

# NODPA NEWS

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

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# Organic Industry News

### New Dairy Herd Transition/ Organic Law Has Been Amended: Will Allow Dairy Animals to Transition with the Land

By Kathie Arnold

Amid a storm of controversy in the organic community, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) was successful in getting the Agricultural Appropriations Conference Committee of Congress to add an amendment to an appropriations bill that would change the Organic Foods and Production Act (OFPA), the 1990 law that authorized the creation of the National Organic Program. The changes affect dairy herd transition, wording on synthetics, and commercially unavailable agricultural products used in processed products.

This amendment was prompted by the Harvey Court Ruling, which struck down the 80/20 dairy herd transition clause for being inconsistent with the law. The OFPA amendment will not restore 80/20, but rather will allow the animals to transition along with the crops and land in the third year of transition. Following is the new OFPA wording on dairy livestock (with the newly added wording in bold italics):

6509 (e) Additional Guidelines  
(2) Dairy Livestock  
**(A) IN GENERAL--Except as provided in subparagraph (B),** a dairy animal from which milk or milk products will be sold or labeled as organically produced shall be raised and handled in accordance with this chapter for not less than the 12-month period immediately prior to the sale of such milk and milk products.

(Continued on page 2)

### Update on Pay Price

By Ed Maltby

In the last edition of the NODPA News I wrote an article that described what the different companies were paying for organic milk in the northeast. Since the article was printed we have seen a significant change in the base price paid to the farmer.

All three of the major purchasers of organic milk have, or plan to, increase the price they pay by at least \$2.50 per cwt with a further rise predicted early in 2006. The improvement in pay price recognizes the significant increase in the costs of goods and services over the last few years, and specifically the recent dramatic increases in fuel and feed.

The current activity around the OFPA has stimulated handlers to increase their signing bonuses for farms that are transitioning. Also, they are again looking at the increase in costs for transitioning farmers in their final year, when the farmer bears all the cost of organic production without the benefit of an organic price. Organic Valley is working with Stonyfield to assist its members with more economic and efficient ways to purchase feed.

Members of the NODPA Board and I have continued to meet with different handlers and their representatives to inform and educate them on the pressures that farmers have. The NODPA Board has sent the following letters over the past six months:

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(Continued from OFPA Amendment, page 1)

**(B) TRANSITION GUIDELINE.--Crops and forage from land included in the organic system plan of a dairy farm that is in the third year of organic management may be consumed by the dairy animals of the farm during the 12-month period immediately prior to the sale of organic milk and milk products.**

This provision will allow farms to feed their third year transition crops to their animals during the year long herd transition, right up until day the herd is considered organic, when the feed must be 100%

certified organic. Many certifiers have been allowing the use of third year transition feeds for the 80% part of the 80/20 during the first nine months of transition, but then fully certified organic feed has been required for the last 3 months. This in essence has meant a 3 year, 3 month transition for most dairy farms that had to fully transition their land. Some certifiers had been requiring 3 years transition for the land and then one year for the herd for a total of 4 years of transition.

This new provision will actually ease transition costs for farms that can grow all of their own grain as they will be able to transition in just 3 years. For farms who do not grow any of their own grain, the new provision will make transition more costly as all grain fed during the year of herd transition will have to be certified organic grain, but they too will have the total process shortened to just 3 years. The allowance for feeding third year transition feeds only applies to crops grown on the farm itself, however, and does not allow purchasing off farm third year transition crops to feed the herd. Farms that grow part of their own grain will be somewhere in the middle on how this affects their economics of transition.

The 80/20 dairy herd transition is not out the window yet and can still clearly be used by farms that start their herd transition by early June of 2006. Leslie Zuck, Executive Director of Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO), stated that "It is possible that NOP [National Organic Program] could allow producers to begin an 80/20 conversion right up until June 6, 2007, even though the conversion wouldn't be complete until a year later. But as things stand now, without further clarification from NOP, PCO can only allow 80/20 if they start by June 2006." As of press time, my phone message and email to the NOP to clarify this question had received no response.

The other concern in all this for dairy producers and consumers revolves around replacement animals. In the words of Emily Brown Rosen, of Organic Research Associates, LLC, who has been intimately involved in organic standards development for years, "Some have questioned why public interest groups have raised the

**The OFPA amendment will not restore 80/20, but rather will allow the animals to transition along with the crops and land in the third year of transition.**

concern that this change will allow cows to be treated with antibiotics and fed genetically engineered feed or slaughter products prior to conversion-- this stems from the fact that currently, the only requirement that young dairy stock be managed organically from last third of gestation is tied in the regulation to the use of the 80/20 feed provision, according to the NOP interpretation

(204.239(a)(2)). So depending on how the rules are rewritten, that requirement could be lost and all dairy animals only required to have a 12 month conversion. This would allow non-organic animals as replacement stock on a continuing basis, thus the loophole for non-organic feed and drugs. [Bold added by KA] Hopefully, there can be a lot of public discussion and comments, and USDA response that will lead toward strengthening, and not weakening of this requirement."

The NODPA Board recently issued a public statement reaffirming NODPA's support for all replacement animals being organic from the last third of gestation once a dairy farm has transitioned. This will be a key point that farmers and others will need to concentrate on, to ensure that as the NOP rewrites the National Organic Standards, the requirement for dairy replacement animals being organic from last third of gestation (as is required for slaughter stock) is written into the Rule. NODPA will keep you informed. ♦



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*(Continued from Update on Pay Price, page 1)*

- \* July 12<sup>th</sup> -Letter to NODPA members only to ask them what financial and social pressures they are under with the current pay price structure.
- \* August 1<sup>st</sup> – Letter to processors and handlers only explaining the difficulties that northeast organic dairy farmer's face and asking for a series of meetings to discuss these and other issues.
- \* August 4<sup>th</sup> – Letter to NODPA members reminding them that the Field days are only a week away and asking them to come to the meeting to raise any issues they have and enclosing the August 1<sup>st</sup> letter to processors.
- \* September 15<sup>th</sup> – Letter to processors and handlers only to ask for meetings with them separately or in groups to discuss all the issues that affect the organic milk industry in the northeast. ♦



## From The NODPA Desk

*By Ed Maltby, NODPA Coordinator*

The last few months have been busy but interesting and the last month was very wet (at least in western Massachusetts!).

We had a very successful field days event and annual meeting in August in the heat of southern New York, though we did bring some much needed rain. I think I lost about 5 lbs. from the heat and my attempt to imitate a 30-year old by dashing around the meeting room.

My sincere thanks to our New York hosts, especially Lisa Engelbert. Everyone put in a lot of time to ensure a smooth-running event as well as serving delicious food. Attendees may have been hot but they didn't go away hungry.

The NODPA members gave a unanimous vote of confidence to the Board, and provided the direction that the Board and I need to move forward. Are there any volunteers to host next year's Field Days?

Following the directive of the members at the annual meeting, members of the NODPA Board and I are continuing to meet with different handlers and people who can influence the future direction of the organic milk industry. The recent rise in the pay price has brought

*(Continued on page 4)*

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*(Continued from NODPA Desk, page 3)*

some relief to those farmers who were seeing their margins rapidly disappear. The costs of production at a reasonably sized, efficient organic dairy in southern New England have been calculated at \$21.45 per cwt. Once you add on all the other expenses that the smaller family farms have, from mortgage payments through to a living wage for the farmer, the current, average base pay price of \$24.50 leaves little room for savings, re-investment or absorbing increased costs. NODPA's mission is to educate all sectors of the industry about the needs of, and pressure on, family farmers who produce organic milk in the northeast. The survey, being done by the University of Vermont and Maine, will further inform us all about the increase in cost of production and the state of organic dairy farmers' net worth, without relying on increases in the value of real estate.

The past month has seen divisions within the organic dairy industry, as a result of the Harvey Court Ruling. This decision will only weaken the impact this very small constituency can have in deciding what rules govern organic production. We all need to recognize the importance of each sector in the long term sustainability of the organic dairy industry. We need to maintain the confidence of the discriminating consumer who is willing to pay a premium for a high quality product that is truly organic. We need to work with all the handlers of organic milk who are willing to adapt to new practices while not compromising on quality. We have to educate both of these groups to the plain truth that for the majority of organic dairy farmers, an excellent lifestyle and healthy cows does not send their kids to college, encourage their kids to take over the farm, or re-invest in the infrastructure of the farm.

Elsewhere in the newsletter is the NODPA Board's position on the effort to amend the OFPA. The Board made a decision to release a statement that re-states NODPA's position on the need to maintain high standards of certification to ensure that the farmer's voice will be heard during the high level discussions happening in Washington. These are important times to maintain the integrity of the organic seal and NODPA will ensure that the organic dairy farmers' voice will be heard.

We are calling members to ask their views on critical issues to inform the Board and myself about what members think. We hope to be able to regularly check in with our membership in this way and by regular mailed surveys.

A reminder about using our webpage and list-serve on a regular basis to keep up with all the happenings in the organic dairy world. Your subscriptions and donations maintain both of them.

If you have any questions or need information don't

hesitate to call me at 413-772-0444 or email:  
[emaltby@comcast.net](mailto:emaltby@comcast.net).

On a final note, always remember that consumers hold the family farmer in very high esteem. Many surveys show farmers ranking in the top five for trustworthiness. It is our duty to ensure that trust does not get abused by our friends and those that profit by marketing that image. ♦

## NODPA Public Statement Issued 10-21-2005

*In light of the effort waged to amend OFPA—the law that authorized the National Organic Program—a public statement was issued on October 21 from the NODPA Board of Directors. Representatives of the Board have been meeting with other dairy producers and their representatives for the last four months to discuss these and other issues and felt that the time was right to re-state NODPA's position. NODPA is also conducting a representative phone survey of the membership to reassess member positions on these issues.*

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA) supports strong organic dairy standards. We are dedicated to bringing a superior product to the market for the benefit of consumers. The NODPA Board reaffirms our commitment to supplying organic dairy products produced by cows on quality pasture during the growing season, our commitment to requiring that all organic dairy replacement animals be organic from the last third of gestation (last three months of the mother's pregnancy), and our commitment that any animals with life threatening conditions must be treated with antibiotics or other prohibited medications but then be removed from organic production. We are mindful of consumer's willingness to pay a premium price for our products and we are willing to uphold and follow the strong standards that they desire.

As an organization of organic family dairy farmers, we know first hand about the learning curve involved in being able to manage our animals and farms so that we have healthy herds that don't need to rely on antibiotics.

*(Continued on page 5)*



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(Continued from NODPA Public Statement, page 4)

Many organic dairy producers have been doing so for a number of years. We know it is possible, and there is much networking among producers to share the knowledge gained over the years. We realize that learning to manage without the use of antibiotics and other conventional medications can be a challenge to transitioning and newer organic producers and occasionally to long time producers. But rather than see current standards weakened, NODPA encourages more education of both organic dairy producers and veterinarians on alternative health care, more research to establish efficacy of alternative health care methods, and encouragement and utilization of best management practices that lead to healthy herds.

Allowing replacement dairy animals to only be under organic management for one year before milk production instead of from last third of gestation, as a few certifiers are doing and as may happen because of the fallout from the Harvey Court Ruling, is a shortcut that allows use of animal drugs, GMO feeds, and animal based feeds in the first year of life. Once a farm has transitioned to organic, we believe that the organic circle should be kept closed and all animals should be organically managed through

their full life cycle.

While NODPA is disappointed that the recent Harvey Court Ruling requires the loss of the 80/20 dairy herd transition clause that gave dairy farms consideration in making the financially challenging transition to organic production, we do support the language being proposed to allow the animals to transition along with the farm's crops and land. We realize this will be financially more difficult for farms, and we encourage all efforts to find and provide cost share or financial compensation for farms making the transition.

NODPA continues to assist dairy producers in the U.S. make the transition to organic production to help meet the continually growing

demand for organic dairy products in our region and country. We do not, however, want to see the standards watered down in order to more easily meet that demand. We believe organic standards should remain at least as strict as they are currently, and in some areas stricter, and that weakening them will compromise the integrity of our products. We encourage increasing assistance, both educational and financial, so that more farms can transition to meet the demand, rather than lowering standards. ♦



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## **USDA Dawdles While Factory Farm Takeover of Organic Dairying is Underway**

*By Will Fantle,  
Research Director, Cornucopia Institute*

Organic family farmers and their consumer allies won a victory before the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) last spring only to have USDA bureaucrats pull the rug out from under them. On August 16, the NOSB—the USDA's expert advisory panel—were stunned at their summer meeting when they were informed by department staff that changes they unanimously made to the organic regulations were, without forewarning, being rejected. The rule changes would have closed loopholes being exploited by large factory farms producing "organic" milk.

The controversy over pasturing dairy cows erupted earlier this year when an organic farming watchdog, The Cornucopia Institute, filed formal complaints against several 3000- to 5000-head confinement organic dairy operations in western states, charging that the penning of thousands of animals into small drylots was a violation of federal organic rules (the complaints were subsequently closed without explanation and without being

investigated by the USDA). "Factory farms have been utilizing loopholes in the federal law requiring pasture for dairy cows and other ruminants," says Mark Kastel, senior farm policy analyst at The Cornucopia Institute. "The NOSB moved to close the loopholes, but the USDA appears more interested in protecting factory farms and their powerful corporate allies," Kastel added.

Besides being required by law, the pasturing of dairy cows and other ruminants offers many positive benefits. It builds an interrelated system between the animals and the land, working from the soil up to promote an interdependent community. It allows animals to satisfy their natural behavioral instincts, and yields improved foot and leg strength, reduced breeding problems, less stress, enhanced immunity, and longer lives.

Consumers also benefit. The Danish Institute of Agricultural Research recently found that milk from cows farmed organically was 50% higher in Vitamin E, 75% higher in beta carotene, and higher in omega 3 essential fatty acids than conventional milk. This study tied these qualities to organic cows having room to graze and a diet high in fresh grass and clover, and forage.

The Cornucopia Institute says there is overwhelming support from organic farmers and consumers for strict pasture enforcement. A national survey of organic dairy farmers they conducted found that over 93% support the pasture guidance endorsed by the NOSB. Eight thousand

(Continued on page 7)



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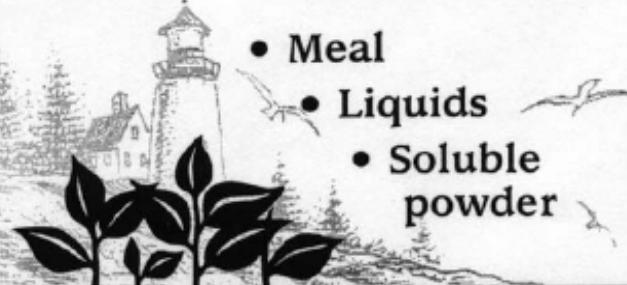
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*(Continued from USDA Dnades, page 6)*

consumers signed a petition supporting the proposal and hundreds more sent letters, including natural food cooperatives nationwide, to the NOSB backing the plan.

The pasture controversy also brought more organic farmers to Washington, D.C., meetings than ever before. "The USDA has been looking the other way since 2000 as corporate investors launch more and more of these 'organic' CAFOs [confined animal feeding operations]," says Tony Azevedo, a California organic dairy farmer. "This was my third trip. Are they going to stall long enough to allow these corporate giants to squeeze family farmers like me out of business—just like what's happening in conventional agriculture?" Azevedo asked.

Dairyman Azevedo's concerns about more factory farms entering organic dairying found further validity as the Aurora Organic Dairy announced in mid-October that they are expanding their existing 5600 head operation in Colorado. Next fall they intend to begin milking an additional 3200 cows on another farm in the state and are rumored to be converting a fourth major farm to organic production in Georgia.

At press time, the newest controversy at the USDA's National Organic Program swirls around its decision to prevent the NOSB from taking final action to close regulatory loopholes at their upcoming November meeting in Washington.

NOSB chairman Jim Riddle, an organic certification expert from Winona, Minnesota, along with four of his colleagues will be leaving the board at the end of the year after having worked hard to complete the new rule making that would force the USDA to take a more aggressive regulatory approach to organic farms that keep their animals in confinement. This will be their last meeting.

Members of the NOSB itself have appealed to the USDA to place the simmering issue back on their agenda. "If scheduled, we will be prepared to take final action on the rule change at the November meeting," stated Chairman Riddle.

"The USDA has sat on their recommendation and has done nothing," said George Wright, an organic dairy farmer from Hermon, New York, who milks 55 cows. "How many times are they going to call us back to Washington to talk about the same issue?"

Many organizations and individuals have contacted USDA Secretary Mike Johanns to ask that he personally intervene and order the issue placed on the November meeting agenda. If you are reading this before November 10<sup>th</sup> you also are encouraged to send Secretary Johanns an email at [agsec@usda.gov](mailto:agsec@usda.gov), call his office directly at (202) 720-3631, or FAX his office at 202-720-2166.

*Mr. Fantle is the Research Director for The Cornucopia Institute. More information at [www.cornucopia.org](http://www.cornucopia.org)* ♦

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## Stonyfield Farm and Organic NFDM from New Zealand

*By Nancy Hirshberg,  
Vice President of Natural Resources, Stonyfield Farm*

As many NODPA members have read, Stonyfield Farm is working to get Grade A certification for a source of organic dry milk powder to be imported from New Zealand and used in our products. We are aware that this could result in an understandable fear among U.S. organic dairy producers that we would import vast amounts of dairy product which could drive the domestic farmer pay price down. In this article I will explain why Stonyfield Farm is pursuing this option which appears to be in conflict with our founding mission to support family farms, and hopefully to dispel a few rumors along the way.

For those not familiar with our company, we were founded in Wilton, NH in 1983 on a biodynamic farm school called the Rural Education Center. Our growth from the beginning was very rapid and within a year of our founding we were buying non-organic milk and ingredients from off the farm. In 1994, working with Peter and Bunny Flint at the Organic Cow, we began converting our products back to our organic roots. Last year at this time, approximately 80% of Stonyfield Farm sales were organic.

It will come as no surprise to any NODPA members that there is a shortage of organic milk in the U.S. Last September (2004) for the first time since we began work with CROPP/Organic Valley (1997) we were unable to fill orders for our products. Stonyfield Farm made the decision to convert our fat free organic quarts back to non-organic in order to free up supply to meet the demand for our other products. This conversion allowed us to fill most of our orders this past year, but required that we turn away many new customers. We were- and in fact still are- hoping that the conversion of the quarts to non-organic would be temporary.

Last week, once again faced with the inability to meet the demand for our product in the coming year, as well as confronting the farmer pay price increase which has resulted in some of our products becoming prohibitively expensive to produce, we again made the very undesirable decision to convert *another* product line (10 oz smoothies) to non-organic. Let me be absolutely clear about several points. First, even with converting the smoothies, *we are NOT decreasing our purchases of organic milk and NFDM from CROPP*. In fact we would love to buy tens of millions of pounds more milk. Despite the large number of farms that CROPP has signed on in the past year, they just do not have the milk to supply the growing needs of Organic Valley and Stonyfield Farm. When you're using 3 loads of milk and increase

*(Continued on page 9)*



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(Continued from *Stonyfield Farm and Organic NFDM*, page 8)

your demand by 30% it's far more doable than when you're using 40 loads of milk per week and increasing by 30%. Second, the decision to convert the 10 oz smoothies to non-organic was a very undesirable last resort choice for *everyone* at Stonyfield Farm. From marketing to operations, all of us would have greatly preferred not to have had to make the decision to convert our product to non-organic. It's exactly the wrong direction for us to be going in. However, when faced with all of the other options, including contracting with large producers in the U.S., and buying our own farms, we opted for this as the least undesirable to keep our other organic products on the store shelves.

In light of the organic milk shortage, over a year ago I had the idea to explore seeking milk powder from overseas so that it would free-up domestic organic milk going into NFDM in the US, which could then be redirected to meet the demand for fluid organic milk for Stonyfield Farm products. Only after we could not meet our needs domestically did we consider the overseas option.

Any organic milk Stonyfield Farm buys must be certified organic to NOP requirements, kosher, and because yogurt is a Grade A product, the farms, processors and

labs must meet the requirements of the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO). Only three facilities outside the U.S. currently have the federal Interstate Milk Shippers (IMS) listing.

After much research, and meeting with producers from Argentina to Australia, we decided to pursue a project in New Zealand. The cows are 100% grass fed and the infrastructure to meet the PMO seemed the most advanced.

We received approval from the State of NH that they are willing to send over inspectors to do the certification. We are working closely with the producers and the Government of New Zealand to make the necessary changes to their operations to get the farms, labs and processing facilities IMS listed. At this point, no State of New Hampshire inspectors have even been to New Zealand.

If the project gets off the ground and we import milk powder from New Zealand, we would still have a need for significantly more milk from the U.S. We are eager to convert our fat free quarts back to organic- and now our 10 oz smoothies- which the NZ milk powder doesn't even begin to address. Those two products alone would need over 50 million pounds of milk annually. I also want to be clear however, that Stonyfield Farm works with all of our suppliers in partnership for long term re-

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from Stonyfield Farm and NFDM page 9)

lationships. We will not ask any supplier to go through the enormous task (and expense) of building a supply and getting the appropriate certification and regulatory issues addressed, only to have us walk away in a year.

We wouldn't do that to US producers or New Zealand producers. One advantage of Stonyfield Farm's relationship with Groupe Danone is that we are developing organic projects worldwide. If necessary in the long term, we could potentially direct some of the NZ product to meeting their needs.

We do not see the New Zealand milk powder as a threat to the pay price for US organic dairy farmers. Stonyfield Farm is continuing to work closely with CROPP to increase our annual purchases and to develop incentives to bring new farmers to organic and to increase domestic supply so that Stonyfield Farm and other US dairies will not need to go overseas to source ingredients.

I know that some of you reading this will understand why Stonyfield Farm has made the choices we have. And some of you will see it as yet another corporation squeezing the farmers. All I can do is "say it like I see it". It's important that farmers understand the difficulties that we face (as well as processors understanding the difficulties that you the producers face) and that's what I've tried to lay out for you here. It's part of the dialogue between producers and processors that it is my understanding NODPA was intended to foster. ♦

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## New Organic Dairy Opportunity in Northern New York

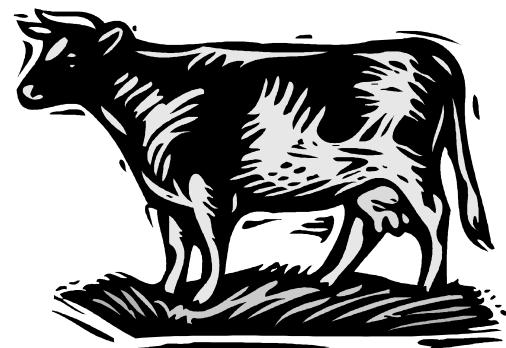
By Diane Bothfeld,  
St. Albans Cooperative Creamery, Inc.

On September 1, 2005 the first shipment of organic milk was picked up in Clinton and Franklin Counties in Northern, New York. This milk is destined for Oneida, New York to be bottled under the Stonyfield Organic Fluid Milk Label at the H.P. Hood Plant.

Peter and Anne Sylvester of Ellenburg Center, New York are one of the farmers on this new organic load of milk. The Sylvester's are pleased with this new opportunity and feel that organic milk production will work well for them. "We have been using grazing for years and we never used many antibiotics on our cows," said Anne. "The transition was fairly easy and we feel our cows are healthier and milking the same as in past years," stated Peter.

The Sylvester's milk 75 cows and farm together with their two sons and daughter. The farm is grass based with pasture and hay produced as the main crops. The Sylvester's are members of the St. Albans Cooperative Creamery, Inc. and their milk is being marketed organically through Dairy Marketing Services to H.P. Hood. Three other dairy farmers from Clinton and Franklin Counties in New York have also gained organic certification of their dairies through NOFA-NY Certified Organic LLC.

In 2005, there were approximately 80 farms transitioning to organic milk production in the Northeast. The buyers for organic milk to supply the population center on the East Coast of the United States do not have enough organic milk. Organic milk is being brought into the Northeast from the Midwest. "The market is there for organic milk and I believe that other dairy farmers in Northern New York can benefit from selling their milk organically," added Peter. "The stable price will allow us plan ahead and not get surprised by changes in milk prices when we open our milk check," said Anne. ♦



## Organic Valley / CROPP Looks To The Future

*By David Bruce,  
Pools Communications Manager*

Organic Valley / CROPP Cooperative would like to invite all the organic and transitioning dairy farmers to our Barn Meetings this winter. Hosted by our on-staff veterinarian Dr. Paul Detloff, these events focus on herd health and will be valuable for both veteran organic dairy producers and transitioning farmers interested in organic alternatives for herd health management.

Barn Meetings are just one aspect of CROPP Cooperative's Membership Services program. As a farmer-owned cooperative, we place great value in providing a variety of services for our member owners. From placing orders for Organic Valley products at the farmer-owner price to assistance with feed resources, our membership services staff works to provide producers with whatever they need, and if they don't have the answer they will find someone who does.

Organic Valley / CROPP Cooperative is deep in the budget planning process, and foremost in that consideration is the price we pay our farmers. We recognize that this growing year has been difficult for many farmers in

the Northeast and that costs of production, especially purchased feed and fuel costs have brought significant challenges to many farmers. With that in mind we are trying to maximize the return to our farmers.

CROPP Cooperative has a longstanding policy in place that we call "the Y in the road." The founding farmers recognized that the farmgate price must not be eroded by costs incurred by the cooperative inherent in processing and marketing. Therefore, the target price to the farmer is honored first and foremost. We recognize that we are not simply paying for a raw material; we are paying our member owners. The annual budget process gives us an opportunity to analyze and reformulate. We are upbeat and confident that our pay price for 2006 will be competitive and that farmers will continue to choose a farmer owned and governed cooperative.

### Northeast Barn Meetings with Dr Paul Detloff

Sponsored by Organic Valley/CROPP  
Locations & specific dates will be announced  
Jan 16th-20th (NH-VT-ME)

Feb 20th-22nd in NY

March 13th-17th in PA.

For more information, contact Peter Miller,  
[peter.miller@organicvalley.coop](mailto:peter.miller@organicvalley.coop)





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**University of Maine Receives Funding**

*By Rick Kerbergen,  
UMaine Cooperative Extension*

University of Maine researchers have received a four-year grant from USDA/CSREES Integrated Organic Program to develop ways to reduce costs and increase the quality of feed for organic dairy farms.

The grant is part of a new emphasis on organic dairy research that UMaine is pursuing in conjunction with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the University of New Hampshire and MOMP.

The research will consist of a cropping systems experiment at the Witter Research Farm in Stillwater, Maine and feeding trials with dairy herds at UMaine and the University of New Hampshire. The experiment is expected to establish the most productive and profitable organic feed crops, according to Chris Reberg-Horton, assistant professor of sustainable agriculture and specialist with the UMaine Extension Office. "I would say this is certainly the most comprehensive research on organic dairy rotations that has ever been done," says Reberg-Horton.

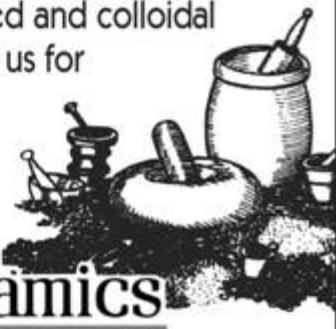
The research is particularly important now, as New England organic dairy farmers look for ways to capitalize on a boom in consumer interest in organic dairy products.

The Witter experiments will test four basic cropping scenarios, each of which could affect an organic dairy farmer differently, depending upon the size of the farm, the resources available to the farmer and the risk the farmer can

*(Continued on page 13)*

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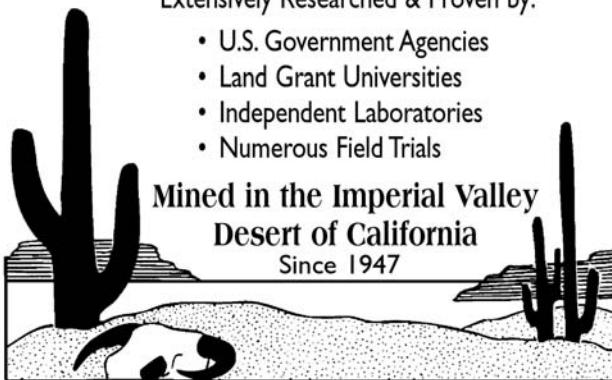
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## 2005 Field Days and NODPA Annual Meeting on August 12<sup>th</sup>

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA) held its fifth Annual Summer Field Days Event on Friday and Saturday, August 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in Nichols NY, just west of Binghamton, NY. The field days were attended by over 140 farmers from Maine through to Pennsylvania. The event was hosted by Englebert Farm (Kevin, Lisa, Kris, Joe and John) and sponsored by Horizon Organic Dairy, Stonyfield Farm Inc. and Organic Valley Family of Farms.

The Field Days started at 1:00 p. m. on Friday, with a field trip to the Englebert Farm to look at organic corn, soy and hay production and walk their pastures. The Englebert family has been farming in the Southern Tier of NY since 1848 and at their present location since 1911. They own 140 acres of pasture and 150 acres of crop land, plus nearly 300 acres of woods. They also rent 450 acres suitable for row-cropping and 150 acres of permanent grass hay land. No chemicals have been used since 1980 and rotational grazing was begun in the late 1980's. They currently feed their cows 8-10 lbs. of high moisture ground ear corn per milking cow per day, along with pasture, supplemented with baleage. Their herd health involves keeping their soils healthy and in balance, but, according to Kevin Engelbert, to be truly sustainable, "farmers need a fair price, namely parity price, for their products." The field trip involved a crop walk which concentrated on weed control in corn and

soybean production. The visit from dairy farmers from all over the northeast also brought the first significant rain for the last month to the farm.

The Friday night banquet was held at the Creamery in Nichols and featured spit-roasted organic veal from Engelbert Farms, salt potatoes, green salad, corn on the cob and ice cream donated by Barts' Homemade. NRCS grassland specialist Darrell Emmick gave the key note address on organic pasture management which highlighted the social, environmental and economic benefits of using grazing-based dairy production systems in the northeast region of the US. Darrell's work includes the development of practical application guidelines and the provision of on-farm technical assistance. He is the New York State Grazing Land Management Specialist with the USDA -

*(Continued on page 16)*

*(Continued from U of Maine Funding page 12)*

afford to take. New seedings were planted at the Witter center this fall for feeding trials next fall.

The systems were chosen by a team of MOMP farmers, processors and non-profit farm organizations to represent the cropping systems and rotation sequences typical in New England. An interdisciplinary team of farmers and researchers will analyze the systems for their impact on profitability, risk management, herd nutrition, nutrient cycling and weed management.

*Reprinted with permission from the Maine Organic Milk Producers Newsletter ♦*



# New England's Original Organic Milk

The Organic Cow of Vermont® proudly supports local family farms that provide us with certified organic milk. As our business grows, so grows the opportunity for more farms to transition to organic. The Organic Cow of Vermont continues to look for milk in the region. The Organic Cow of Vermont will financially assist you with \$1.00/cwt during the 12 month herd transition. Contact Cindy Masterman 888-648-8377 to discuss the opportunity.

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**Dairy Marketing Services** (DMS) is looking for organic milk for its customers - H.P.Hood and Horizon Foods - at very competitive prices. We also have very attractive packages available for farms transitioning into organic dairy farming. Please contact Diane Bothfeld at 1-888-589-6455 extension 5546.

**Horizon Organic** continues to grow its producer partner network in the Northeast states of ME, MD, NH, NY, PA, VA & VT and its Midwest base in IN, IA, IL, KY, MI, MN, OH & WI. Horizon Organic offers competitive pay, assistance during transition and long-term contracts. Producers in the east please contact Cindy Masterman at 888-648-8377 or in the Midwest contact Troy Thomas at 800-237-2711, x-213.

**United Ag Services** in Seneca Falls, NY is looking for organic milk in NY and northern PA. Please contact Jim Patsos at 315-568-2750 or 800-326-4251.

**HP Hood** is starting new organic milk routes in a number of Northern Tier States (ME, NH, VT, NY, PA, OH, MI, WI, MN, IA) and would like to hear from you. Our support of sustainable agriculture, a signing bonus and transition assistance have helped many already. Please call Mike Suever at 617-887-8419.

**CROPP Cooperative~Organic Valley** Family of Farms is looking for organic dairies, both established and transitional organic dairy

producers, in New York, Pennsylvania, and all of the New England States. Competitive Organic Milk Pay Price once certified organic and complete year of Transitional Funding for new farmers during herd's transitional year. Please contact Peter Miller, East Region Pool Coordinator, at 888-444-6455, x407 to leave message, or mobile at 612-801-3506, [peter.miller@organicvalley.coop](mailto:peter.miller@organicvalley.coop).

**Upstate Farms Cooperative**, a member owned cooperative headquartered in LeRoy, NY, is establishing their own supply of organic milk. Upstate Farms Cooperative and their owner-members operate 3 milk plants in Buffalo and Rochester, NY. Our members are interested in producing organic milk. If you are in the Finger Lakes/Western NY area and are interested in learning more about Upstate Farms Coop, please contact Bill Young at 800-724-6455 x 6225, [byoung@upstatefarms.com](mailto:byoung@upstatefarms.com) or visit our website at [www.upstatefarms.com](http://www.upstatefarms.com).

**LOFCO** continues to look for milk in PA/MD, particularly southeast PA. The market is strong. Please contact Levi Miller at 717/661-8682 or Jerry McCleary at 717/577-8809.

*Any buyers looking for organic milk who would like to be listed in this column for the February issue, please email the desired text to Kathie at [randkarnold1@juno.com](mailto:randkarnold1@juno.com) or call 607/842-6631 by January 5<sup>th</sup>. ♦*

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## Commentary



**'Commentary'** is an open forum for sharing thoughts, opinions, concerns, and whatever else inspires you. Please send your submissions to any of the Editors (see page 15 for contact information)

### A Visit to Aurora

We had the opportunity to attend our son's graduation in Denver, CO. While we were there, we had some extra time to go sight-seeing and drive around. We decided to check out Aurora Organic Dairy since it wasn't too far away. When we called the phone number listed in a local phone book, all we got was an automated system. However, we were grateful that it did give directions to the farm.

We found the farm and at the first entryway there was a sign saying to check in at the front office. We proceeded to drive on, passing a long row of at least 10 or more double-wides or duplex type houses for the workers and their families, set next to each other the whole way along the front of the property. There was a driveway or dirt road in front of them and then a metal fence that separated the dirt road from the highway.

There were several entrances as we went along and at each entrance we read the same sign but could not see any sign on any of the buildings that read "Office". As we drove past the lower end of the farm, there was a tractor trailer unloading cows. Just past that, there were dry cows in a fenced in area that had what looked like a pond or a lagoon that had some grassy banks. Some of the cows were standing in what looked like mud at the far end of the "pond".

We turned around and went back up to the first entrance, which led to the processing plant. Two men were walking up towards us and we stopped and asked them where the front office was located. They said we did not need to go back out on the highway, but could drive along behind the buildings and that the last building we would come to is the office.

While driving down towards the office, the workers' houses were on our left and feed lots were on our right. It was a hot day and cows were standing up against the steel buildings looking for shade. They were in dirt lots. We could not see pasture around the buildings that would support 500 cows, let alone 5000.

As we got close to where the office was, we saw that cows were now being loaded onto another tractor trailer. We were so discouraged and disappointed at the conditions we saw that we decided to not stop and talk to anyone at the office. It was not what we had envisioned Aurora Dairy to be. We thought the cows would have access to lots of shade and grassy paddocks and that they would be clean.

We had the privilege of staying in a private home

while we were in CO and the folks we stayed with believe in eating healthy. They buy as much organic food as possible and gladly pay the higher price for organic milk that comes from cows that are on grass versus conventional milk. Their daughter, who was visiting from Oregon at the time, said she will now purchase milk from Organic Valley knowing it comes from cows that are on grass as the season allows. We also stopped at a store in the area where we saw a woman choosing a carton of organic milk. We asked if she buys organic milk from Aurora and she said no, she doesn't, because their cows are not out on pasture.

*A New York Organic Dairy Producer* ♦

(Continued from Field Days, page 13)

NRCS. Darrell is also pursuing a PhD with his primary research interest being the foraging behavior of lactating dairy cows and the influence of supplemental concentrate feeds.

This was followed by a producers' and NODPA members' meeting. NODPA President and Maine farmer Steve Morrison welcomed the farmers to the meeting, and reviewed the evening's agenda. This was followed by a brief review of NODPA's activity in the past year by New York organic dairy producer Kathie Arnold. NODPA has supported the National Organic Standards Board's livestock committee action in their proposal that dairy cows and other ruminants obtain a significant portion of their annual feed from grazing on pasture. NODPA actively supported a proposed guidance document that requires significant pasturing for ruminants. Kathy also gave a brief update on the Harvey Lawsuit and its future impact on the organic dairy standards – particularly the 80:20 rule that allows transitioning farmers to use a percentage of non-certified feed. There was a straw poll of farmers present to see if NODPA should support the movement to open up OFPA (the NOP enabling law) to try to keep the 80:20 rule. There was no support for this idea. There was a brief discussion on the ability of organic milk producers to apply to the USDA for a return of the \$.15 per cwt for dairy marketing that is deducted from all milk checks and the implications for the future marketing of organic milk. Kathie explained that there is a form available for organic farmers to fill out to get those funds back.

Steve Pechacek from Wisconsin gave an update on the Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Alliance. There were several representatives from this organization including Steve, who is the President, Ed Zimba (Board member), and Jim Greenburg (Vice President). Steve Pechacek thanked NODPA for its support and help in getting MODPA started, and emphasized the importance of the two organizations working together. Steve discussed MODPA's support of parity pricing of organic milk that would reflect the annual increases in the cost of goods and services in order to maintain a pay price that allows a living wage with a return on investment.

(Continued on page 24)

# Organic Production

## Feature Farm

### Segalla Farms

By Lisa McCrory

#### About the Farm

Rick Segalla and his family own and operate a 900 acre farm of which 300 are wooded and the remaining tillable/open land is used for corn silage (74A), soybeans (63A), Alfalfa (95A), grass hay (72a) and pasture (160A). They have 115 milking cows and an equal number of young stock and are starting to raise some beef animals as they contemplate starting an organic beef business. Most of the cows are Holsteins, though there are some Holstein/Jersey and Holstein/Hereford crosses in the herd.

Rick's great grandparents on his mother's side were the first owners of the primary farm. Prior to purchasing the farm, they worked for the owners and when the farm came up for sale they pulled their resources (rather creatively, but that is another story) and became the proud new owners. Over the years, the farm grew; pieces of land would come up for sale and today the farm consists of pieces of land from 8 different farms. Rick's parents bought the farm in 1949 and in 1979, Rick and his brother bought the cows and took over the farm. Two years later, Rick bought his brother out. The farm itself is a corporation owned by Rick and his siblings. A second and separate incorporated business owned by the family members is a gravel business, which totals about 100 acres of the farm property. Rick loses a little land here and there when some of the gravel acreage needs to be put into production.

Cows are housed in a freestall barn, bedded with sand, and milked in a double six parlor. At one time, he was milking 200 cows 3 times a day, but reduced his cow numbers to match the readily available pas-



ture on the farm as the cost for land (to purchase or rent) is incredibly high in his area. At one time Rick mixed lime in with the sand, but the pH of his soil went over 7.0 and his Magnesium levels (high Mag lime) were way out of balance with his calcium, so this practice had to end.

#### Transitioning to Organic

The transition to organic production practices started in 1994 when Rick decided not to buy chemicals for his land and purchased a cultivator to take care of his crop needs. This change was initiated partially due to finances.

Rick was having problems with stray voltage and needed to cut back on expenditures while he resolved that problem. In 1997, with stray voltage behind him, a healthy herd and a promising market, Rick decided to transition his herd to organic and was certified by 1999.

#### Feeding cows and calves

During the winter months, the cows are fed a corn silage/haylage/16% grain TMR (Total Mixed Ration). All but 6 lbs of grain is mixed into the TMR and the rest of the grain is offered in the parlor; 3 lbs per milking per cow. During the summer time, cows go out to pasture and have the option to return to the barn for a small amount of TMR. When the cows are on pasture, the % protein in the grain goes down to 12%. The TMR is fed out three different times over the day meaning that the feed gets cleaned up quickly, the cows are not slug feeding any one type of feed, and they are encouraged to go to pasture and graze in order to get their fill.

Calves are raised in groups of 4-6 and are fed milk from a bottle at the beginning and then learn to drink out of pails. Rick used to use nipple barrel feeders but had sucking problems and as a result has some 3-titters. Once he changed to a bucket feeding system, the sucking problems went away. From day one, the

(Continued on page 18)

*(Continued from Featured Farm—Segalla, page 17)*

calves are offered hay and at 30 days, they are offered grain. The calves are weaned at 60 days and are out to pasture between 6-9 months of age depending on the time of year.

Rick has been growing soybeans for 2 years now and it is still undecided as to whether this crop will be a true part of the cropping system. This year with the excessive rain, the soybeans have been under water twice, affecting the yields. The intention with this crop is to sell the human grade beans to the high end market and roast the second rate beans and feed them to his cows. The income from the beans that he sells will go towards feed costs and the soybeans that he feeds his cows will reduce the protein needs from his purchased grains, thus contributing to the costs of purchased feeds in two ways.

### **Basic Farming Philosophy and Attention to Herd Health**

“You need healthy soils to produce healthy crops and pastures”, says Rick. Once you have that, you are sure to have healthy cows. Rick is not afraid to have a couple weeds in his feed; “it provides a broader spectrum of minerals in the diet”, says Rick.

Strategies for herd health are rather simple on this farm: Rick has a closed herd except for the occasional bull, calves are vaccinated for pink eye and given the 9-way vaccine at pasture time, herd health checks happen twice a year, hoof trimming happens as needed and they use DHIA as a farm management/record keeping tool. The cows do not get regular vaccinations and at this point, he has not had any problems. Cows are bred naturally with Holstein bulls (and the occasional Hereford bull that sneaks over from their small beef herd). Traits that he breeds for are longevity and good production traits. The bull will spend its first season with the heifers, then will graduate to the cows during the second season and will go down the road after that.

Somatic Cell Count usually runs between 180,000 – 250,000 and for the occasional mastitis case, Rick has had success using acupressure which he first learned about after seeing a presentation by Dr Richard Holliday.

### **Milk Market**

At this time, Rick sells his milk to Calabro Cheese, a 43 year old family owned and operated Italian Cheese company located in East Haven, Connecticut ([www.calabrocheese.com](http://www.calabrocheese.com)). Calabro specializes in producing the following Italian cheeses: Ricotta, Ricotta

Impastata, Mozzarella Fior Di Latte, Grated Parmesan and Romano cheeses; and a line of select specialty cheeses which includes scamorze, caciocavallo, burrini, smoked mozzarella, fresh basket cheese, and queso blanco. At this time, Rick is the only producer providing this company with organic milk. The rest of the milk purchased is promoted as 100% natural for their Italian cheeses lines.

### **Involvement with NODPA and Looking into the Future**

Rick has been involved with NODPA since the first annual (2001) NODPA Field Days, which took place at Roman Stoltzfoos's farm in Pennsylvania. Rick became a NODPA Representative in 2001, has not missed a single Field Days event and is an active Board member.

Rick currently employs 2 workers to run the farm with him and one of his daughters helps with the book keeping. He has 4 children between the ages of 21 and 32 and is open to any or all of them returning to the farm some day. There are many directions that this 3<sup>rd</sup> (and almost 4<sup>th</sup>) generation farm could take including developing a beef market or bottling milk. Only time will tell. ♦

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## Organic Soil Fertility Management

*By Klaas and Mary-Howell Martens*

William Albrecht noticed that both cattle and people from some parts of the country were much stronger and healthier than those in other regions. Similar observations were made by Andre Viosin in France, Sir Albert Howard and Lady Eve Balfour in England, and many others around the world. Great breeding herds of cattle and horses seemed to be numerous in some regions while other regions constantly imported new breeding stock. Disease outbreaks seemed to be much more frequent and severe in some areas while others were often "missed" and remained mostly healthy at the same time.

Sir Albert caused quite a stir when he announced that he had let his healthy stock come in close contact with cattle who had brucellosis and that his cows had remained perfectly healthy. Many people responded to him by saying that his claim was "impossible".

These pioneers of organic agriculture believed that the relative health and vigor (or lack of it) of these people and animals began in the soil that produced the food that they ate. The soils that produced the healthiest animals all had very generous amounts and similar proportions of the key minerals calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorous, sulfur, iron, manganese, zinc, boron, copper, etc. The soils were also well supplied with humus.

What can we do if our farm is not one of these lucky locations, naturally blessed with the right proportion of

nutrients, or what if the natural fertility has been depleted? How can we improve our soil health, thereby improving animal and human health at the same time?

### Enhancing Microbial Activity

The vitality and constitution of the soil is in its life, or its microbial and small animal activity. We must provide the conditions that nurture a healthy diversity of soil life and allow it to thrive. This includes providing sufficient food, air, water, and a favorable environment, while eliminating factors that affect the soil life negatively.

Microbes require organic matter for food, but not all organic matter is created the same. Elevating soil carbon alone is not the goal - the added organic matter must be of the right type. Some of the least productive soils we have worked with have excessively high organic matter, but it tends to be very inactive. Would we feed our children, or our cattle, old dry hard woody material? No doubt they would object! We must supplement the soil with high quality organic matter that will break down easily, readily providing nutrients to the microbes and turning into humus that will feed the plants.

Microbes need to have a good balanced supply of minerals. This is one reason that soil testing is so important - to give you an indication whether there are mineral imbalances and deficiencies. Not only are plants responsive to mineral imbalances, so are microbes. When there are se-

(Continued on page 20)

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(Continued from *Organic Soil Fertility*, page 19)

vere mineral imbalances, this can lead to a shift in microbe populations to a predominance of pathogenic and detrimental ones.

Microbes also need sufficient soil air, water, and gas exchange. These conditions depend on good drainage and soil structure. You need to consider drainage on a large scale - is tiling or other erosion control needed to provide better surface and subsurface drainage? These need to be corrected as soon as possible. Microbial activity, mineral balance and organic matter will improve soil physical conditions on a more internal level through stable aggregation, changes in soil chemistry, and reduced erosion and leaching. The overall result will be a soil that better holds the right amount of air and water, with sufficient movement to get rid of wastes.

We also have to eliminate factors that damage soil life. Pesticides are the obvious problem here, but another thing that really hurts soil life is high levels of mineral salts. These can come from synthetic fertilizers, but they can also come from excessive manure, especially anaerobic liquid manure. Even compost, if over-used, can lead to a "salty" soil. These conditions depress microbial activity, damage soil structure and tend to favor certain types of weeds, such as lambsquarters, pigweed, and velvetleaf.

### Balancing Mineral Nutrients

Dr. Albrecht observed that certain proportions of major cations were consistent among the most productive soils.

After testing many soils throughout his career, he recognized that the best soils tended to contain roughly 68% calcium saturation, 12% magnesium, 3% potassium, and 5-10% other basic cations such as sodium, and 5-10% hydrogen. This proportion of calcium and magnesium seemed to give the soil excellent internal drainage, and air and water movement. These proportions are affected by soil physical makeup - sandier soils need higher levels of magnesium and other minerals relative to the calcium to meet the nutrient needs of the crop and retain water. Clay soils might need less magnesium and lower saturations of some of the other minerals. Albrecht also observed that the absolute mineral proportions are less critical on soils with high organic matter and good microbial activity.

It is important to recognize that mineral nutrients need to be in balance with each other. Due to interactions between minerals, excesses of one nutrient may lead to deficiencies in others. Plants grown in soils with extremely high phosphorus levels can show zinc deficiency symptoms because the zinc present in the soil will be tied up. A deficiency in boron can make it difficult for a plant to obtain enough potassium. Very high nitrogen will prevent adequate uptake of potassium and copper. Such mineral imbalances can lead to stunted or abnormal plant growth, increased insect and disease pressure, and changes in weed potential. Animals eating crops grown in imbalanced soils tend to have metabolic problems, either from getting too much or too little of necessary nutrients from their feed.

(Continued on page 21)

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If a soil test indicates a mineral deficiency, organic farmers have a number of options to correct the situation. You should first find out what approved materials are available locally and economically. Limestone is readily available in most regions, but you should look carefully at the calcium and magnesium content of the lime - if your soils are already high in magnesium, you probably don't want to add more and should request Hi-Cal lime. If magnesium is low, then dolomitic lime might be a better choice. If wood ash is available locally, this is often a very economical source of calcium and potassium with phosphorus and trace elements in smaller amounts.

Poultry manure or compost is not only high in nitrogen, it also adds a lot of phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sulfur and many trace elements. Turkey manure is similar, but is higher in copper, which if you need it, this would probably be your best source. Gypsum is available in some regions and adds calcium and sulfur. Granite dust is great for trace elements and contains a slow release form of potassium.

With fertilizer, the idea that "if a little is good, a lot is better" is seldom correct. Nature does not like rapid changes and it is important to realize that you can overuse even good materials if not careful. Many organic farmers overapply manure, especially if they use it as their primary nitrogen source, and can end up with unhealthy levels of potassium and phosphorus. These lead to sick cows, sick plants and weed problems. It is also possible to overapply lime, resulting tied-up phosphorus and potassium and lower yields. We feel that it is generally best to correct soil deficiencies slowly.

When you make a change in mineral level, it will often take several years for that change to show fully in the plants and animals. It can take 3-5 years before the full effect of liming is seen. The plants, and therefore the organic matter, will also slowly react to the mineral changes, further extending the effect.

Well-made compost is an excellent source of the mineral nutrients, organic matter and microbial diversity, plus it becomes a microbial inoculant of the soil. This is especially the case with the Biodynamic preps when they are put into the manure. Composting also stabilizes nutrients to make them less leachable. Composted materials will not compete with crops for nutrients in the soil like uncomposted materials can do. We also have the opportunity to enhance compost by adding materials like rock dust, gypsum, and even clay. These materials, when properly put into a compost pile, can reduce loss of nutrients in the composting process, and the minerals they contain will become more readily available once they have been composted.

### In Conclusion

One problem we see on many conventional farms is that they are "leaky". Excessive "luxury" levels of synthetic fertilizers are applied, leading to very high levels of soluble minerals in the soil that are easily lost through leaching and erosion. Synthetic nitrogen fertilizers dissolve calcium and

magnesium that then leaches at higher rates, requiring more frequent liming. Extremely high levels of soluble nutrients destroy soil life, which leads to further deterioration of soil structure, loss of nutrients and physical compaction.

On an organic farm, we're striving to keep sufficient fertility available to the crops while keeping it on the farm. A rainforest is one of the most productive ecosystems on earth. Despite enormously high rain fall, the minerals are not lost because they are held in biological forms and recycled rapidly. It should be our goal on organic farms to simulate this type of system. In order to do this, we have to pay close attention to both the biological and chemical needs of the soil, knowing that soil health depends on the balance and interaction between both.

*Klaas and Mary-Howell Martens farm 1300 acres of organic grains and processing vegetables in Penn Yan, New York. They also own and operate Lakerivew Organic Grain, an organic feed mill and seed operation. ♦*

## Evaluation of Alternative Dairy Cow Breeds

*By Frank Buckley,  
Moorepark Livestock Research Centre, Ireland*

Studies to evaluate the merits of a number of alternative dairy cow breeds to the Holstein-Friesian have been a key part of the research program at Teagasc Dairy Production Research Center, Moorepark, Ireland for almost 10 years. Over the 10-year period, one study has been completed and two further studies are in progress. All three studies were based on seasonal spring calving, grass-based systems of milk production, which predominate in Ireland. The purpose of the studies was to compare the biological and economic efficiency of the different dairy cow breeds.

### Study I (1996 - 2000)

The objective of the study was to compare the performance of Dutch Holstein-Friesian (HF), French Montbeliarde (MB), French Normande (NM) and upgraded Irish Holstein Friesian (CL). Over the five years of the study a total of 116, 100, 112, 108 and 112 cows were allocated to the study in 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively, divided equally between the four breeds. The breeding season was confined to 14 weeks. It started in late April and ended in late July. Approximately 650 kg (1430 lbs) of concentrate per year was fed per cow over the total lactation each year.

### Results: Holsteins more milk but shorter longevity

The results of this study, similar to a number of other studies carried out at the research center, indicated that although the HF produced the highest milk production, much of this was achieved through greater mobilization of body reserves in early lactation and lower live weight gain from mid to end of lactation (Table 1). The NM produced milk with the highest milk fat, protein and lactose content. The milk protein content of the MB was also higher than the

(Continued from Alternative Breeds page 21)

HF. Pregnancy rate to first AI was higher for the two dual-purpose breeds when compared to the HF, with more HF cows (26.3%) not pregnant at the end of the breeding season compared to the MB (8%) and NM (8%). The study confirmed that both dual-purpose breeds had a superior beef merit when compared to the HF. The incidence of lameness proved very high with the NM. On average over 55% of all cases of lameness recorded during the course of this study were observed with the NM breed. Dairy cow breed had a significant effect on survival with 20.6% of Dutch Holstein Friesians, 49.2% of Montbeliardes, 55.8% of Normandes, and 39.7% of the upgraded Irish Holstein Friesians surviving to 7 years of age.

Economic analysis from this study indicated the MB breed was more profitable than the HF breed through a

Table 1. Study 1 (1996-2000): The effect of dairy cow breed on milk production, BCS, live weight and reproductive performance (1 kg = 2.2 lbs)

	HF	MB	NM	CL
Milk (kg)	5994	5119	4561	5321
Fat (kg)	233	195	182	199
Protien (kg)	203	179	164	178
Fat (g/kg)	39.0	38.1	40.0	37.5
Protien (g/kg)	33.9	34.9	36.0	33.6
BCS Week 1	3.04	3.34	3.32	3.13
BCS End of Lactation	2.45	3.11	3.11	2.81
Live weight week 16	528	548	557	533
Preg1 (%)	37	50	57	42
Empty after 14 weeks (%)	26	8	8	16

combination of lower replacement rate, higher beef value and higher milk price.

### Study 2 (2001-2004)

At the Ballydague research farm, a follow on study from Study 1 was initiated in 2001. The objective was to investigate the performance of Montbeliarde / Holstein-Friesian (MB\*HF) and Normande / Holstein-Friesian (NM\*HF) crosses as well as the three pure breeds involved in the previous study. Also included at Ballydague are pure Norwegian Red dairy cattle (NRF). The six groups are currently being evaluated on two grass-based systems: Low Concentrate (LC) with 1210 lbs grain/cow/lactation and High Concentrate (HC) with 2750 lbs grain/cow/lactation. Data from 402 cows (94 HF, 72 MB, 63 MB\*HF, 36 NM, 58 NM\*HF and 78 NR) over the 3 years to date has been accumulated.

### Results: Crossbreed milk yield close to Holstein production / Norwegian Reds highest reproductive efficiency & Holsteins lowest

Similar to the initial study, yields of fat and protein tended to be highest with the HF and lowest with the NM. However, milk yield for the MB\*HF, NM\*HF and NRF, were close to that of the HF. Body condition scoring (BCS) was lowest with the HF. No difference in body weight is apparent between the HF and the dual-purpose breeds at present. This may be a consequence of the fact that all animals at Ballydague are 2 years old at first calving. The imported animals in the Study 1 (MB and NM) were older at first calving compared to the HF as a consequence of normal practice in France. The NRF had the lowest body weight, approximately 110 lbs lighter when compared to

Table 2. Study 2 (2001-2003): The effect of dairy cow breed on milk production, BCS, live weight and reproductive performance

	HF	MB	MB* HF	NM	NM* HF	NRF
Milk (kg)	5958	5469	5857	4895	5695	5743
Fat (kg)	226	201	219	184	218	209
Protien (kg)	207	191	201	173	198	196
Fat (g/kg)	38.0	36.8	37.6	37.8	38.5	36.6
Protien (g/kg)	34.7	35.0	34.3	35.2	34.9	34.0
BCS Week 1	2.98	3.23	3.21	3.23	3.12	3.30
BCS End of Lactation	2.63	3.05	2.98	3.14	2.93	3.00
Live weight week 20	547	534	537	548	541	499
Preg1 (%)	42	37	50	50	57	59
Preg 6wk (%)	56	56	71	62	66	45
Empty after 14 weeks (%)	19	8	10	10	12	9

the HF.

The milk production performance of the MB\*HF and NM\*HF cows to-date is higher than the mid-parent mean indicating the presence of hybrid vigor. However, this has not been so for milk composition. The highest reproductive efficiency was observed with the NRF (pregnancy rate to 1<sup>st</sup> service (Preg1) = 59%, proportion of cows pregnant after 6 weeks breeding (Preg 6wk) = 75% and calving to conception interval (CCI) = 88 days). The lowest reproductive performance was observed with the HF. The reproductive performance of both the MBxHF and NMxHF was higher than the average of the respective parent breed groups.

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from *Alternative Breeds*, page 22)

Feeding higher levels of concentrate resulted in increased milk yields. Response to extra concentrates was highest with the HF and lowest with the NM. However, feeding higher levels of concentrate had no effect on reproductive efficiency.

### **Study 3 (2004-2008)**

More than 95% of the dairy cow population at present in Ireland is Holstein-Friesian (HF). However, there is some interest in the potential use of other breeds. Crossbreeding the Holstein-Friesian with an alternative dairy breed can provide an opportunity to increase health and fertility, as well as beef merit and/or milk composition. This can be through the introduction of favorable genes from another breed selected more strongly for traits of interest, by removing inbreeding depression, or through heterosis/hybrid vigor. However, a major obstacle presently in Ireland (and in most countries worldwide) is the lack of an across-breed evaluation procedure that would allow farmers to compare the genetic level of sires of the alternative breeds with the current Holstein-Friesian sires. This is generally due to a lack of data on the alternative breed.

A major new study has recently been initiated at Moorepark with the arrival of 400 pure-bred Norwegian Red heifer calves from Norway. The calves, by 10 proven sires, have been distributed to 50 commercial dairy farms. They form part of a major initiative aimed at evaluating conclusively the merits of the Norwegian Red and Norwegian Red crossbreds under Irish dairy farming conditions. For over 30 years the Norwegian breeding program has successfully incorporated selection for improved female fertility and traits such as mastitis resistance and calving ease. These 400 pure bred calves, together with a similar number of crossbred (Holstein-Friesian x Norwegian Red) and pure Holstein-Friesian calves (both which have been generated on the farms), will provide essential data that will enable Teagasc and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation to provide genetic evaluations (Economic Breeding Index) for Norwegian Red sires, and importantly crossbred

cows. The outcome of the study will enable Irish dairy farmers to select the top sires based on the Economic Breeding Index from both the Holstein-Friesian and Scandinavian Red breeds, now currently only available for Holstein Friesian. The study will also benchmark the potential advantages of crossbreeding (heterosis/hybrid vigour).

### **Preliminary data: Norwegian Reds higher calving ease and calf survival**

The animals on this study will calve for the first time in the spring of 2006. The first data available from the study was the calving performance of the dams that produced the Holstein-Friesian and Holstein-Friesian x Norwegian Red experimental animals (all Holstein-Friesian cows). This data indicated that NRF sired calves were born more easily than those sired by Holstein-Friesian; 2.7% and 5.3% serious difficulty for Norwegian Red and Holstein-Friesian sired calves, respectively. Calf survival was also higher with the Norwegian Red with 1.7% stillbirths recorded compared to 3.2% for Holstein-Friesian sired calves. Data from this source suggested slightly higher calving difficulty and stillbirths with Montbeliarde sired calves. These findings concur with that observed at the Ballydague research farm.

### **Conclusion**

The Economic Breeding Index (EBI) of the Holstein Friesian cow used in Study 1 and 2 were low due to their poor survival and calving interval traits. In the future, it is expected that the new EBI index in Ireland will identify Holstein-Friesian animals that are superior for milk production, calving interval and survival and thus economically

superior to the current Holstein-Friesian. Likewise the results of the present research also suggest that the use of some alternative breeds in a crossbreeding strategy may lead to improved profitability for Irish dairy farmers. Going forward, this will be best achieved where all dairy cow breeds are ranked within one index with traits that reflect profitability at farm level. ♦



***Irish Norwegian Reds***



***Irish Normande Cross***

*(Continued from Field Days, page 16)*

Sarah Flack followed Steve's presentation with some preliminary information from the economic study being done on cost of production of organic milk on farms in Vermont and Maine.

Steve Morrison presented a review of the priorities set by farmers at the 2004 producer meeting. These were prioritized by members at the 2004 producer meeting in the following order:

1. Pasture access standards,
2. General organic standards,
3. Viable pay price,
4. Consumer confidence,
5. Consumer education,
6. Creating a national organization,
7. Concern about big companies and farms,
8. Networking and educating farmers and supporting NODPA.

Ed Maltby (NODPA coordinator) then facilitated a discussion amongst NODPA members, starting by reading some comments from several farmers who were unable to attend. These included the suggestion for the need for increasing the pay price for organic milk to match production costs, and the importance of organic dairy farmers supporting one another. Kathie Arnold then presented the producer priority input collected earlier in the evening that would guide the NODPA Board and management in 2006. These fell into four main areas:

1. Pay price
2. Pasture rule
3. Education and networking of farmers
4. Organic grain price, quality and availability

Discussion for the rest of the evening focused on pay price. Comments included farmers from different regions reporting wide variation in cost of production, but all reporting significant increase in cost of production over the past few years. Some regions report larger problems with higher costs of grain (increasing from \$6 per bushel to \$9.00) and fuel than other areas. Many farmers are concerned about shrinking margins and organic producers returning to the conventional market to be able to stay on their farms. There was a suggestion that more farmers should contact their milk buyers to give them information on the current cost of production. There was a lot of discussion on what level of pay price increase farmers should ask for; if there should be a linkage to retail pricing, and what sort of regional variations are needed.

The evening closed with a motion by Kevin Englebert that members support the actions of the NODPA board and staff, and request that they continue to work on increasing the base pay price by meeting with farmers, milk handlers, processors and retailers to devise the best approach to working toward an increased milk pay price. The motion was seconded by NODPA Treasurer Henry Perkins and was

passed unanimously.

The Saturday morning proceedings were opened by Steve Morrison, NODPA's President, followed by "Measuring The Health of your Soil." Janice Degni, and Fay Benson of Cornell's South Central NY Dairy and Field Crop Team used some of the practices that have been discussed in their winter soil health meetings to show farmers how to measure the health of their farm soils. This workshop was available throughout the event and they had different stations to measure soil health, such as: soil aggregate stability was measured with a rain simulator; microbial population was determined by the length of time a cellulose chip is digested by the soil; how growing a corn plant in the sample soil and comparing it to a corn plant grown in sterile soil can measure harmful nematodes populations, and penetrometers were demonstrated.

Klaas Martens of Lakeview Organic Grain lead an interactive workshop on soil fertility management. Klaas has been growing certified organic field crops since 1994 and currently he and his family are growing 1,300 acres of diverse crops. Klaas has served as a mentor and consultant throughout the organic community advising on soil structure and fertility, and how it affects the rest of an organic system. Klaas grew up on a dairy farm in Penn Yan, NY and graduated from SUNY Cobleskill with a degree in Animal Husbandry. In 1991, he branched out on his own and started exploring organic methods. Several years ago, the Martens purchased an Agway feed mill that had been out of operation for a number of years, and opened Lakeview Organic Grain in Penn Yan. He gave a very interesting presentation on soil health, spending over an hour answering questions from farmers about their own farm situations.

Jim Gardiner followed Klaas with a talk about medicinal and nutritional uses of herbs in relation to livestock health care. Jim and his family operate a certified organic dairy farm in Otselic, NY, and during the past 14 years, they have worked at finding alternatives to medications through the use of vitamins, minerals and herbal foods to help their livestock recover from 'dis-ease'. Jim was able to share his experience with practical methods of preventing and treating sick animals without compromising organic certification. He spent over an hour interacting with farmers about their different problems and working on solutions.

At 12:30 a magnificent pork BBQ lunch was served with excellent local organic produce. At 2:00 p.m. the field days participants toured the Moore's farm of 250 acres on the Pennsylvania border. The Moore's milk 55 crossbred cows as a seasonal, pasture based herd in a New Zealand-style swing 10 milking parlor housed in a solar barn. Moore Farms has been certified organic since 1998 and have pioneered many different practices in low cost, high quality production techniques. Their farm is totally grass based, feeding only pasture, hay and grass baleage, and raising calves on their milking mothers. Rob and Pam Moore and Darrell Emmick led discussions on grassland management; once-a-day milking; strategies for reducing use of purchased grain, plus practical difficulties of milking cows with calves still suckling. ♦

# Membership



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Farm: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Organic Dairy: Yes No

Please send Checks made payable to NODPA to:  
NODPA c/o Ed Maltby, 30 Keets Rd, Deerfield, MA 01342

P. Lee, George and Edna Martin, Rodney Martin, Steve and Patty Meyer, Rob & Pam Moore, Steve and Mia Morrison, Sam & Fannie Peachey, Richard Segalla, Vaughan and Susan Sherman, Forrest Stricker, George & Linda Wright, Ted Yandow.

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# Calendar

**November 11-12**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Small & Beginning Farmers Conference**

Snowy Owl Inn,  
Waterville Valley, NH

Featuring keynote speaker Joel Salatin and 15 workshops specially oriented toward small & beginning farmers. Registration is \$50 per person or \$80 for a couple. Conference fee includes all meals. Bring the kids! Children's activities available throughout the conference. Contact: Abby Holm (603) 527-2093 or [conference@beginnerfarmers.org](mailto:conference@beginnerfarmers.org)

**January 21**  
**NOFA/Mass Winter Conference**

Bancroft School, Worcester, MA

Offering workshops for dairy farmers interested in organic milk production. Topics include: The Organic Milk Market, Pasture Management, Budgeting for the Transition Years, Alternative Cow Care. Keynote speaker, Brian Donahue, farmer, writer, professor, will discuss how "Husbandry Was Once A Sacred Art". For more information on workshops and registration, visit the NOFA/Mass website, [www.nofamass.org](http://www.nofamass.org).

**January 21**  
**10th Annual Vermont Grazing Conference: Bringing it All Back Home: Connecting, People, Animals and the Land**

Vermont Technical College,  
Randolph Center, Vermont

Featuring workshop tracks for beginning and experienced graziers, dairy, diversified producers, and on business/marketing issues. We will be *Bringing it All Back Home: Connecting People, Animals, and the Land* in VT. Sharing the keynote this year will be Brent and Regina Beidler, certified organic grass-based dairy

farmers from Randolph Center. Brent and Regina purchased their farm in 1998 after working overseas in Bangladesh and Chad, and domestically on a number of Vermont farms. Brent and Regina will be sharing some of their diverse farming experiences and how these experiences have impacted the practices on their farm today. To register, contact Jennifer Colby, VT Pasture Network Outreach Coordinator at (802) 656-0858 or [jcolby@uvm.edu](mailto:jcolby@uvm.edu) or [www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture](http://www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture)

**January 27 – January 29**  
**NOFA-NY Organic Farming & Gardening Conference:**

**'Cooperation: with Nature, with Neighbors, with Local Economies'**  
Holiday Inn, Syracuse, NY

Dairy track on Saturday, Jan 28, *Organic Herd Health* with Dr. Linda Tikofsky, Quality Milk Production Services, Cornell University; Organic dairy farmer panel; Luncheon Keynotes: *Beyond the Bulk Tank --The Use of Knowledge*, John Bunting, grass-based dairy farmer, contributing writer to "The Milkweed" & *The Corporate Takeover of Organic Agriculture--Who Owns the Organic Label?*, Mark Kastel, Organic Integrity

Project at The Cornucopia Institute; Request brochure: [office@nofany.org](mailto:office@nofany.org) or (607)652-NOFA; or visit [www.nofany.org](http://www.nofany.org)

**February 11**  
**NOFA-VT's Winter Conference**  
Vermont Technical College,  
Randolph Ctr, VT  
Keynote Speaker will be James Howard Kunstler, author of The Geography of Nowhere, Home from Nowhere, and The Long Emergency.  
Contact: 802-434-4122, Email: [info@nofavt.org](mailto:info@nofavt.org), [www.nofavt.org](http://www.nofavt.org)

**March 2 and 3**  
**Northeast Sustainable Livestock Conference**

Lake Morey Inn, Fairlee, VT  
This is a collaborative effort between NOFA-VT and UVM Extension with sponsorship monies from NESARE, Risk Management Agency and VHCB. This two-day conference will include topics on energy, soils, crops, finances, grazing, animal health, and marketing. Contact: Lisa McCrory, NOFA-VT, 802-434-4122 or Heather Darby, UVM Extension, 802-524-6501.

## Advertise With Us!

**Half Page Ad** (7.5" W x 4.5" H) = \$180

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**Eighth Page Ad or Business Card** (3.5" w x 2.25" h) = \$60

**Classified Ads:** Free to Northeast organic farmers

All others \$10 for the first 30 words; \$.10 per word over 30

**Deadline for the next issue is January 9, 2005**

Please send your ad and check (made payable to NODPA) to: Lisa McCrory, NODPA Newsletter, 341 Macintosh Hill, Randolph, VT 05060 For more information, call 802-234-5524 or email [lmccrory@together.net](mailto:lmccrory@together.net)

**• Note:** Ads requiring typesetting, size changes or design work will be charged additional fees, according to the service (minimum charge \$30.00).

Please send a check with your ad.

# Net Update



ODAIRY- If you need information on feed, politics, equipment, workshops and many more from people doing the work, sign up and join the list-serve which is moderated by NODPA.

This is yet another service of NODPA, so don't forget to pay your dues to keep this list serve alive and working. To subscribe to ODAIRY, follow the instructions on our Web Site, [www.nodpa.com](http://www.nodpa.com) or email: [ODAIRY-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ODAIRY-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

## A taste of the cream or the skim of ODAIRY!

Magnetic Cow Collars: The magnetic collars are reported to increase milk production by approximately 3 pounds per milking, to significantly lower Somatic Cell Count and Stress levels in the cows.

Approximately 100 ton of high moisture corn for sale. Yesterday it tested 29% moisture. Rick Glenister, Locke, NY 315/497-2734

Suggested Regulatory Changes to Comply with Harvey v. Johanns Submitted to the USDA from members of the National Organic Standards Board (Please Note that entire NOSB has not yet voted on this document)

Introduction: On January 26, 2005, the United States Court

of Appeals for the First Circuit issued its decision in the case of Harvey v. Veneman, Docket No. 04-1379 (1st Cir. 2005), amended at, 396 F.3d 28 (1<sup>st</sup> Cir. 2005). In the decision, the Court held that existing regulation.....

With the current and projected price of fuel my idea of buying in hay is looking less and less like a good idea. .... Still, I dug out my file on round balers and wrappers and there are a bewildering number of choices. First, what is the big deal between fixed and variable chambers? What is the best baler for silage and dry hay in NY, NH, VT and ME as conditions there are more similar to where I am than most of PA and south and west? How about wrappers? I have 75 pto hp to run the machines with.

We are in the process of planning a Northeast winter conference on "Livestock Sustainability". The dates have been tentatively set for March 2 & 3 at the Lake Morey Inn in Fairlee, VT .....

So if a dairy uses Bio-diesel on their farm this should exempt them from pasturing their cows?? Is this called fuzzy logic?? ♦

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40 lactating Jersey cows, either conventional or certified. Contact: Amos Miller 717-556-0672

tion, you could either email or call us. Scott and Traci Laing, Potsdam, NY, Phone: 315-265-3179 Email: [tracilaing@aol.com](mailto:tracilaing@aol.com)

## For Sale:

40 Organically certified Holsteins, mostly first and third lactation. 20 Organically certified cross-bred Jersey/Holstein heifers (5 are bred). Contact: Amos Miller 717-556-0672

We have five holstein-jersey cross heifer calves for sale. They range in age from 8-14 weeks old. They are certified through NOFA-NY. The price is \$400 each. If anyone is interested and would like more informa-

## Employment

NE Procurement position announcement: Organic Valley / CROPP Cooperative is hiring a New England Region Pool Coordinator. We are looking for someone who believes in a farmer-owned cooperative and the power of a grass roots, membership organization. This position will help us better serve our current producers and find more coopera-

tively minded dairy farmers. The position will report to the National Milk Procurement Manager and work closely with the East Region Pool Coordi-

nator, Peter Miller. For details or to submit a resume please email Tim Griffin [tim.griffin@organicvalley.coop](mailto:tim.griffin@organicvalley.coop).



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