

8/20 NODPA Producer meeting notes:

NODPA reps present were introduced: Annie Claghorn, John Stolfus, , Rick Segalla, Henry Perkins, Jim and Nancy Gardiner, Arden Landis, Siobhan Griffin, Steve Morrison

Thanks given to the Clark family for hosting the event, Elisa Clancy, Mia Morrison, and Kathie Arnold for all the hard work on the NODPA newsletter

Notable guests introduced were: Jerry Brunetti (Agri-Dynamics), Ridge Shinn (NE Livestock Alliance), Allan Nation (Stockman Grass Farmer), Charlie Taplin (Brookfield Ag Services), Jenny Nelson (Rep. Bernie Sanders), Jim Curtis (Taurus Service Inc), Gwen Harris (VT Grass Farmers' Assoc)

Present from organic milk buyers: Cindy Masterman from Horizon, Tim Griffin from CROPP, Mike Suever from Hood, Mike Damon from DMS

Sarah Flack handed out checkoff sheets, so that producers could sign up to have 2 cents per hundredweight deducted from their milk checks to help fund NODPA

Kathy Arnold spoke about the state of the organic dairy industry, characterized by:

- 20% growth in recent years
- some new players and acquisitions, such as Dean Foods buying Horizon, and Dannone taking a majority share in Stonyfield
- still many small processors, including on-farm processing

She outlined major concerns going forward:

- issues around the national standards, including questionable USDA guidances and how much say the NOSB will have in shaping changes
- Clarity on what animal health products are acceptable for use on organic farms
- How to handle new farms transitioning in, including need for technical assistance/mentoring, balancing supply and demand
- Large organic dairies influencing consumer concerns
- Growth of infrastructure of organic dairy, including increasing vets, education, processing
- Maintaining a viable pay price

Tony Azevedo, an organic producer from California, gave his thoughts on what he has seen in the industry. He farms in the San Joaquin Valley, one of 7 organic dairies in state. Over the past 50 years, he has seen many small farms go out of business in his area. He spoke against creating farm divisions, such as small and big farms, or family/non-family farms, instead trying to recognize farm will have different sizes and needs. In his experience, all farmers were looking at getting bigger, to maintain profitability in the face of low prices. He said going organic saved his farm from going out of business. Organic must maintain its connection to consumers in order to succeed, and not turn into just another commodity. This means having cows on grass. If the pasture standard is not enforced, California factory-farmed milk will end up in New England, he predicted.

There was a floor discussion on how to stop dry-lot organic dairying. NODPA had lobbied for a good pasture standard when the standards were being written, but as written the standard is weak and ambiguous. Ideas to change things included

- consumer education campaign to influence standards
- producers refusing to put their milk on a truck with a company who did business with factory farms
- lobbying politicians/USDA to affect the rule
- getting the milk companies to have a strict pasture standard

Organic Valley has discussed a pasture standard for their farmers. Horizon and Hood were asked about their pasture rules. Horizon replied that their farms do put the cows out on pasture, and that the issue is really between farms and their certifier. Hood said that their standards will be more stringent than the national standards. General consensus was that milk buyers should recruit new farms from farmers that are already grazing, and should set a pasture standard just like they set milk quality standards

After non-producers left, the business meeting was held. Sarah Flack reported on the state of NODPA. The annual budget is \$60,000 with 3 part-time staff: Sarah, Lisa, and Elisa. With the plan to separate NODPA from NOFA Vermont, expenses will increase.

There was discussion about the best time for the NODPA field days, maybe moving it to another time of year. General feeling was to keep it in the summer or early fall, to avoid haying conflicts. Advance notice should be 6 months if possible, to give farmers planning time.

In the future, NODPA will need over \$100,000 annually to run, including hiring new staff that would understand milk marketing and increase membership. To date, major NODPA operating funds have come from:

- John Merck Fund, in the form of a 3-year challenge grant (may not fund in future)
- Field Day proceeds
- Newsletter advertising

The producer checkoff should turn into the main form of support for NODPA, providing support for other grants.

There was discussion about the history of NODPA, which was started to maintain organic milk prices, when the price dropped in 2000. NODPA's mission is to help small family farms, to help organic dairy farmers communicate, to lobby for good organic standards, and to help share information

The discussion continued around the issue of lobbying processors to enforce standards, or trying to influence that on the producer level. Ideas included

- making a video to showcase organic dairy and NODPA, which might cost \$5,000
- publicizing that dry-lot dairies are coming into organic dairies
- creating standards or a rating system to keep milk companies honest

Producers listed the most important issues for NODPA to address, in order:

Pasture access standard

General standards

Viable pay price

Consumer confidence

Consumer education

Creating a national organization

Losing control to big companies

Networking farmers

Supporting NODPA

Educating farmers