentice program, but have yet to find a good fit. One apprentice was wonderful, and stayed with them for two years, but decided that

FEATURED FARM

dairy farming wasn't going to be her career. Another candidate simply was not cut out for dairy farming.

In order to spread the word and educate the community about dairy farming, the Hardy's host a variety of farm tours for local schools and colleges in the area. Through their son, who attended University of New Hampshire, they became a regular part of the New England Working Farms tour, and every four or five years students from colleges all over New England tour their dairy farm.

Teresa takes dairy cows to schools to show to the children, and they walk some calves in the local parade. She is also on the Maine Dairy Promotion Council, while Henry serves on the Farm Bureau, Farm Service Agency and the Soil and Water Conservation Boards, and the farm is involved with Farm Bureau, Farm Service Agency and with the Soil and Water Conservation District.

"We try to be a positive influence of agriculture in the community," she said. "We are involved in a bunch of different things."

The farm was honored by the Maine Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2019. They have won superior quality milk production awards from Dairy Farmers of America. The Hardy's were the Maine Dairy Farm Family of the Year in 2011. Other awards received throughout the years include those for pasture quality, and for breeding.

One new venture on the farm is Teresa's farm stand, which will officially open next summer. She's been making salves, soaps and lotions from cows' milk and natural ingredients such as local beeswax and honey for her grandchildren, some of whom have allergies and skin conditions. And they have made a big difference, improving the conditions and providing soothing relief. She is now going to be crafting these items for direct market retail sale, right from the farm.

Not only will this diversify income streams, it will further connect the farm to the community, and educate folks about the positive impact family organic dairy farms can contribute to their neighbors' wellbeing. The mission statement on their website sums up their focus on agriculture and outreach: "Standards exceeding the industry. Visitors always welcome." ◆

The Hardy Farm is located at 360 Weeks Mills Road, Farmington, Maine 04938. Henry can be reached at 207-491-6789, and Teresa can be reached at 207-491-8667. Their email and website are: hardyayrshires67@gmail.com, and www.hardyfarm.weebly.com

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Pay and Feed Prices January 2025

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has published estimated national organic fluid product sales for September and October 2024, compiled with data from the Federal Milk Marketing Order. In September, the data shows a continued increase in the sales of Organic Whole Milk packaged fluid products of 15.5% over September 2023, and the October data shows sales at 10.1% over October 2023. There was a 2.9% increase in Organic Fat Reduced Milk in September 2024 over September 2023, but a 0.8% increase in October 2024 over October 2023. Year to date, October 2024, organic fluid milk sales are 6.8% higher than the same period in 2023. Producers report, anecdotally, and Maple Hill executives confirm that organic dairy products with the extra Grass Fed certification are in short supply as sales increase. There is no separate, independent data on Grass-Fed organic sales available. Maple Hill, Family Farmstead and Organic Valley Grass Fed are certified under the Organic Plus Trust (OPT) which has a steering committee of leaders from Maple Hill, Pennsylvania Certified Organic and CROPP Cooperative. Horizon Grass Fed producers use the American Grass Fed Association certification.

Total US sales of organic fluid milk products were 249 million pounds in September 2024, with organic Whole Milk sales at 131 million pounds, and sales of organic Fat Reduced Milk at 117 million pounds. In October 2024, total sales of organic packaged milk were 256 million pounds, with sales of organic packaged Whole Milk at 137 million pounds, and sales of organic Fat Reduce Milk at 117 million pounds. Reports from producers are that organic milk is still short in the Northeast, and across the country, with spot milk as high as $46/cwt.

The **average retail price** for organic milk in 2024, as recorded by Federal milk order market administrators based on a survey conducted one day between the 1st and 10th of each month (excluding Fridays and weekends) in selected cities or metropolitan areas, is $4.81 per half gallon. During 2024, the average price has varied very little, peaking at $4.87 in July, with the lowest price in January 2024 of $4.73/half gallon. The highest monthly retail price was $4.88/half gallon in September 2023. These averages do not reflect the retail prices for brand named products and Grass Fed certified products in retail stores that can be over $6 per half gallon.

The yearly average retail price was recorded at $3.81 per half gallon in 2008 to an average of $4.81 in 2024, an increase of $24/cwt. Since 2008, the average Pay Price has increased by approximately $6/cwt.

FMMO 1 reported that in October 2024, fluid Organic Whole Milk utilization of organic milk packaged within the Order totaled 16.17 million pounds; lower than the previous year of 18.1 million pounds. In October 2024, Organic Reduced Fat Milk packaged in the Order, 13.45 million pounds, was down from 15.44 million pounds in October 2023. The total organic fluid milk packaged in the Order in October 2024 of 29.62 million pounds, was down 12% from October 2023 total of 33.64 million pounds. All milk packaged outside the Order but sold within the Order increased by 6% or 8.33 million pounds in October 2024 over October 2023. This would include

- continued on page 34

Estimated Fluid Milk Products Sales Reports

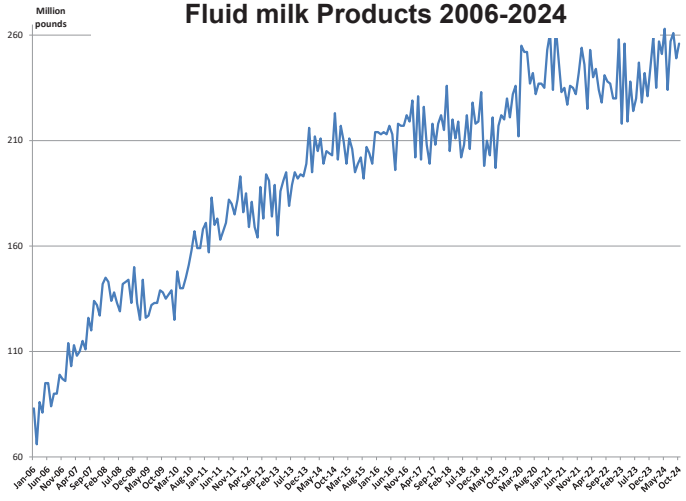
Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	Sept-24	2024 Year to date	Sept-23	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	131	1,182	15.5%	13.3%
Flavored Whole milk	1	7	-19.7%	0.0%
Organic Reduced-Fat Milk (2%)	80	724	4.2%	4.6%
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	21	188	0.3%	-7.8%
Organic Fat-Free Milk Skim	10	100	-0.3%	-9.6%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	6	59	-0.3%	2.2%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	0	3	63.7%	21.8%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	117	1,071	2.9%	0.6%
Total Organic Milk Products	249	2,264	**9.1%**	**6.9%**

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	Oct-24	2024 Year to date	Oct-23	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	137	1,319	10.1%	12.9%
Flavored Whole milk	1	9	23.7%	2.9%
Organic Reduced-Fat Milk (2%)	82	805	9.7%	5.1%
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	20	208	-9.9%	-8.0%
Organic Fat-Free Milk Skim	10	110	-14.4%	-10.1%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	5	64	-33.0%	-1.7%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	1	4	204.3%	40.2%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	117	1,188	0.8%	0.7%
Total Organic Milk Products	**256**	**2,520**	**5.9%**	**6.8%**

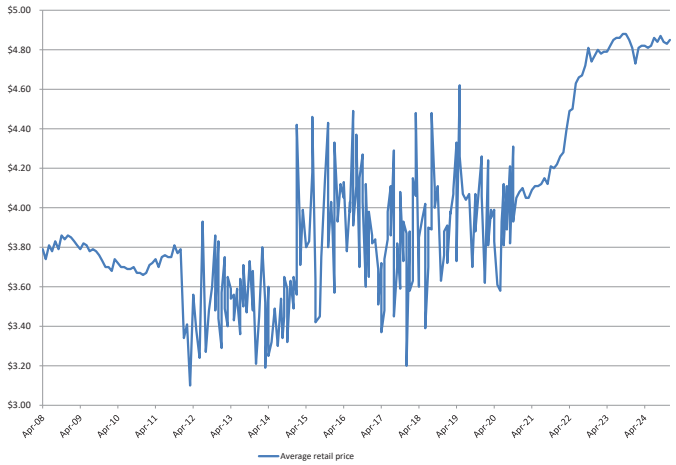
Data may not add due to rounding to the nearest million pounds

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

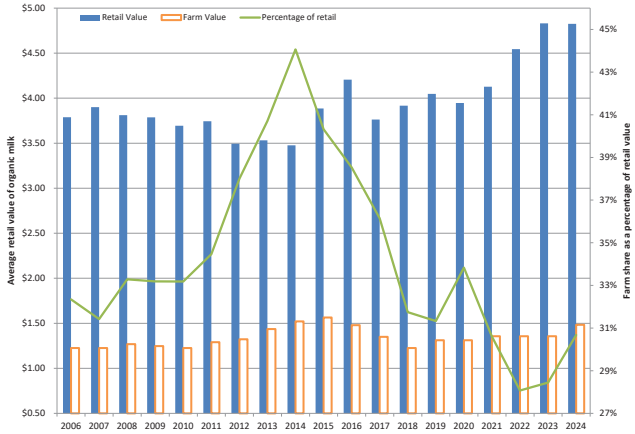
Estimated Total U.S. Sales of Organic Fluid milk Products 2006-2024



Average Organic Retail price for 1/2 gallons as reported by USDA AMS 2012-2024

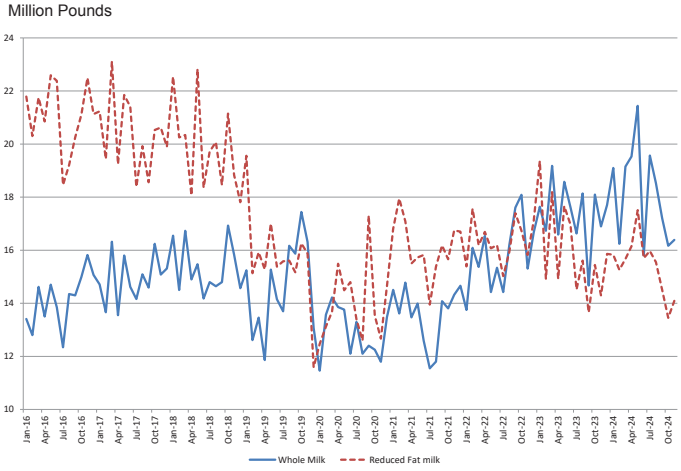


Average retail price, average farm share and percentage for half gallon of organic milk

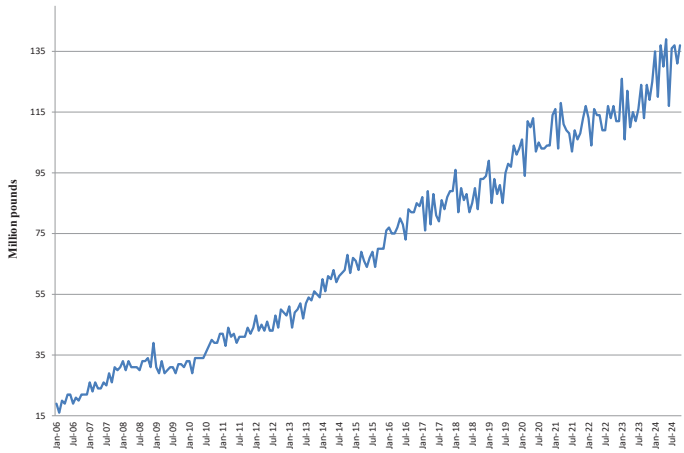


Utilization of Organic Fluid milk in FMMO 1 2016-2024

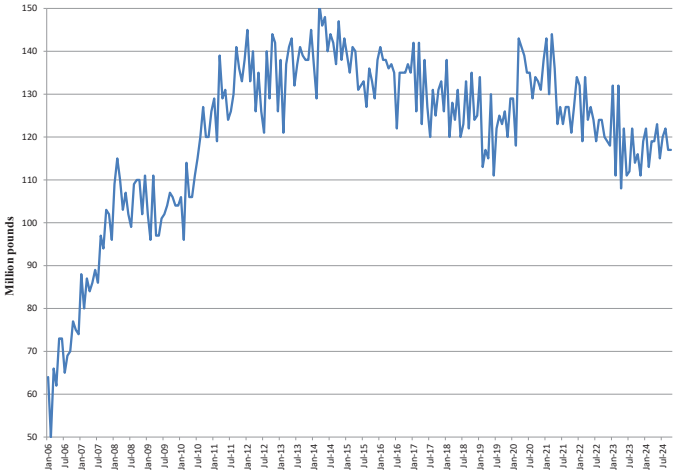
(not including fluid packaged milk processed out of order)



Organic Whole Milk Retail Sales 2006-2024



Organic Reduced-Fat retail sales 2006-2024



ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Pay and Feed Prices

continued from page 32

organic fluid milk packaged outside the Order but sold within the Order.

In November 2024, Organic Whole Milk packaged in the Order was 16.39 million pounds, a small decrease from November 2023 of 16.89 million pounds. In October 2024, Organic Reduced Fat Milk packaged in the Order was 14.09 million pounds, lower than the 14.30 packaged in November 2023. Total organic milk packaged in the Order in November 2024 of 30.84 million pounds was down from the 31.89 million pounds packaged in November 2023. Year to date, January to November 2024, there was a total of 368.82 million pounds of organic fluid milk packaged and sold in FMMO 1, an increase of 2.51 million pounds or 0.69% over the same period in 2023. In November 2024, there was 149.35 million pounds of milk marketed as Class 1 in FMMO 1 but packaged outside the FMMO 1 marketing area, an increase of 2.61 million pounds over November 2023.

There are 3 other FMMO's that publish reports of the volume of Class 1 organic packaged milk in their Order, two of which report how much is 'exported' to other Orders. In October 2024 of the 256 million pounds packaged and sold as Class 1 organic milk in the US, approximately 146.72 million pounds was packaged in 4 Orders that publish reports on organic milk packaged in their Order. That leaves over 100 million pounds of organic milk that is packaged in Orders that do not publish the data on organic milk that they collect. In both October and November 2024, Order 32 (Central) packaged more organic milk than any other order at 50.36 million pounds in October and 48.04 million pounds in November. Order 51 (California) packaged 45.02 in October and 36.7 million pounds in November. Order 33 (Mideast) packages less than Order1, with 21.72 million pounds in October and 20.12 million pounds in November 2024. In Order 32 (Central FO where Aurora Dairies are located), 88.5% of the organic milk packaged in 2024 was 'exported' to other Orders

Reports from producers, and from those advertising on NODPA's website and in the NODPA News, are that demand for organic certified cows and heifers is very strong, with prices paid equal to and exceeding conventional dairy replacements, $2,500 per head and higher. In the article Leatherstocking Cattle Exchange by Robert Yoder, in this issue, he reports on the interest in A2A2 cows and heifers and Alex Weaver's recent auction. NOFA-NY-certified livestock auction in New Berlin, New York, reports that organic cull cows consistently sold above conventional cows in November and December 2024. The average price for conventional cull cows ranged from a low of $92/cwt to a high of $129 /cwt in December. Calf prices are still strong but no premium for organic. Organic milking cows were selling well at an average of $1,500-$3,800 each in November and December 2024. In a recent report from a Pacific Northwest livestock auction, USDA stated the overall average for organic cull cow prices traded higher than the overall average for conventional

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	35.68	31.51	33.23	28.97	29.35
MAY	38.95	36.24	30.49	29.72	28.25
JUNE	31.51	34.59	31.53	28.41	26.90
JULY	35.54	30.75	29.44	25.50	26.70
AUGUST	34.07	33.75	32.12	27.18	24.70
SEPTEMBER	31.72	28.32	35.00	30.26	29.70
OCTOBER	29.62	33.54	34.83	29.47	25.78
NOVEMBER	30.48	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

Vermont Report

Month	Volume(lbs.)	Ave. daily production per cow (lbs.)	Min Price	Max Price	Weighted Av Pay Price	Ave. Butterfat	Ave. Protein
Nov-23	1,155,583	39.6	$ 27.92	$ 43.60	$ 37.01		
Dec-23	1,227,212	39.3	$ 27.92	$ 47.13	$ 39.70		
Jan-24	1,224,497	40.2	$ 35.00	$ 47.38	$ 39.97	4.21%	3.03%
Feb-24	1,073,895	41.9	$ 36.04	$ 46.74	$ 39.99	4.82%	3.43%
Mar-24	1,088,144	46.4	$ 33.68	$ 42.87	$ 36.59	4.64%	3.38%
Apr-24	958,104	44.5	$ 33.08	$ 41.85	$ 36.10	4.59%	3.34%
May-24	1,105,985	51	$ 32.10	$ 39.11	$ 34.77	4.38%	3.32%
Jun-24	860,631	50.7	$ 31.65	$ 39.10	$ 34.00	4.20%	3.22%
Jul-24	1,013,388	48.4	$ 30.70	$ 37.06	$ 33.00	3.99%	3.13%
Aug-24	1,169,419	47.8	$ 31.49	$ 38.79	$ 34.39	4.03%	3.21%
Sep-24	1,066,596	48.3	$ 29.50	$ 38.75	$ 34.08	4.09%	3.29%

Pennsylvania Report

Month	Volume(lbs.)	Ave. daily production per cow (lbs.)	Min Pay Price	Max Pay Price	Weighted Av. Pay Price	Ave. Butterfat	Ave. Protein
Jun-24	1,331,605	31.23	$ 25.05	$ 41.74	$ 33.57	3.98%	3.07%
Jul-24	1,170,262	27.9	$ 25.50	$ 41.43	$ 33.55	3.88%	2.99%
Aug-24	1,167,928	27.93	$ 28.45	$ 42.32	$ 34.60	3.99%	3.11%
Sep-24	1,268,946	30.76	$ 28.70	$ 43.22	$ 35.61	4.17%	3.30%

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

cull cows. The average price for the top 10 organic cows auctioned was $129.97 per hundredweight, compared to an average price of $132.41 per hundredweight for auctioned top 10 conventional cows. The average weight for the top 10 conventional cows was 1370.0 pounds compared to 1371.5 pounds for the top 10 organic cows. The overall price for organic cows auctioned was $111.02 per hundredweight with an average weight of 1283.87 pounds, while the overall price for conventional cows auctioned was $99.57 per hundredweight with an average weight of 1267.70 pounds.

Vermont Monthly Organic Dairy Report and Pennsylvania Monthly Organic Reports

Part of a new pilot program in partnership with the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Market News to collect organic market data for the 2023/2024 growing seasons are reported monthly.

Organic Milk Exports

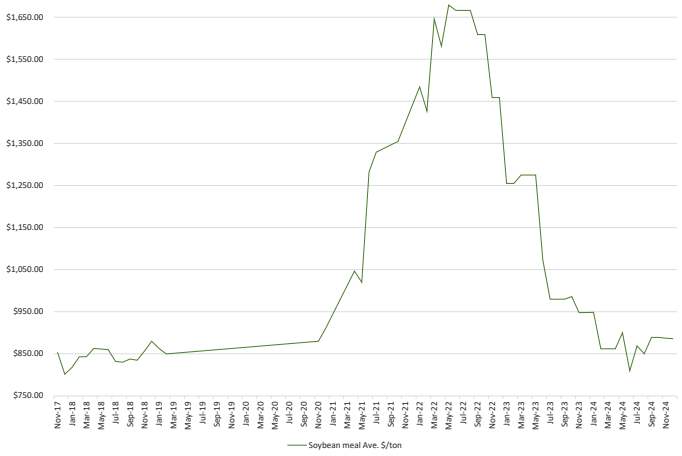
The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) released a monthly report for September and October 2024. Exports for September 2024 were 268,828 liters (610,444 lbs.), down 7.7% percent from August, but up 70.4 percent from 2023. Recently released data for October 2024 indicated organic milk exports were 464,716 liters (1,055,259 lbs.), up 73% from the month prior, and down 85.2% from 2023. Exports of organic milk from the start of the year through October are up 36.2% percent, compared to the same period one year ago.

Feed

National data from USDA has organic feed corn delivered to the elevator averaging $6.41 per bushel in December 2024. Organic feed soybean delivered to the elevator averaged $19.78/bu. in November 2024. Organic feed wheat averaged $6.02/bushel in November. Soybean meal is currently trading at $889/ton. Costs for organic Alfalfa are about the same as conventional, at $260 -$300 per ton. ◆

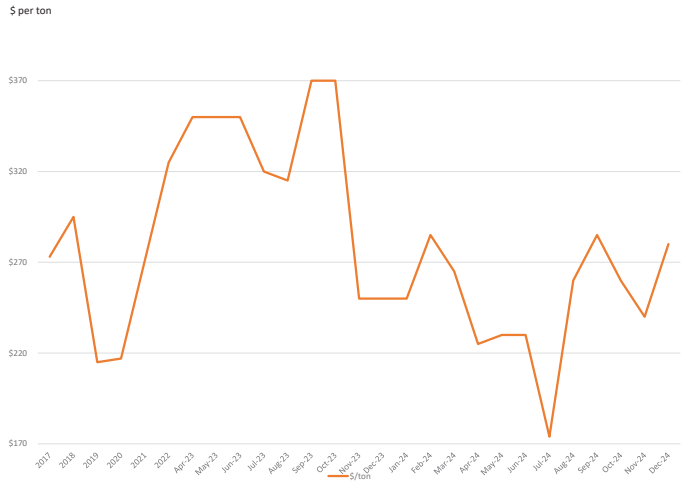
Organic Feed Soybean $/bushel 2008-2024 - USDA Market News Data - FOB Farm and FOB Elevator/Warehouse from 2023 onwards

2017-2024 Soybean meal Ave. $/ton delivered FOB dealer/warehouse - USDA AMS Data



Organic Corn Price $/bushel 2008-2024 supplied by USDA AMS FOB the Farm and FOB Elevator/Warehouse from 2023 onwards

Organic Hay Dollars per ton (Average/year) - USDA AMS Data



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noraowens@comcast.net
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Thank You!