

NORTHEAST ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS ALLIANCE



August 22nd, 2001

An Overview

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance originated February 2001 in Waterbury, VT at a summit meeting of organic dairy producers. This was considered a landmark meeting – the first of its kind – with organic producers from New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine attending. Present also, were resource people working for the organic certifying bodies of Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire. Kevin Brussell, from the Organic Farmer’s Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM) located in Casey, IL introduced his organization to the gathering. OFARM is a consortium of organic grain cooperative whose mission statement is to “Coordinate Efforts of Producer Marketing Groups to Benefit and Sustain Organic Producers”. OFARM will consider adding a northeast organic dairy division to their group to help dairy and grain farmers work together to set prices, and better understand each others’ production, marketing, and costs.

The purpose of the summit meeting was to bring farmers from different areas together to discuss a base price for organic milk, the federal organic standards, and alternative markets for organic milk. At the meeting, a motion was made and passed to form an association of organic family dairy farms from the northeast including the New England states, New York and Pennsylvania. The new organization was named The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA).

The group made a list of goals for the Alliance:

- 1) Agree on a base price across the northeast and establish a means of holding it
- 2) Require that farms are pasture based – this needs to be more clearly defined and it is the responsibility of the state reps to get feedback from their farmers. Some suggestions were to:
 - Specify a percentage of daily intake from pasture on a dry matter basis during the grazing season.
 - Limit the number of animal units per acre for the pasture system to that it doesn’t become a feed lot.
 - Describe pasture in qualitative terms such as improved animal health, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, improved quality and quantity of grassland, increased profit, increased conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) in milk and meat and other philosophical terms.
 - Submit a proposal to the NOSB (National Organic Standards Board) for rules affecting the pasture requirement in the federal standards.
- 3) Educate consumers and transitioning farmers about organic farming practices and the challenges associated with farmer-processor relations.
- 4) Establish good open communication with reliable, quality feed sources (e.g. OFARM).
- 5) Establish good open communication with organic dairy processors (e.g. Horizon, CROPP, etc.) to help fix and hold a sustainable floor price for milk.
- 6) The group may adopt a set of standards that reflect their philosophy about organic farming; i.e. a relationship between animal number and acreage etc.

Organizational Strategies

Representatives from each state were named whose job is to continue the goals of this new organization and represent the thoughts and ideas of their representative state.

The chosen Representatives at this time are:

Annie Claghorn and Ginny Welch (VT)
Dan Tilley, Kathie Arnold and Joan Burns (NY)
Elvin Ranck and Roman Stoltzfoos (PA)
Steve Morrison and Steven Russell (ME)

Non-Dairy Representatives are:

Lisa McCrory (NOFA-VT)
Diane Schivera (MOFGA)
Ron Kirk (NY)
Kevin Brussell (IL).

Since this original meeting, there have been 4 conference call meetings lasting about 2 hours each. These meetings have been used to share information of activities happening in the different states, formulate a mission statement, decide to send out a newsletter on a regular basis, put together a questionnaire, organize a summer conference, and discuss ways in which this organization can be self supporting.

The routine with each conference call has been to give every a state a chance to check in and give an update on any related organic dairy news or events. Following that, the next projects to tackle were to formulate a mission statement and decide how NODPA could be effective in carrying out its mission.

The group decided that a newsletter would be a great medium for sharing information between states. Contents of the newsletter would include personal letters from farmers urging fellow producers to get involved with NODPA, articles from producers covering topics of interest, technical articles on animal health, pasture management or other topics that would be interesting and useful to the NODPA membership, calendar of events, a listing of the NODPA Representatives and how to get in touch with them, and (eventually) advertisements that could support the cost of the newsletter.

NODPA feels that it is important to create an opportunity at least once a year for all the producers to get together to discuss critical issues and plan strategies to strengthen the organic dairy infrastructure. It was decided to organize a conference/field day on an organic dairy farm in late August. This years conference will be held Wednesday, August 22nd at Roman Stoltzfoos's farm in Kinzers, PA. Details on speakers, agenda, etc are included on a separate sheet.

NODPA has also sent out a survey to all the organic dairy farms as well as a large number of transitioning farms and others considering organic production. The survey asks a lot of questions that will be helpful in giving NODPA direction that represents the membership and it also helps the organization in recruiting leadership from all the representative states. Results of the survey will be available at the August 22nd event. Extra surveys are available.

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance Mission Statement

To enable organic family dairy farmers, situated across an extensive area, to have informed discussion about matters critical to the well being of the organic dairy industry as a whole with particular emphasis on:

- 1) Establishing a fair and sustainable floor price for their product at the wholesale level*
- 2) Promoting ethical, ecological and economically sustainable farming practices (e.g. strict pasture requirements for organic livestock)*
- 3) Developing networks with producers and processors of other organic commodities to strengthen infrastructure within the industry (e.g. grain growers, meat packers, etc.)*
- 4) Establishing open dialogue with organic dairy processor/retailers to better affect producer pay price and contribute to marketing efforts.*

