

## NODPA Annual Producer Meeting

August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003

NODPA Field Days, Albion, Maine

Welcoming remarks and a history of NODPA and its accomplishments were summarized by Lisa McCrory, NODPA Coordinator.

### In brief, the Accomplishments to date are:

- Created effective farmer networking on a state by state and Northeast level.
- Opened lines of communication with processors, industry representatives, and the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).
- Organized two Annual Field Days Events in PA and NY with a third annual event taking place this August in Albion, ME.
- Created the *NODPA News* quarterly newsletter that goes out to over 900 producers, educators and industry people.
- Created Odairy, the organic dairy electronic discussion group, which has over 200 subscribing members. (To become an Odairy subscriber, send an email to: [odairy-subscribe@yahooogroups.com](mailto:odairy-subscribe@yahooogroups.com) ).
- Developed a web page filled with resources including educational information on animal health and grazing management, industry news, classifieds, calendar events, and a business directory. ([www.organicmilk.org](http://www.organicmilk.org), [www.nodpa.com](http://www.nodpa.com) ).
- Administered producer surveys (2001, 2002) providing information on pay price of milk, cost of purchased feeds, pasture use and feedback on important issues.

### The Challenges to date:

- getting producer involvement and input
- raising funds from producer members and organizations (including foundations)
- Labor needs: NODPA wants to do a lot more than a part time person can do AND we need to raise funds in order for that labor force to grow so that those other goals can be achieved

NEXT.....

Steve Morrison, NODPA President, then spoke to the group reviewing the Mission Statement and recognizing that NODPA has been able to strengthen the bond with producers allowing the group to respond as a unit to situations. Increased producer representation, continued networking and reaching farmers by way of a centralized office have all been positive.

A recent event has been the merger with Horizon and Dean Foods. Producers are having mixed feelings about this event recognizing that organic dairy farming is moving in the direction of consolidation and NODPA needs to keep farmers communicating on a grassroots level. With this Dean Foods/Horizon merger, it is possible that larger dairies may be transitioning to organic and this (and other factors) could affect the pay price for organic milk.

Some important things that NODPA needs to do are:

- 1) continue formalizing,
- 2) put together a business plan so that we are more attractive for funders,
- 3) get more individuals involved in writing grant and sourcing grant opportunities,
- 4) adding more people onto the payroll,

- 5) build and maintain a database that can show who is shipping milk to whom and where. We would benefit as a group in understanding how this works.
- 6) getting articles out to the general press and not just the NODPA News – consumer education
- 7) progress reports to the Board of Directors
- 8) Close ties to legal counsel: supporting farmers that are going through contract negotiations, direct marketing and renegotiating contracts
- 9) Questions in the future about organic certification standards: 700-800 cow herds are changing (influencing?) certain areas in the standards the convenience of the large scale production model.
- 10) Maintaining a presence at industry meetings (ie producer leader at the Dean Foods meetings)

### **Discussions:**

There was a question about farmer membership and how to get producers more involved & contributing to the organization. Comments were to visit people ‘on the ground’. Who are those farmer leaders who are connected with lots of other producers and how do we invite them in?

### **Presentation by Kathie Arnold and Steve Russell:**

Organic Dairy Replacement Standards are currently being interpreted in two different ways. Current NOP standards state that:

#### **205.236 Origin of Livestock**

- a) *Livestock products that are to be sold, labeled or represented as organic must be from livestock under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation or hatching: Except that:*
  - 1) *Poultry .....(blah, blah - abbreviated)*
  - 2) *Dairy Animals. Milk or milk products must be from animals that have been under continuous organic management beginning no later than 1 year prior to the production of the milk or milk products that are to be sold, labeled, or represented as organic: Except that, when an entire distinct herd is converted to organic production, the producer may:*
    - (i) *80:20 rule first 9 months (abbreviated)*
    - (ii) *organic feed last 3 months (abbreviated)*
    - (iii) *Once an entire, distinct herd has been converted to organic production, all dairy animals shall be under organic management from the last third of gestation*

Included in your mailing is a flow chart that Richard Matthews, National Organic Program Manager uses to explain the NOP position. This flow chart is on the NOP web site. What it allows is for some producers to source organic dairy replacements from ANY source provided they are managed organically for one full year before their milk goes in the tank. Other producers in their flow chart design are REQUIRED to find replacements that are organically managed 3 months prior to birth (last third of gestation). This is clearly an unlevel playing field.

At the NODPA Producer meeting, producers agreed unanimously that once a farm has been certified organic and has gone through its one time whole herd transition, ALL

replacement dairy stock must be organic from the last third of gestation. This rule must be the same for all. Included in your packet is a copy of the position statement that was submitted to Richard Matthews , National Organic Program Chair, and to George Seimon (NOSB Livestock Committee Chair). At the bottom of the letter was the name and affiliation of all the NODPA Reps. In retrospect, I wish that I had contacted all of you individually to get permission to put your name down, but time was of the essence.

Discussions on this topic prior to the unanimous decision:

- majority of certifiers as well as the OTA Certifiers Council support last third of gestation
- what about wanting to improve dairy genetics?
- Before NOP Standard, PCO allowed you to grow by a small % by purchasing nonorganic animals
- Had a high scc last year and had a heavy culling with a seasonal operation. Had a challenge finding other cows.
- 10 years from now, hope that herds will be healthier
- What about a clause for 'commercially available'?
- There has not been a premium yet for organic cows
- Vehicle for creating an Organic Trader in the Northeast.
- With Horizon, you can call with an animal for sale and get a post card out right away
- We could put together a consignment auction of organic livestock on the day before the conference or right after
- Dean Foods doesn't want small producers – they are already starting to talk about trucking fees.
- If we don't have these loopholes covered, there will be a lot of large producers finding ways to get certified.
- Need to cultivate the college students

Asked around to see if anyone in the audience had any organic animals for sale:

- 1) Lewis Nuit – Atkinson, ME
- 2) Pam Moore, PA
- 3) John Zehr, PA
- 4) Jack and Anne Lazor, VT

Looking for organic livestock

- 1) Tim Barrows, Vergennes, VT

\* from this there was talk about NODPA creating an 'organic trader' that could go out monthly to subscribing members.