

NODPA News

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

May 2021 Volume 21, Issue 3 WWW.NODPA.COM



INSIDE THIS ISSUE: Organic Industry News

Origin of Livestock	1
From the NODPA Co-President	2
From the NODPA Desk returns next issue	
Vilsack's Checkoff Problem	10
Feed & Pay Prices	14



Organic Production

Featured Farm: Tafel Farm, Laurens, NY	1
SAVE THE DATE: the 21 st Annual NODPA Field Days	28
PFAS and Agriculture: What It Means	29



Net Update

Recent ODairy Discussions	19
Subscribing To ODairy	19



Member Info

NODPA News Subscription	31
Calendar	32
Classifieds	34



Adam and Margaret Tafel, owner operators, their sons Henry, Riley and Moses, and long-time employee Rachel Stone

FEATURED FARM: TAFEL FARM, LAURENS, NY

Grass-Fed Milk Production: Putting it all together

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

Adam and Margaret Tafel began their own dairy fifteen years ago, with an initial herd of 40 certified organic cows, rented farmland that was ready to certify organic and a market for their milk. Although Margaret was new to dairy farming, Adam had experience on

both confinement and grazing dairies, and had been working for David and Sue Evans's organic dairy in Norwich, New York. That dairy - Sunrise Family Farms Creamery - had begun bottling their own milk as well as

continued on page 20

Origin of Livestock (OOL)

By Kathie Arnold and Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

The long running saga of the OOL regulation continues on its predicted path. On May 12 2021, the National Organic Program (NOP) published the reopening of comment on its April 28, 2015, proposed rule to amend the origin of livestock requirements for dairy

animals under the USDA organic regulations. There is a 60 day comment period which takes us to July 12, 2021.

Taking into account the summer hiatus, we will be incredibly lucky to receive a Final

continued on page 3

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Message from NODPA Co-President

This spring on the farm I've been working on a pasture tree planting project that is in our farm's CSP management plan. We are hoping to have multiple benefits of dispersed shade, fodder from honey locust pods, and maybe, most of all, some new fence posts in 5-10 years.

I started out this spring not thinking much about the fence post aspect, as it will be quite some time before a payoff, but I've since changed my mind. I've been fixing much of our high tensile fence and finding that the Cedar posts in our newer fences (about 10 years old) are rotting off at an alarming rate. Our first high tensile fences, many well over 20 years old and built with treated fence posts, are also starting to go bad but at over twice the age as our Cedar posts we've been using to meet organic rules. I've also been having a harder time getting the composite fence posts (back ordered and out of stock) that I have been using as replacements for the smaller in-row posts but still need something much bigger for gate and corner posts. This has led me to planning a planting

next year of just black locust for the sole purpose of growing most, or ideally all, of our own permanent fence posts.

The main challenges will be trying to have them grow straight and some form of weed suppression that is low maintenance. We are following the advice of Steve Gabel, author of Silvopasture, to plant the black locust close to each other (3' spacing) to encourage them to grow straight and tall. I've also heard I may need to prune them to help keep them straight. There are apparently different cultivars that are better suited for posts and I'll have to make sure I can get the bare root stock ordered early.

So far, we are really enjoying the nearly two week earlier pasture season so far this spring but are dealing with some pretty wet pastures as of now. Cheers and may your pastures be lush and fence posts straight.

*Kirk Arnold, NODPA Co-president
Truxton, NY | Phone: 607-842-6631*

Board Members & Representatives

PENNSYLVANIA

Roman Stoltzfoos, State Rep
Spring Wood Organic Farm
1143 Gap Rd, Kinzers, PA, 17535
romans@epix.net
Phone: 610-593-2415

Dwight Stoltzfoos, Board Secretary
Spring Wood Organic Farm
1143 Gap Road
Kinzers, PA 17535
info@springwooddairy.com

NEW YORK

Kirk Arnold, NODPA Co-president
3175 State Route 13
Truxton, NY 13158-3107
kickaha21@gmail.com
P: 607-842-6631

Liz Bawden, Co-president, Newsletter Contributor, Associate Editor
119 Factory Rd., Hammond, NY 13646
bawden@cit-tele.com
Phone: 315-324-6926

Ryan Murray, Board Member
6000 Cheningo Solon Pond Rd.
Truxton NY 13158
rcmdairy@gmail.com

Robert Moore, State Rep
Moore Farms, 2083 Moore Hill Rd.
Nichols, NY 13812
Phone: 607-699-7968
cowpoke2@verizon.net

Bill Stine, State Rep
45540 Stine Road
Redwood, NY 13679-3160
Phone: (315) 482-2017
tstine2007@yahoo.com

John Stoltzfoos, State Rep
1553 Hesselton Gully Rd.
Whitesville, NY 14897
jtstrib@yahoo.com
Phone: 607-356-3272

George Wright, Treasurer
821 Pyrites-Russell Rd., Hermon, NY 14897
wrightdairy@yahoo.com
Phone: 315-347-4604

VERMONT

Brian Wilson, State Rep
Morningside Farm, 101 Hemenway Hill Rd, Shoreham, VT 05770
Cell phone: 802-377-1786,
bpwilson@shoreham.net

Jeep Madison, State Rep
2806 Smith Street, Shoreham, VT 05770
Cell: 802-349-6262
jojoselixir@yahoo.com

Bonnie and Tom Boutin, State Rep
1184 Cross Road, Newport Ctr, VT 05857
Phone: 802-334-2081
bonnieboutin@yahoo.com

CONNECTICUT

Rick Segalla, Board Member
96 Allyndale Rd., Canaan, CT 06018
mocow@earthlink.net
Phone: 860-824-0241

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Cindy-Lou Amey, State Rep
Indian Stream Farm
81 Tabor Road, Pittsburg, NH 03592
Phone: (603) 538-7734
cindyloamey@gmail.com

MAINE

Steven Russell, Board Member
RR2 Box 5660, Winslow, ME 04901
jwinrussel@roadrunner.com
Phone: 207-872-6533

**Steve Morrison, Board Member
Policy Committee Chair**
159 Atkinson Rd, Charleston, ME 04422
smcrest@gmail.com
Phone: 207-285-7085 Fax: 207-285-0128

Aaron Bell, State Rep
Tide Mill Organic Farm
91 Tide Mill Road, Edmunds, Maine 04628
Phone: 207-733-2551
eatlocal@tidemillorganicfarm.com
www.tidemillorganicfarm.com

AT LARGE NODPA BOARD MEMBERS

Ed Zimba, MODPA Board Member
Zimba Dairy, 7995 Mushroom Rd
DeFord, MI 48729
zimbadairy@tband.net
Phone & Fax: 989-872-2680

**Darlene Coehoorn, MODPA President,
Newsletter Contributor**
Viewpoint Acres Farm
N5878 Hwy C, Rosendale, WI 54874
ddviewpoint@yahoo.com
Phone: 920-921-5541

Bruce Drinkman, MODPA Treasurer
N14264 490th Street
Ridgeland, WI 54763
bdrinkman@hotmail.com
Phone: 715-265-4631
Sean Mallett, WODPA President
seanmallett@msn.com

Henry Perkins, Past President,
Box 156 Bog Rd., Albion, ME 04910
Phone: 207-437-9279
henryperkins51@gmail.com

**NODPA Policy Committee
Chair Kathie Arnold**
3175 NYS Rt. 13, Truxton, NY 13158
kathiearnold@gmail.com
Phone: 607-842-6631
Fax: 607-842-6557

Cecelia Murray, Policy Committee
Bundy Creek Farm LLC
5229 Cheningo Road
Truxton, NY 13158-3118
cecelmurr@aol.com

NODPA STAFF

Ed Maltby, Executive Director
30 Keets Rd, Deerfield, MA 01342
ednodpa@comcast.net
Phone: 413-772-0444 Fax: 866-554-9483

**Nora Owens, Editor &
Event Coordinator/Webmaster**
30 Keets Rd., Deerfield, MA 01342
noraowens@comcast.net
Phone: 413-772-0444
Fax: 866-554-9483

Newsletter Layout
Angie Holcomb
Hayward, WI 54843

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

From the NODPA Desk will return next issue. Both time and space have been dedicated to *Origin of Livestock* as we recognize the priority of the issues it addresses. – *Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director*

Origin of Livestock

continued from page 1

Rule in 2021. This request for comment is targeting specific areas of the Proposed Rule that the Trump administration was afraid would not stand up to legal challenge or could not be successfully implemented.

Over the nearly two decades of attempting to reach a Final Rule on the issue of transitioning non-organically certified dairy bovine animals to organic production, organic dairy producers have suffered economic harm and the NOP organic seal has had its integrity questioned by certifiers, consumers, and Inspector Generals. As the organic dairy industry has grown, the inconsistency of implementing this exception has increased but the compromise solutions to passing a Final Rule with the support of the organic community have found greater acceptance. There is only one way to close all the loopholes and that is by allowing no transition allowance for conventional livestock to become organically certified. However, not allowing the one-time transition exemption is politically and administratively not possible at this time. NOP believes that it can enforce a one-time exemption that “maintains market stability while simultaneously preserving the value of the organic label” (2021 reopening of comment). Viewed from the supply side of the organic dairy market and the experience producers had in 2015-2016, NOP’s analysis is biased towards the processors, marketers and retailers. It will take an aggressive approach by NOP and certifying agents to make the proposed compromise work to the benefit of all stakeholders in organic dairy.

We have accepted that there is no support from the NOP, Congress, and the organic community to open OFPA (the law authorizing the NOP) and do away with the one-time exemption. Therefore, we are providing the following analysis. We hope to educate and provide some background for anyone who wants to comment on the Proposed Rule. The NOP asked for comment on various issues they see as important. We have addressed most of those below.

1. NOP seeks views on “whether the final rule should prohibit organic dairy operations from acquiring transitioned animals to expand or replace animals to produce organic milk”. We unequivocally say **yes**, transitioned animals can only produce organic milk on the operation they were transitioned on. . We strongly advise that transitioned animals lose their organic dairy

status if they are sold, transferred, gifted, moved to another operation, or they are included as part of a merger of their certified entity with other organic livestock where ownership remains with the original certified entity but there is common management of many different certified entities.

Allowing transitioned animals to be sold as certified organic creates a loophole that will be exploited. Transitioned animals are, technically, not organic. A transitioned animal is certified to produce organic milk under an exemption to the regulations that is imposed only on organic dairy (for example, there is no transition exemption to convert non-organic meat animals to organic). They cannot be sold for organic slaughter, and should not be allowed to be sold as an organic dairy animal. If culled from the herd, a transitioned animal should be sold into the conventional market, whether it is a dairy or a beef market. There will be no decrease in the asset value to the owner as the original value of the livestock was as a conventional animal and the owner has recouped any expense incurred in transitioning to organic certification through the price differential received for organic milk produced. Some justifications for this position are below:

- A transitioned animal, by definition, did not have organic management throughout its life. It did not have equal inputs to an animal that was raised on organic feeds and management (more costly than non-organic inputs) its whole life and therefore should not have as high an economic value as dairy stock that are organic from the last third of gestation.
- To equate transitioned dairy animals to last third organic animals de-values those animals raised organic from the last third of gestation and the investment by farmers to achieve that status.
- It discriminates against the producers who had to invest more money in the raising of the last third of gestation dairy animals and unfairly rewards the producer of transitioned animals. This unfair economic advantage of transitioned animals is what has driven the abuse of the current rule and it will continue to drive abuse of a new rule if the door on transitioned dairy replacement animals being equal to last third of gestation dairy animals is not tightly shut.
- Tracking of transitioned animals versus last third of gestation animals will require no more record keeping or work for producers or certifiers than should already be done.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Origin of Livestock

continued from page 3

Organic slaughter stock and last third of gestation dairy stock are the same category. Transitioned dairy animals will not be able to be sold as either organic slaughter or dairy replacement stock, which will be easy to track as their status will never change.

- Putting transitioned animals on the same level as those raised as organic from the last third of gestation undermines any environmental benefits of organic livestock production.
- There is no reason why a new start-up should not buy organically certified cows as the organic dairy industry is now mature enough to have enough dairy replacements, or would if the price reflected a fair return. The December 21, 2000 Federal Register National Organic Program Final Rule does not mention an option of buying and transitioning conventional heifers as a means to start a new organic dairy herd. It states that the one time transition is for an “established, discrete dairy herd in conjunction with the land resources that sustain it”.
- Having a thriving market for last third replacements will allow small to mid-size organic dairy operations to diversify into raising and selling replacements whose price will better reflect the true cost of organic dairy at their scale of production if they are not competing against transitioned animals for the same market.



2. Record keeping, auditing, and verification of animal identification will be essential. NOP needs to recognize and utilize the updated technology now being used by organic dairy farmers to track their individual animals and require standardized forms for transfer/sale of animals so that each animal has its own ‘passport.’ Uniform and consistent implementation of this requirement is necessary if NOP is to meet its goal as stated in their reopening of comments 2021 justification for continuing the onetime exemption, “that certifiers will be able to enforce a rule that allows for a limited and well-defined transition.”

Recordkeeping is currently not well defined, except by reference to other parts of the rule and this area needs more clarity in a final rule. There is the question about communication between different certifiers about the past history of producers, and the need for some degree of uniformity in certificates of organic certification, especially important for organically certified auctions. The fact that a transitioned animal and any progeny fed third-year transitional crops can never be sold as organic beef, nor as organic dairy stock, will need specific attention in any record-keeping and on-farm accountability.

NODPA’s understanding is that there are certifiers who still don’t require animal lists for dairy stock to be submitted at least annually. This must change. To be assured of compliance, there needs to be close tracking and scrutiny of all animals on a certified dairy operation. Without a definitive and required paper trail that is verified by direct observation and auditing of a set percentage of animals, there is far too much opportunity for fraud as animals can easily be moved in and out of a herd. This requirement for direct observation is no different than spot testing and auditing now being required of inspectors verifying a percentage of invoices and available pasture to confirm pasture records.

The following are needed as requirements for organic livestock records. High risk, large herds will have all animals tagged electronically and be relatively easy to track and verify. Smaller operations will be easy to track by walking through the barn after milking or during winter confinement. NOP needs to require certifiers to inspect detailed animal lists from all dairy operations. From those lists they will randomly choose animals that they want to inspect through a direct observation to verify the accuracy of the record. For each animal, the list must include:

- Their unique identification name or number or unique ear tag or RFID tag (radio frequency identification) or a tattoo number
- Date of birth, dam and breed/cross breed

continued on page 6

Increasing energy intake is the key to better performance, optimum body condition, and vigorous health during spring grazing season on organic dairies.



Habilac™

Organic Rumen Bypass Fat

Habilac™ is a high quality blend of organic fatty acids for improving production responses, body condition and the overall health and reproduction through a science-based balance of fatty acids.

Science based. Research driven.®



AgriBusiness®
ANIMAL NUTRITION

1.800.525.1992
goagpartners@perdue.com
[perdueagribusiness](http://perdueagribusiness.com)

© 2021 Perdue AgriBusiness® LLC. All rights reserved. Perdue® and Perdue AgriBusiness® are registered trademarks of Perdue. Habilac™ is a trademark of Perdue.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Origin of Livestock

continued from page 4

- Whether the animal was transitioned or fully organic from last third of gestation
- Whether the animal was purchased or farm raised, and date of purchase
- Documentation of disposition. A full health history is already required.

Ensuing auditing of the randomly chosen animals must include verification that each animal's dam is/was in the herd for farm raised animals, verification that the date of birth is in the dam's record, auditing of a percentage of mature cow's progeny to cross verify integrity of the herd, and full documentation for any animals stated as purchased (including the individual cow's "passport" mentioned above). If certifiers don't have the ability to satisfy these requirements and provide follow-through, they should not be accredited to certify dairy operations.

The above suggestions follow the NOSB instruction on recordkeeping approved by the NOP July 22, 2011:

5.2 Organic Livestock Producer Records:

1. Origin of Livestock Records

- a. Breeding, birthing, and weaning records (e.g. calendar, chart, notebook, veterinary documents)
- b. Invoices, receiving records, and organic certification verification for all purchased animals

3. Increased data on organic dairy.

The NOP admitted it had difficulty finding the information it needed for its economic justification of the benefits of its proposed regulation and the economic effect of various alternatives. In admitting that there is a shortage of up-to-date, non-proprietary data, the NOP reflected the challenge every producer has in determining the size, competitiveness and economic sustainability of the organic dairy market for their own dairy. The dairy industry has great depth of data that is collected by USDA AMS and the Federal Milk Marketing Orders (FMMO). Processors are required to report very detailed information on the milk they receive and how it is utilized and packaged on a monthly basis. It is important for producers to know how much milk is used in retail products, manufacturing, or diverted at a lower price into the conventional market. The FMMO's have that data but only one Order is publishing it on a monthly basis, FMMO 1. When organic dairy was only one or two percent of total milk production, the data was insignificant.

Now it is judged to be as high as six percent of total milk production and expanding its market where conventional milk sales are contracting and dependent on exports.

The USDA's Organic Production Market and Data Initiatives (ODI) collects information vital to maintaining stable markets, creating risk management tools, tracking production trends, and increasing exports. But it is neither comprehensive nor complete. Waiting for the organic census to publish its data from self-reporting operations is not good enough for a market as large and growing as organic dairy. We support the expansion of reporting of real time data on organic dairy and the cooperation between all agencies within USDA, principally the Federal Milk Marketing Orders, USDA ERS and USDA AMS, to provide producers with an accurate and independent assessment of the market. Since there is no Federal Milk Pricing within Organic Dairy, producers have to sign individual contracts with milk buyers and need detailed independent information to arrive at a sustainable pay price with buyers in what is an increasing monopsony supply side market.

With the expansion of the organic database, there is no reason why certifiers cannot include the number of organic dairy producers, the average yields of milk for each operation and the number of milking cows and heifers in their annual reporting to the NOP.

4. Operation or producer: The NOP is asking for comment on "whether AMS should use the term "operation" to describe the regulated entity, rather than "producer."

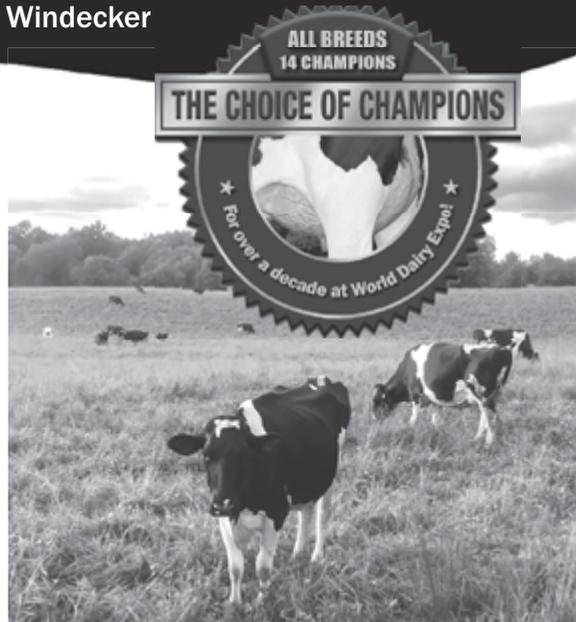
If NOP reads its own comments in the 2015 Proposed Rule, it will be able to answer some of its own questions. This question is wider than organic dairy and has implications for all certified entities.

The regulatory language in terms defined (§ 205.2 Terms defined), has no definition for certified entity. Perhaps there should be one. NOP needs to standardize what legal structure they want for a certified operation as defined in 'Terms defined'. A 'Producer' under Term defined, includes the classification of a 'Person'. Under Terms defined, a Person is "An individual, partnership, corporation, association, cooperative, or other entity." For many, the farming operation is a dba under a sole proprietor's social security number or under an LLC, Corporation, or partnership using a TIN or EIN number. Many individuals and business entities have many production, distribution, and branding 'partnerships' under dba's. Within the regulation, the term producer and operation are used in different contexts and at times seem interchangeable.

continued on page 8

“... good news for the rest of her lactation!”

— Bryce Windecker



WINDEX FARM, FRANKFORT, NEW YORK
 Dale, Deb, Bryce and Kayla Windecker
 100 Registered Holstein cows
 BAA 107.6, 7 EX, 47 VG, 28 GP
 65 lbs/cow/day, SCC 110,000
 Certified Organic grazing herd

Photos: Bryce, Deb and Dale Windecker with hay equipment. Bryce at 2019 Big E with his bred-and-owned show cow from a top cow family Windex Fremont Dandy EX94. She was nominated Jr. All-American 5-year-old.

“If you can get a cow rolling along when she freshens, it’s good news for the rest of her lactation. That’s why we use Udder Comfort™ on every fresh cow, especially heifers, 2x/day for 5 days after calving,” says Bryce Windecker, cowman in charge of the breeding program at Windex Farm, Frankfort, N.Y. He transfers to Cornell this fall.

Bryce explains how his family has used Udder Comfort for 10 years, since before being certified organic in 2017: “This product is better than anything else. It’s real prevention. We use the yellow sprayable Udder Comfort and we like to cover the udder on a fresh animal.

“This gets swelling out fast. That’s better for their comfort level and udder quality as a whole, to keep SCC low.”

UDDER COMFORT™
 Quality Udders Make Quality Milk

Maximum Results
Minimal Cost

1.888.773.7153 1.613.652.9086
 uddercomfort.com

Call to locate a distributor near you.



For external application to the udder only after milking, as an essential component of udder management. Always wash and dry teats thoroughly before milking.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Origin of Livestock

continued from page 6

Certified operation under terms defined is “Certified operation. A crop or livestock production, wild-crop harvesting or handling operation, or portion of such operation that is certified by an accredited certifying agent as utilizing a system of organic production or handling as described by the Act and the regulations in this part.”

NODPA has long proposed that a producer with an established conventional herd can use the one-time exemption to transition their whole herd in order to maintain the genetics and inbred immunities that the herd has developed but only if the owner(s) have not held more than 10% ownership share of an organic operation that has already used the one-time exemption. The regulations also define a person as an ‘individual, partnership, corporation, association, cooperative or other entity’ (section 205.2).” While we understand that the intent of tying the transition exemption to an operation is to prevent organic dairies from transitioning multiple herds, NODPA believes that the intent would be more directly and effectively accomplished by

tying the transition to the “responsibly connected person(s).” In accordance with the “responsibly connected person” approach, any person who is a partner, officer, director, holder, or owner of 10 percent or more of an applicant or a recipient of certification would only be allowed a one-time herd transition exemption.. An exemption regulated in this manner would stop new start-ups that consisted of or included responsibly connected persons who had already used the one-time exemption, thus ending the ability to transition multiple conventional herds to organic. Conversely, attaching the exemption to an operation, as recommended by NOP, would allow any newly certified entity (however configured) to be eligible for the one-time transition of a conventional dairy herd each time a business arrangement was reconfigured, which could include persons with a 10% or more ownership stake in another operation that had already used the one time exemption. Continuing to allow the one time exemption to be used by the same person(s) to transition under multiple entities is not leveling the playing field. Tying the one time exemption to a responsibly connected person will greatly help level the playing field, although the only way to really level it would be to impose a limit on how many animals each responsibly connected person could transition, such as 250 animals.

THE BEST SEED TO GROW THE BEST FEED, AT YOUR FINGERTIPS.

Blue River[®]
Organic Seed

PuraMaize[®] 1-800-370-7979 | blueriverorgseed.com

CORN SILAGE ALFALFA SOYBEANS FORAGES

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

In sum, attaching the one-time transition exemption to the “responsibly connected person(s)” would more effectively fulfill a primary goal of the proposed rule—to prevent organic dairies and or individuals, from transitioning multiple conventional herds or groups of animals. It would do so in a manner that would preclude producers from circumventing the one-time rule. When the operating entity is a dba (doing business as) operation, many certifiers will look for the responsibly connected person to hold legally accountable.

We understand that some certifiers may have limited support for requiring the tracking of herd owners and including that information in the organic certification, but it is a necessity. Those certifiers will have to follow the history of the responsible connected person(s), which may be difficult but an operation with several dba’s will be just as difficult to track. Ownership in businesses are easily tracked electronically on a state level, so should be possible through the organic data-base. Certifiers are used to thinking of “operations” as being certified and associating “responsible connected people” to those operations. Without that connection, there is no legal entity to work with.

5. Implementation timeframe. We urge that all requirements of the rule be implemented immediately upon publications of the Final Rule, with the only exception being those dairies that have already started their transition and were already approved by a certifying agent. Having anticipated a Final Rule since 2015, no one can validly claim they need more time.

In summary, we need a Final Rule on the OOL and we need it now. We need to protect the integrity of USDA organic certification so, now that the glut of organic milk has finally subsided, we will have a level playing field on which we can re-establish a thriving organic dairy market that pays a fair price to producers while guaranteeing the integrity of the product for consumers. Such a regulation needs to be implemented immediately when the Final Rule is published with the only exception being those dairies that have already started their transition and have registered their Organic Plan with a certifier. Enforcement is the key, as it is with any regulation. Within

certification agencies, inspectors and desk reviewers play key roles in enforcement of the status of transitioned livestock and verification of livestock records. If one chooses to benefit from organically certified production, one has chosen to actively engage with one’s certifier in ensuring a high level of accountability. That level of cooperation is what this new regulation will need to have, as well as strict auditing of animal lists and enforcement, if it is to have any effect on the organic supply market and hopefully secure some form of future for small to mid-size organic dairies. ♦



BACK to BACK
Forage Superbowl
Grand Champions
(2018 & 2019)
@ World Dairy Expo

Organic Hybrids from
84 - 117 Day RM Complete with
OMRI Listed Seed Enhancements

King's AgriSeeds, Inc.
 1828 Freedom Rd
 Lancaster, PA 17601
 (717) 687-6224
 KingsAgriSeeds.com



Local dealers near you!

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Vilsack's Checkoff Problem

Tom Vilsack is back in charge of U.S. agriculture, promising to address racial equity, climate change and farmworker safety. But his past failure to deal with a series of Obama-era scandals in an obscure corner of the USDA raises questions about his willingness to tackle another major issue in rural America—Big Ag's power over farmers.

By Clint Rainey, April 22, 2021



When Joe Biden nominated Tom Vilsack to run the Department of Agriculture late last year, the former Iowa governor had a somewhat paradoxical political liability. After eight years as Barack Obama's agriculture secretary, Vilsack was easily the most qualified politician for the job — only one person in U.S. history has served longer as agriculture secretary. But that long tenure also meant that constituents who felt ignored could gather plenty of evidence to support their grievances.

In Vilsack's case, a broad swath — minority and family farmers, animal-rights and environmental activists, farmworker advocates, and food-safety watchdogs — objected almost immediately to his return, claiming that he had neglected or undermined their issues the last time around. Vilsack's strategy was to reach out to many of these critics, often personally in phone calls and Zoom meetings, and assure them that the USDA now would be radically different.

One example: Black farmers have vigorously criticized the USDA's handling of racial discrimination under his watch. It didn't help that in 2010, he fired a Black official, Shirley Sherrod, based on video excerpts of a speech she'd given that was selectively edited and posted on a website run by conservative commentator Andrew Breitbart, making her sound biased. It became a full-fledged scandal, and Vilsack soon apologized. So in December, Vilsack videoconferenced with nearly a dozen different civil-rights activists and advocates for Black farmers, contacted National Black Farmers Association President John Boyd, and also spoke to Sherrod, who said she "holds no ill will."

This strategy became so central to Vilsack's return that he told the Senate at his confirmation hearing, "This is a fundamentally different time, and I am a different person, and it is a different department."

But for at least one group, worried about consolidation and corporate control of agriculture, that pledge comes with a healthy dose of skepticism. Farm debt has soared to an all-time high, industry concentration is worsening, and the major agriculture companies continue to post record profits. Several prominent voices that had urged Obama's USDA to do something about it — groups like R-CALF USA, America's largest independent-ranchers trade association, and the family-farmer advocacy group Organization for Competitive Markets — told me they've heard from no one on Vilsack's team.



Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture

(photo by Tom Witham)

There have been hints that the Biden administration takes the imbalance of power in agriculture seriously, and Vilsack did recently name a senior adviser on fair and competitive markets — effectively an antitrust czar. But this rhetoric of reform has an unsettling sense of déjà vu. After all, Obama vowed during the 2008 campaign to break corporate agriculture's grip, but his administration ultimately caved under pressure from industry. In fact, giving a pass to Big Ag is considered a key failure of the entire Obama White House, not just the USDA.

To many in farm country, there is no better symbol of that failure — and Vilsack's role in it — than a series of scandals that stretched from 2009 to 2017 inside a cluster of obscure federal programs known as the commodity checkoffs that farmers and critics say have been captured by corporate lobbyists.

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Part of a USDA agency called the Agricultural Marketing Service, they were first established by Congress back in the 1960s to promote U.S. farmers' products — everything from beef, eggs, and milk to avocados and Christmas trees. Funds come from a mandatory farmer fee that varies by industry (close to 2 cents per gallon of milk, for instance, or \$1 per head of cattle). Last year, those assessments dumped just shy of \$1 billion into the checkoff programs. Each one has a board that determines how its money is spent.

Their purpose is to conduct generic promotion campaigns that help small and large producers equally. This took its most famous form in marketing jingles like “Beef, It’s What’s for Dinner,” “Pork, the Other White Meat,” “The Incredible, Edible Egg,” and “Got Milk?” Defenders say the programs keep dull commodities exciting and relevant for consumers. They pump money into R&D (thank them for the McRib and Taco Bell’s Quesalupa), develop new markets overseas, and fund beneficial nutrition research. The early-2010s “butter is back” trend was the work of well-placed studies backed by the dairy checkoff.

These efforts draw criticism from dietitians and food economists. But the money and influence they can buy enticed industry lobbyists to seize control of the checkoff boards, and began diverting funds to projects that primarily served corporate interests. Legally, these funds can’t be used for lobbying but they can be spent on programs that serve agribusiness. For instance, the dairy checkoff started handing fat grants to the NFL and PepsiCo, and an alliance of checkoff programs paid Oscar-winner James Moll to make a 2014 documentary defending industrial farming practices that infuriated farmers.

It’s possible the corruption would have sneaked by, as just a squabble over some niche USDA program, if not for the Obama-era scandals. Between 2009 and 2017, one scandal after another erupted in five of the biggest checkoff programs — beef, pork, dairy, egg, and soybean. Hundreds of thousands of misappropriated dollars were involved, and so were accusations of racketeering, illegal lobbying, congressional inquiries, multiple lawsuits, even threats of physical violence.

The kicker came in 2017, at the end of the Obama presidency, when Vilsack whooshed through the revolving door to become CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council — making him the highest-paid employee at the country’s largest checkoff program. In his first year, milk exports to China and Japan jumped almost 50 percent and the nation’s top milk producer, Dairy Farmers of

continued on page 12



Lasting solutions for your... Soil. Plants. Livestock.

Take these 3 Steps
to Improve your farm today:

- 1 Enliven your Soil with **Regenerex™**
Decomposes Crop Residue & Feeds Microbes in the Soil
- 2 Improve your Pastures with **Plant Sure™**
All Purpose and Convenient. Provides Macros & Micros, biologicals and immune boosting E.O.'s
- 3 Supplement your Livestock with Minerals and Remedies
Dyna-Min™ for trace minerals and to bind aflatoxins
Neema-Tox™ & **Super Start™** for Heathier Calves Starting from Day One



www.agri-dynamics.com • 1.877.393.4484

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Vilsack's Checkoff Problem

continued from page 11

America, posted record earnings. Yet some 1,600 U.S. dairy farms went out of business as profits for farmers sunk to a negative \$60 per cow.

The story of these checkoff abuses is one reason some smaller producers remain skeptical that the Biden administration will actually address the industry's power imbalance.

"If you look at where we were when Vilsack came into office and where we are today," says Mike Eby, chairman of the National Dairy Producers Organization and executive director of the Organization for Competitive Markets, "there's no doubt he has an agenda, and that agenda is to utilize the checkoff programs to further consolidate the industry."

When asked if checkoff reform is going to be a priority for the new department, the USDA press office did not respond. Multiple requests for Vilsack to address criticism from farmers about checkoff abuses were ignored as well.

When Barack Obama ran for president, his trust-busting agriculture platform hooked a surprising number of farmers who otherwise didn't care for his politics. Fred Stokes, a founder of the Organization for Competitive Markets, was one. He voted for Obama, and has regretted it ever since. "I convinced a bunch of broke Mississippi farmers to support him," he recalls. "At first they said, 'Stokes, I think you're right. That guy really does get it.'" By 2008, industry profits and power were growing ever more concentrated in fewer corporate hands. The Congressional Research Service says that from 1986 to 2008, the share of animal slaughter nationwide controlled by the four largest processors increased from 55 to 79 percent for cattle, from 33 to 65 percent for pigs, and from 34 to 57 percent for poultry. Also by 2008, nearly a fifth of all U.S. dairy was being produced by two companies, Kraft and Dean Foods.

Meanwhile, farmers were "funding their own demise," as Stokes puts it, by continuing to surrender millions to checkoffs that benefitted these corporations.

This was the context for a nationwide listening tour for farmers that Attorney General Eric Holder and Vilsack launched in 2010 to help them understand "whether or not the system is fair." More than 4,000 farmers showed up; Stokes personally

10 FINE WITH GARLIC

PREMIUM MINERAL SALT

- Repels flies, lice and ticks.
- Has antioxidants.

REDMOND
AGRICULTURE

(866) 735-7258
redmondagriculture.com

INOC-U-LOCK™
An Inoculant for Livestock Feedstuffs

- Provides Five Species of Bacteria & Four Types of Enzymes
- Controlled Fermentation From Start to Finish
- Designed to Meet NOP Standards
- Improved Silo Face Quality & Improved Bunk Life
- Dry & Liquid Application for Silage & Small Grains
- Liquid Application for Baled Hay

Call For Easy Ordering
Ships Direct To Your Farm

Protect Your Hard Work With
INOC-U-LOCK™

CRYSTAL CREEK
1-888-376-6777

Order Online
www.crystalcreeknatural.com

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

attended workshops in four different states. Holder and his top antitrust cop Christine Varney, plus Vilsack and his antitrust enforcer Dudley Butler, heard stories about corporate price-fixing, intimidation and abuse of market power from farmers who risked retaliation for speaking out.

But this optimism quickly dissipated. Varney left the Justice Department for the private sector seven months after the tour concluded. Butler quit five months after Varney.

Producers told me that, in retrospect, this should have been an omen.

The scandals began gathering steam that same year, 2010, when the Cattlemen’s Beef Board, which administers the beef checkoff, released an audit showing how the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), a trade group that lobbies for big meatpackers, had misspent at least \$216,000 on executive golf outings, trips that CEO Forrest Roberts’ family took to New Zealand and Texas, and illegal lobbying activities.

Through contracts with the checkoff board, the NCBA receives as much as 80 percent of the \$40 million collected annually from

farmers by the beef checkoff program. And those funds account for the majority of the NCBA’s budget, helping fund executive salaries, like the \$601,599 that CEO Kendal Frazier earned in 2019. It also supports the overhead necessary to lobby for policies that critics say largely benefit big meatpackers: requiring cattle to wear electronic ear tags, for instance; fighting efforts to reinstate mandatory country-of-origin labeling nationwide that would allow consumers to distinguish meat produced by U.S. ranchers from imported beef; and trying to convince Congress to exempt the checkoffs from Freedom of Information Act requests.

After the 2010 beef board audit, dozens of industry groups urged Vilsack to conduct a more extensive probe. The USDA’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) launched one in 2011. For the next two years, the Organization for Competitive Markets and R-CALF say they regularly hounded the USDA for updates, and even shared tips about potential new abuses. Finally, in January 2014, the Inspector General produced a 17-page report that effectively absolved the NCBA of wrongdoing, describing the misspent money as, essentially, a mistake. Critics called the report “a colossal political sham.”

continued on page 25

**THIS
MARK
MATTERS.**

DFA Northeast is pleased to provide continued support to NODPA and organic farms.



Grazier’s Choice
FREE-CHOICE LIVESTOCK MINERALS
***10% OFF during May**
 *Restrictions Apply

A superior free choice supplement for all classes of livestock.

A unique blend of nutrients specifically designed for grazing livestock

Fortified with Thorvin kelp, Redmond salt, vitamin E, selenium, calcium, and phosphorus

Ask about our 3 options: Graziers Choice, Graziers Choice w/ Copper and Graziers Choice w/Hi Mag

PRODUCER OF NATURAL & ORGANIC FEED SUPPLEMENTS & FERTILIZERS

CALL FOR A COPY OF CATALOG: 800-347-1566 | WWW.FERTRELL.COM

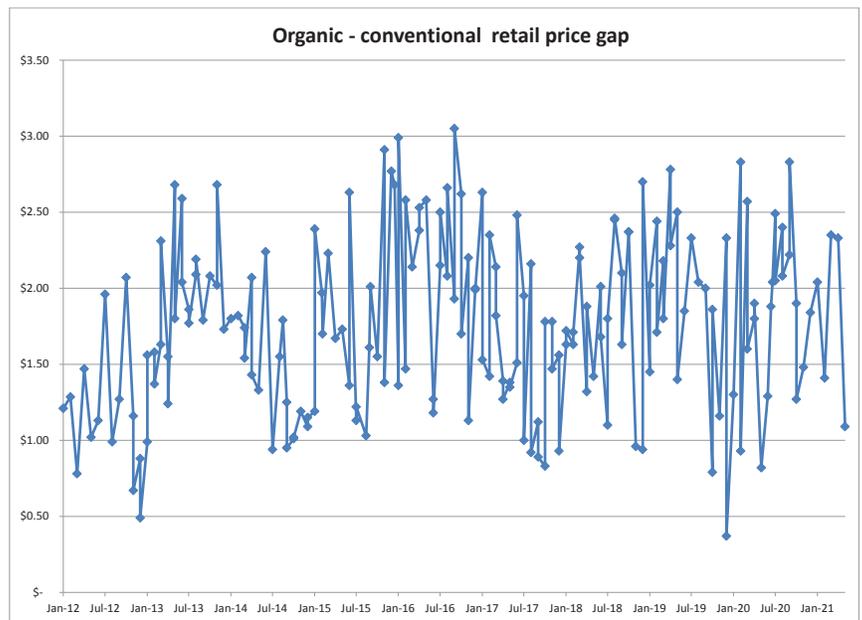
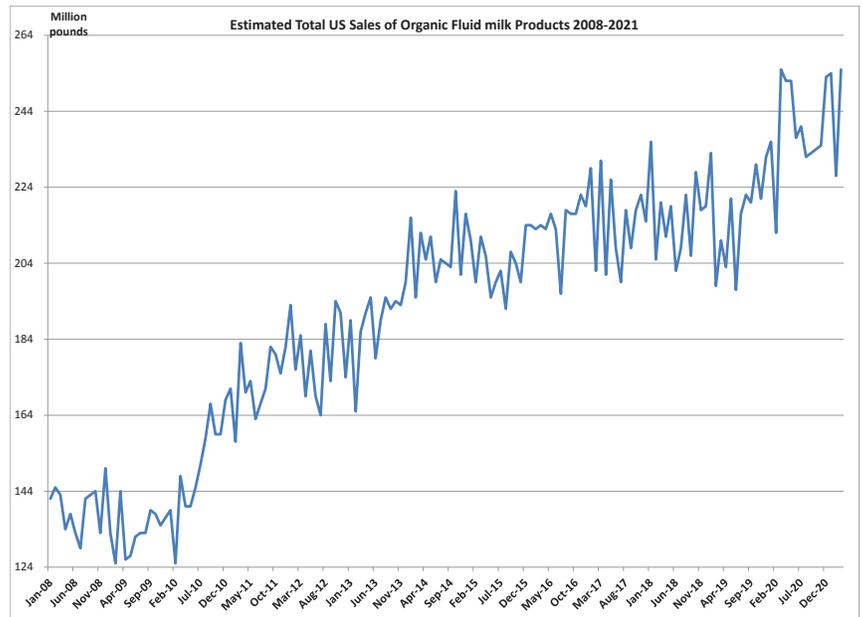
ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

**Pay And Feed Prices
May/June 2021**

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

The March 2021 estimated fluid milk sales report recently published by USDA AMS shows a small increase in total sales of organic fluid milk over 2020, at 0.2 percent, but a larger increase of 4.8 percent year to date compared to 2020. The largest increase in sales year over year comes from Flavored Reduced Fat Milk but 2020 saw an increase in sales due to the extraordinary conditions of the pandemic when a lot of the country was in lockdown. Organic Whole Milk had very similar sales to 2020, at 112 million pound, and Fat Reduced Milk product sales, at 143 million pounds of milk, were the same as 2020. The year-to-date data is more interesting as it show an increase in sales in the first two months of 2021 over 2020 of 33 million pounds of milk. These are positive signs that the increased customer base from the pandemic continues to buy organic dairy.

The reporting from the Federal Milk Marketing Order 1 (FMMO 1) for the utilization of organic fluid milk shows continued growth for 2021. FMMO 1 is the largest market for fluid milk products in the US with sales of 630 million pounds of milk in March 2021 and organic's share was just 31.87 million pounds, about 5 percent of fluid sales in FMMO 1. In 2020, organic fluid milk products sales in the US were 2,877 million pounds, about 6.5 percent of total sales of fluid milk products. The utilization of organic fluid product in the Northeast for April 2021 indicates a stable level of marketing, with a small decrease in whole milk and combined non-fat utilization. Given the unusual market in 2020 the comparison to 2019, shown in the chart below, may give a more accurate indication of growth of this market.



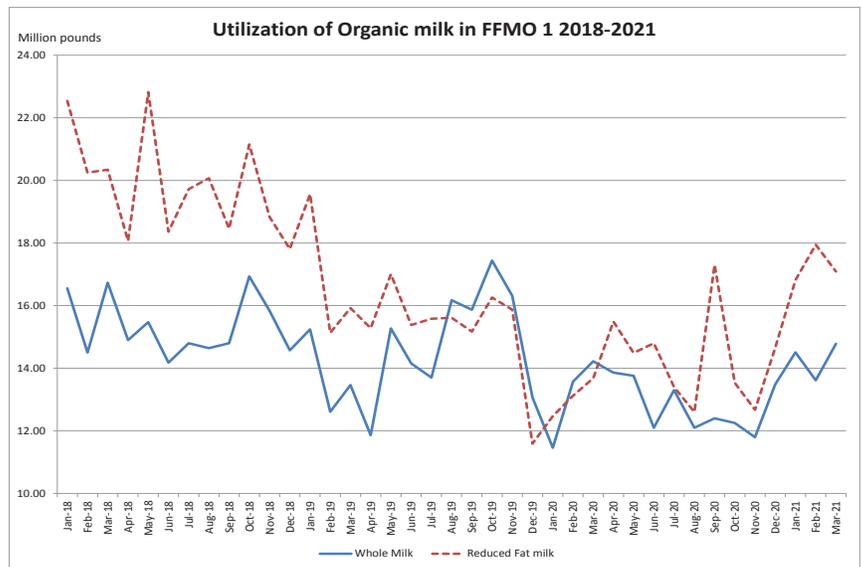
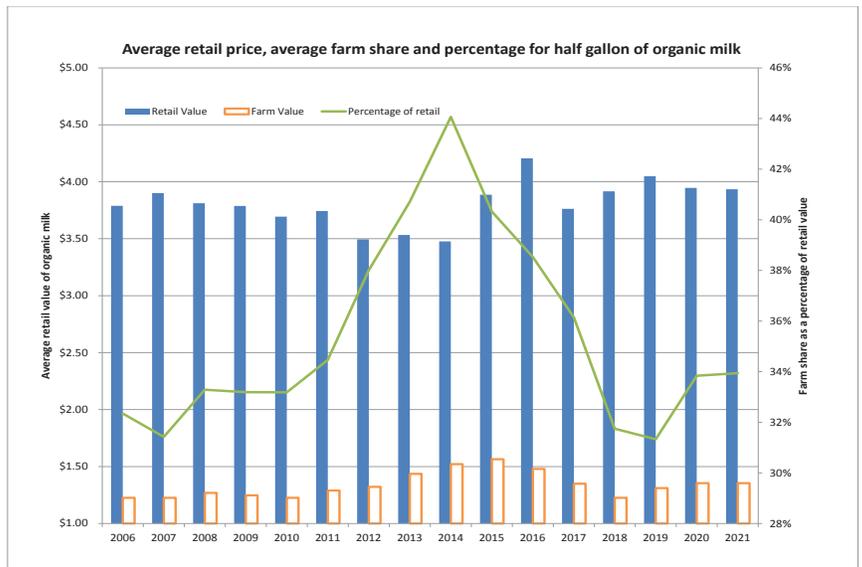
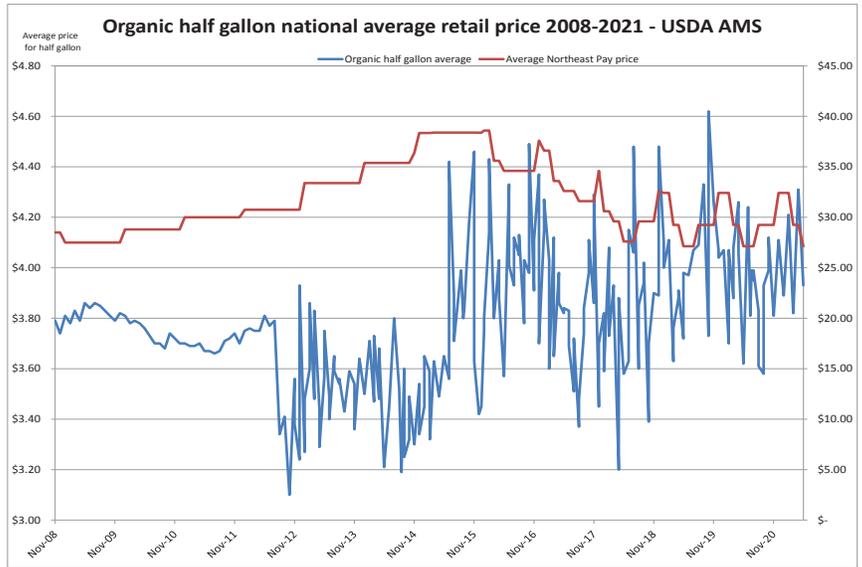
Utilization of Organic Milk in the FMMO 1 in millions of pounds

	Whole Milk	Increase/Decrease over 2020	Increase/Decrease over 2019	Combined Non Fat products	Increase/Decrease over 2020	Total organic products	Increase/Decrease over 2020
Jan-21	14.5	27%	-5%	16.81	35%	31.32	31%
Feb-21	13.62	0.33%	7.42%	17.94	37%	31.56	18%
Mar-21	14.78	4%	9%	17.09	25%	31.87	14%
Apr-21	13.47	-3%	12%	15.5	0.06%	28.97	-1.31%

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

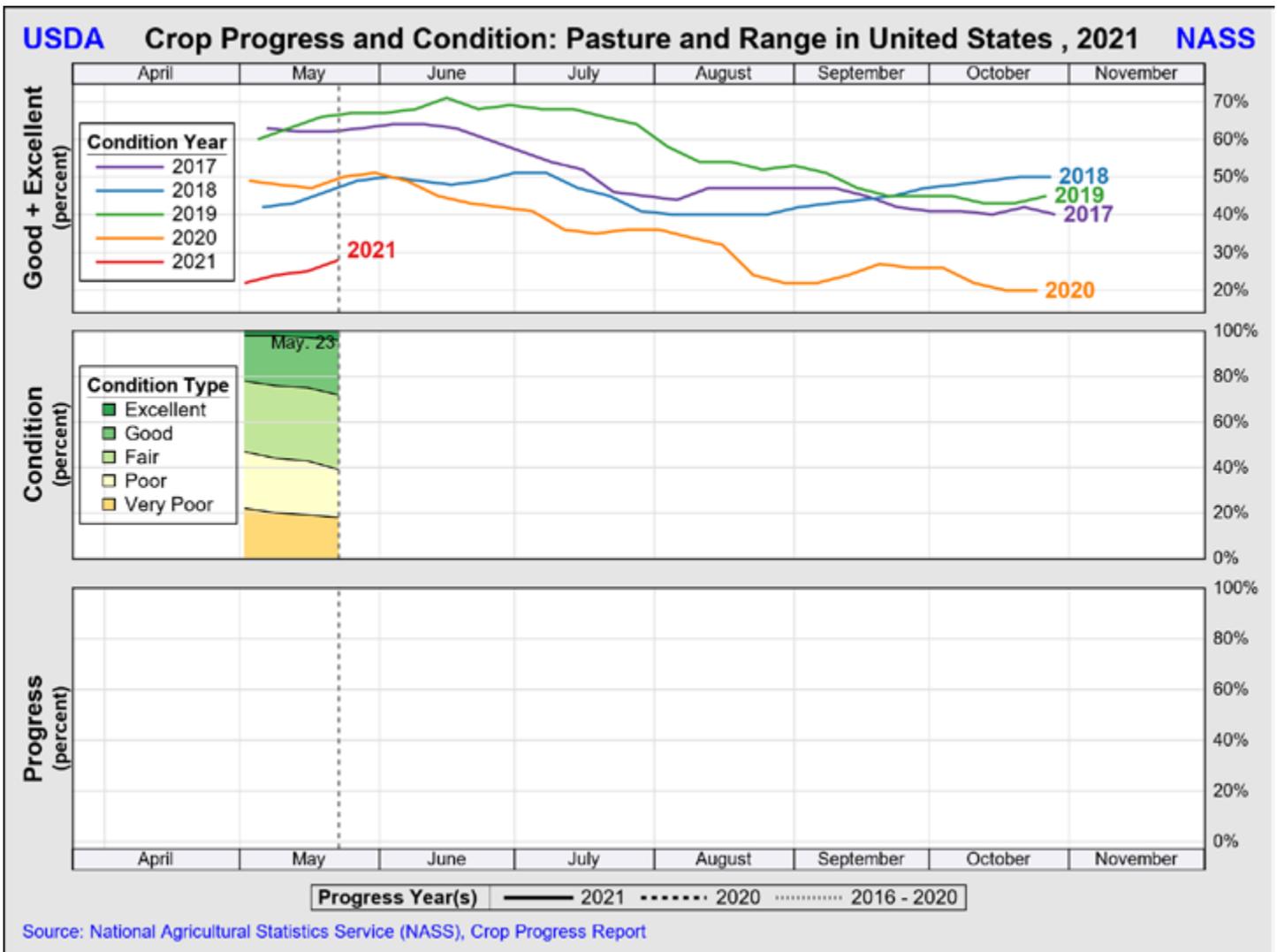
The Organic Valley processing plant in McMinnville, Oregon was mostly destroyed by fire on April 20, 2021. Most of the 25,000 square foot facility is a complete loss. The fire was ruled as accidental with no injuries. The plant has seen several upgrades since Organic Valley purchased the plant in 2017, as \$23 million has been invested in renovations and upgrades. Nearly 500,000 pounds of milk is shipped daily into the McMinnville plant, coming from 42 local family farms. Reports are that Organic Valley is finding homes for the milk for their producers. There have been a few dumped loads when there wasn't a place for it and it is reported a good portion is probably going out to the conventional market but Organic Valley is still paying the organic price. Reports from the West are that there have been numerous milk cuts from processors although some organic farmers are able to send their milk to conventional processors, but are receiving payment at the conventional level.

USDA NASS is reporting that this is the worst start for US pastures and ranges in at least thirty years. Extreme drought in the West as well as increasing drought pressures in parts of the Southern Plains and Upper Plains have significantly impacted pasture and range conditions. For the week ending May 16, USDA reported that just 25% of pastures and ranges were in good/excellent condition, a 1 point improvement from the previous week but 22 points lower than the previous year. The 10-year average for this time of year is above 50% when pastures are generally in good shape in late April and May thanks to melting snowfall and spring rains. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicts that drought will persist for most of the West and High Plains, based on "elevated probabilities of below normal precipitation and above normal temperatures for June-July-August." Lack of a rainfall signal from monthly and seasonal precipitation outlooks supports drought persistence across the Midwest. The forecast for the Northeast is based on a weak rainfall signal and likelihood of above normal



continued on page 16

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS



Pay And Feed Prices

continued from page 15

temperatures during June-July-August, along with a favorable time for “soil moisture discharge”.

The drought across the west has meant that several organic dairies are hauling water in at a high cost with future availability being unknown. A few of the dairies are selling off some milking cows. Cost of last year’s hay has increased by as much as 25-50% as many California dairies have to buy hay from Oregon and Washington rather than nearer home. This year’s hay crop is still an unknown but it will typically increase in cost to match other feed sources. All protein feed is higher in price and availability is patchy with the expectation that organic hay this year will be much in demand and higher in cost. Like the rest of the country, these western producers are not seeing any increase in pay-price and, unfortunately, there will be a number of dairies that will not continue.

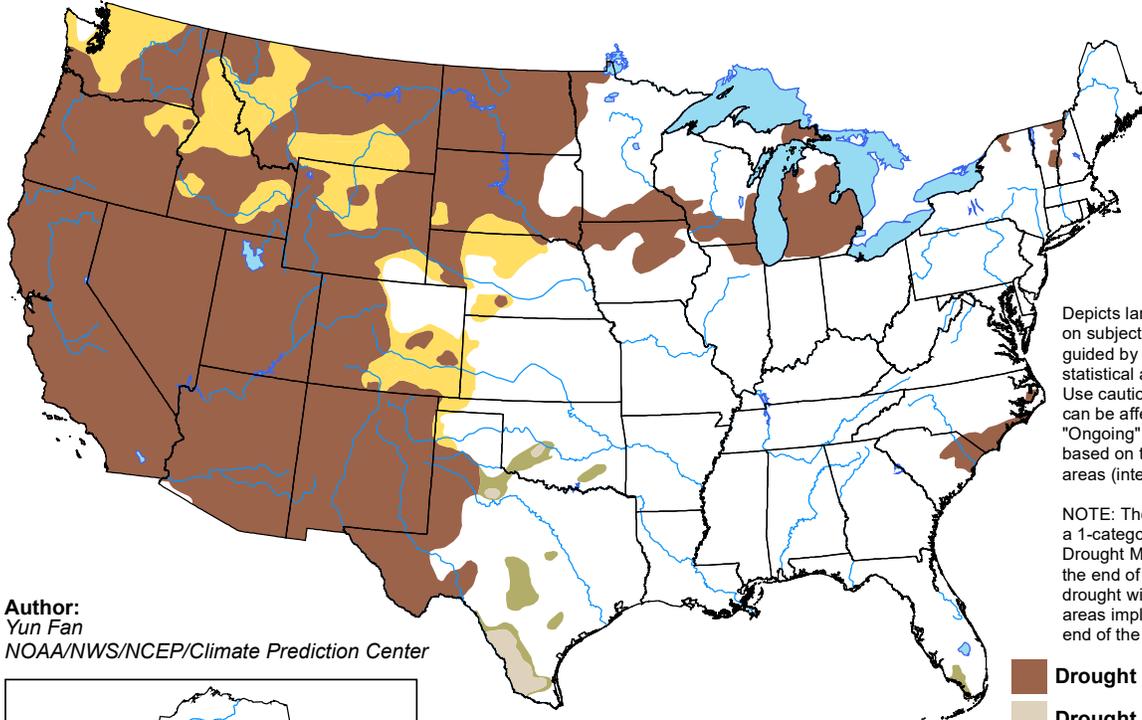
The Annual Organic Oversight and Enforcement Report was published by the NOP on May 17, 2021. I was going to summarize it but found I was going round in circles trying to decipher what they actually did. I took a cue from Mark Keating on ODairy that let the report language speak for itself. This is what USDA reported about its ongoing Organic Livestock Compliance Initiative: “The NOP visits in 2019 confirmed that all the targeted dairies demonstrated at least 120 days of grazing, and all cows received at least 30 percent dry matter intake from pasture during the season. Several correctable issues were identified, requiring action from both certifiers and operations. The NOP visits in 2020 deepened evaluations of certifier controls on key practices, such as temporary confinement of cows and calculations of nutrition consumed from pasture.”

As we get into the Origin of Livestock, this report on organic auctions is interesting and also promising for better enforcement of any new regulation: “Complaints of fraud in live animal sales

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook
Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

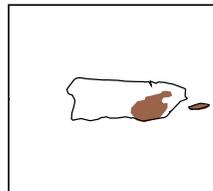
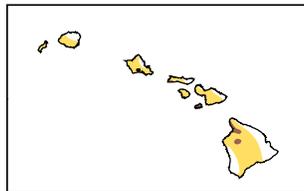
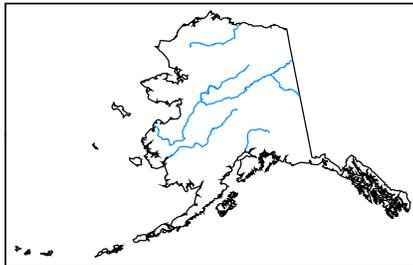
Valid for May 20 - August 31, 2021
 Released May 20



Depicts large-scale trends based on subjectively derived probabilities guided by short- and long-range statistical and dynamical forecasts. Use caution for applications that can be affected by short lived events. "Ongoing" drought areas are based on the U.S. Drought Monitor areas (intensities of D1 to D4).

NOTE: The tan areas imply at least a 1-category improvement in the Drought Monitor intensity levels by the end of the period, although drought will remain. The green areas imply drought removal by the end of the period (D0 or none).

Author:
 Yun Fan
 NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Climate Prediction Center



- Drought persists
- Drought remains but improves
- Drought removal likely
- Drought development likely

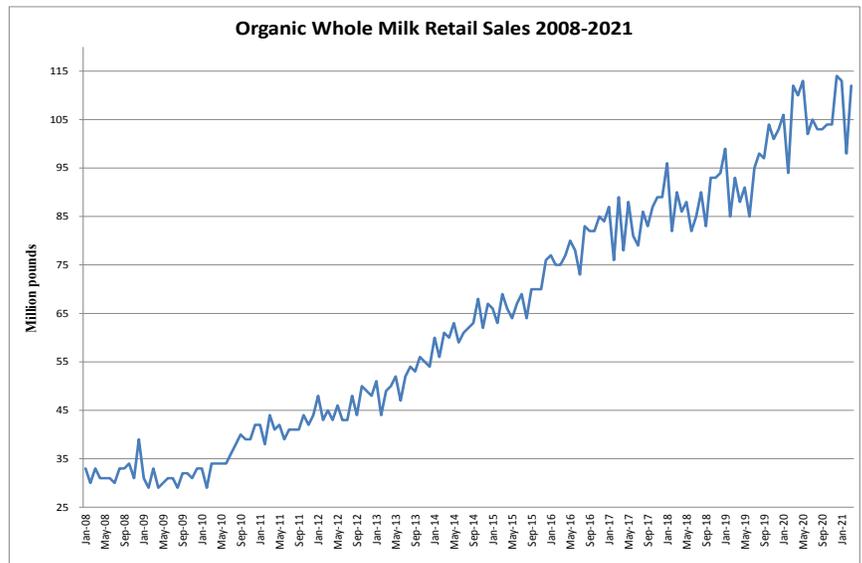


<http://go.usa.gov/3eZ73>

increased in 2020. Investigations initiated at the direction of the NOP resulted in several livestock sale barns surrendering their organic certificates immediately following on-site inspections. NOP has recruited additional Federal investigators with significant experience in USDA livestock enforcement to improve traceability in organic cattle movement nationwide.”

Not sure how a change in leadership at Danone internationally will directly affect Horizon producers but it's good to keep up with the trends at the company. The Food Dive website reported that Danone has picked Antoine de Saint-Affrique as its CEO starting Sept. 15, and proposes adding him to the board at the next

continued on page 18



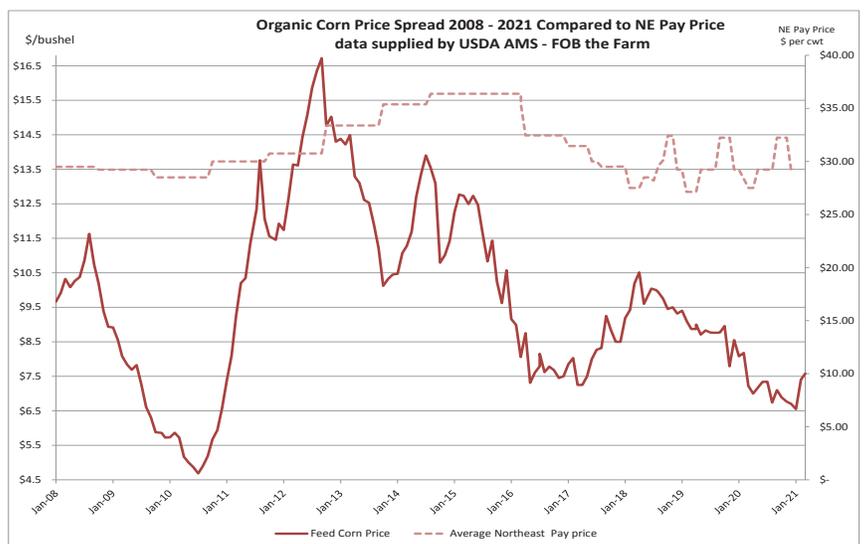
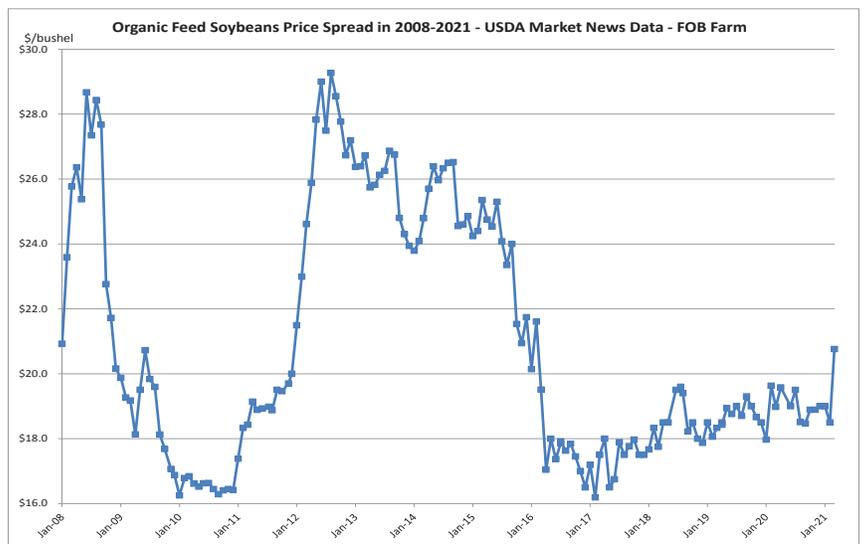
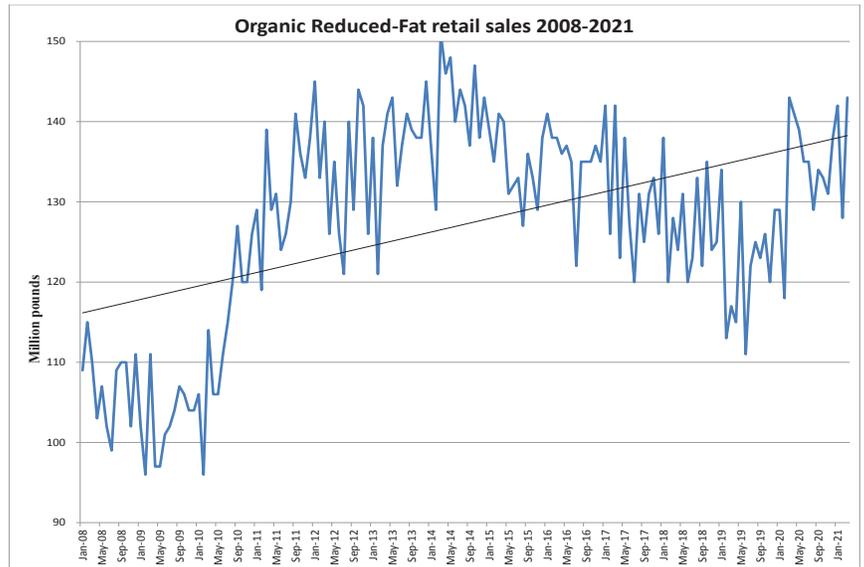
ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Pay And Feed Prices

continued from page 17

annual shareholders' meeting in April 2022. De Saint-Affrique announced on April 22nd that he was stepping down from chocolate maker Barry Callebaut as CEO at the end of August. He replaces long-time head Emmanuel Faber, who announced in March he was leaving as Danone's CEO following pressure from activists agitating for a leadership shake up. The new CEO will have to deal with critics who have said Danone has focused too much on its environmental and sustainability efforts at the expense of its financial performance. The shareholder complaints about being focused too much on environmental, social and governance goals is not promising for a rise in pay price. In fact, from some reports Danone is looking at the cost of hauling and starting to drop farms in the Northeast.

We all know that certified organic is the gold standard for environmental practices that benefit the planet but it seems that the farming practices of Organic Valley farmers are a step above the average organic dairy. University of Wisconsin-Madison's assessment reveals that, on average, the dairy farms of Organic Valley's members have a Lower Carbon Footprint (LCA) than the average U.S. conventional and organic dairy overall. The most significant difference in calculations of the carbon footprint of Organic Valley milk is in the inclusion of carbon sequestration from pasture as well as from forage and crop production. Including carbon sequestration in the LCA reduced the net farm emissions of the cooperative's dairy farms by an average of 15%. On average, Organic Valley farmers report engaging in 50% more pasture grazing than that required by the National Organic Program and the LCA results are impacted by this significant difference. Congratulations to all organic dairy farmers for their good production practices and to the University of Madison for publicizing the benefits of organic production practices. ♦



NET UPDATE

Recent ODairy Discussions

By Liz Bawden,
Organic Dairy Farmer, NODPA President

A farmer had two “healthy young animals die overnight without any clear explanation”. Both were grassfed heifers in good condition due shortly with their first calves. The farmer’s vet was called to perform an autopsy, and the results were inconclusive. After a great exchange of ideas from several vets on the list, it was agreed that the most likely scenario is they had both died from positional bloat, commonly called “casting”. One vet described it as: “a cow or heifer that’s heavy with calf will sometimes lay down on their right side and get tipped slightly back so the rumen “pins” the animal down and they can’t get righted (a bit like a turtle on its back) - Jerseys are more prone to this and sometimes the depression is surprisingly minor -nearly level and shallow. The inability of the cow to right itself keeps the rumen outlet (esophageal opening) blocked and bloat quickly suffocates the animal.” Another farmer has experienced the same challenges and makes it a practice to patrol his pastures and barnyards throughout the day to look for animals that need to be rolled back up.

The topic of the cast heifers brought up other threads of discussion on causes for sudden death in animals. One farmer experienced the sudden death of several heifers; the autopsy found the appearance of unusually red lungs. Gas under the skin led to the diagnosis of blackleg, caused by the soil borne pathogen bacterium *Clostridium chauvoei*. Once it is on the farm in the soil, it’s there forever. So they began to vaccinate with Ultrabac 7, and continue to this day to vaccinate after weaning. A vet shared a story of a shorthorn cow that died suddenly due to nitrate toxicosis. This disorder occurs when feed is high in nitrates (often from drought stress) and the nitrates prevent the blood from carrying enough oxygen. Another vet identified clostridial enteritis as a quick and fatal condition: “there will be an area (sometimes quite short ~4-6”) of the intestine that is discolored (red to black), gas-filled and containing putrid gas - the overgrowth of the clostridium bacteria produces a powerfully lethal toxin. That condition is most common in situations where cattle are getting a lot of grain.” And tragically, sometimes a cow in late pregnancy will tear the uterine artery (at the point where it attaches to the aorta). This causes sudden death with no outward signs but as soon as one opens the abdomen there will be blood all around the viscera.

A producer asked for recommendations for a pre-milking sanitizer. Recommendations included peroxyacetic acid (from

De Laval or IBA) and peracetic acid (small cubes from IBA). Another producer uses an iodine bath to sanitize milking units between cows, and asked if another product would work to minimize possible pathogen transfer without getting traces of iodine in the milk. A Chlorine dioxide product and IBA’s Supersan (peroxyacetic acid) were both suggested. ♦

Subscribing to ODairy:

ODairy is a FREE, vibrant listserv for organic dairy farmers, educators and industry representatives who actively participate with questions, advice, shared stories, and discussions of issues critical to the organic dairy industry.

To sign up for the ODairy listserv, go to:

www.nodpa.com/list_serv.shtml



River Valley
FENCING

*Designing and Installing Agricultural
Fences, Trellises and Bird Net
Systems throughout the Northeast*

413-348-4071

www.rivervalleyfencing.com

FEATURED FARM

TAFEL FARM, LAURENS, NY

continued from page 1

processing it into yogurt. Not only did the Tafel's purchase the initial herd from his former employers, they also shipped their milk to them until 2014.

The couple has since moved from the rented land, purchasing their own acreage in Laurens, New York in 2009. The land - abandoned for five years and purchased at a foreclosure auction - was also able to be certified organic immediately, without having to undergo a transition period.

In 2014, the couple changed course again, this time to 100 percent grass-fed dairying. They began supplying milk to Maple Hill Creamery. But this transition was a simple one, and didn't involve a major change in mindset or management, either.

The milking herd had never been fed much grain, as the couple constantly questioned the value of grain feeding in their organic dairy herd, trying periods with and without during their early years. By the time they began shipping to Maple Hill Creamery, they had not been feeding grain for a long period of time.

"We never converted conventional to organic. We did convert conventional organic to grass-fed," Adam said. "This was very smooth because we never really fed calves and heifers grain, so these animals developed rumens on just forage."

The family's farm consists of 675 owned acres, of which 425 acres is tillable and able to be grazed. Another 325 acres of tillable and

grazing land is rented, with two hundred of these acres dedicated to the milking herd. The pastures used for the milking herd are also mechanically harvested with some fields harvested for a first cutting, and then added to the grazing rotation when needed.

They own their separate heifer farm - which was Adam's childhood home, purchased from his father - 12 miles from the home farm. The heifers have 125 acres of land used only for grazing.

Pasture and grazing land is primarily planted to perennial pasture mixes or Sudangrass. Perennial mixtures utilize either meadow fescue or orchard grass as the base, with a mix of red and white clovers. They also plant trefoil and alfalfa on suitable ground.

"Orchard grass and meadow fescue have different maturity dates which allow us a greater window for mechanical and grazed harvest of high quality forage," Adam said.

The farm has 600 certified organic laying hens which are housed in a 40x70 pole barn. The hens pasture near the barn, given new sections every few weeks. Movable coops didn't work, due to the labor they required. The layers are relative newcomers to the farm, and finding the best solution to pasturing them is ongoing.

"We currently sell 250 dozen eggs per week to a health food store, through another farmer that takes them to New York City, and in our on-farm store," Adam said. "We have an on-farm store that is self-serve and we sell organic beef, pastured pork and eggs."



Tafel's have a self-serve, on-farm store offering organic beef, pastured pork and eggs

FEATURED FARM

Building the Dairy

The Tafels now have 150 cows in the milking herd, which consists primarily of Jersey and Ayrshire genetics, with Hereford genetics used on cows not used to breed replacements. They raise about 50 percent of the 90 or so heifers which are born each year, selling the remainder. Most of the sold animals are from first calve heifers, which are bred via a Jersey bull, or are offspring from the cows crossed with Hereford genetics.

“Our calves are sold at about a week old at the auction. The Hereford crosses do well; others do not,” Adam said. “Dairy culls are sold through the local auction as organic beef, which does okay.”

Most of the breeding is done via artificial insemination, which Adam does himself. The Jersey bull used on the heifers is also used to clean up the milking herd.

They are seeking deep, wide cows, so the animals have increased rumen capacity, a trait which is very important for their grass fed production. It allows the cow to consume a greater amount of forage and obtain the nutrients needed to be productive on an all-grass diet.

They breed with daughter pregnancy rate (DPR), milk production and somatic cell count as other primary selection criteria. Semen from traditional companies such as Select Sires and Genex is used, as well as John O’Brien’s Nature’s Blueprint bulls, which they’ve also used for the past several years.

“I do like to use A2 and polled genetics when it works, but other traits come first in selecting bulls,” Adam said. “We tried milking Shorthorn and Normandy but I found them to be too beefy and could not maintain milk production throughout their lactation. I also just really like Jersey and Ayrshires.”

The herd isn’t closed, and they do purchase some cows and heifers - about 30 in the past 15 years - when needed, and only directly from other farms, and not the auction house. In 2010, the purchase of a dozen animals all from one farm was done to accelerate herd growth, with another five head purchased in 2015. In 2019, 10 cows and heifers were added after the bull didn’t impregnate everyone it should have, and their winter calving goals were not met.

“We aim to keep about 45 heifer calves each year. That is about 30 percent of the milking herd. I feel like we need to replace about 20 - 25 percent of the herd each year, so this gives us wiggle room to grow slightly or cull heavier,” Adam explained.

Most of the dairy’s growth has been internal, with purchased head being the exception. The few times they did purchase cattle was because they were offered great cattle at a cost much less than that of raising a replacement, and the cows were ready to milk

immediately. There are no further plans to expand the herd, as the barn space is near capacity, and they would need to rent more tillable land, which is not available in their immediate vicinity.

“I am not interested in chasing land further than a few miles just to milk more cows,” Adam said.

Although the Tafels began as an organic dairy, and were already experienced with low-grain feeding prior to officially going grass-fed, they had plenty of other adjustments to make. The farmland they purchased had two tie-stall barns, which they renovated into freestall facilities, and they built a parlor.

The milking herd uses the two freestall barns, which were gutted and renovated prior to moving the herd to the farm in 2010. The main barn, which was a 100 cow tie stall barn, now has a swing 10 parallel parlor on the west end, with a holding area and 80 freestalls. The other tie-stall barn was converted in 2012 to a 30 freestall facility, with another 20 freestalls added in 2015. In 2016, calving pens, an office, bathroom, and utility room were added as well.

The freestall barns are tunnel ventilated, designed to reduce heat stress in the summer when the cows are housed during the day and grazed at night. Housing the milking herd indoors in the well-ventilated freestall barns during the heat of summer days also reduces fly concerns. Chopped hay bedding is preferred, although they do use shavings if they can’t make enough hay.

The tunnel ventilation system helps keep pneumonia at bay in the winter, although they recently had a few cases. Adam hypothesizes that reducing the fan speed to try to keep the barn more comfortable for people was a contributor to those illnesses. They’ve had another issue in the past where relocating the system’s fans - an attempt to enhance ventilation - instead resulted in pneumonia, and they immediately moved the fans back to their original positions, and added a few more!

An old carriage barn has been converted into a winter calf barn, housing 24 calves in three groups. But from May through October, calves are exclusively housed on pasture. Older heifers are out-wintered, and out-wintered yearlings have access to a run-in shed.

Another new addition to the farm is the 900,000 gallon manure pit, which was installed using an EQUIP grant in 2017. The manure from the freestall barns - which are cleaned with a skid steer twice a day in the winter and once per day during grazing season - gravity flows into the pit.

“The liquid manure is applied to hay field early in the spring, Sudangrass fields just before planting, and emptied in the fall

continued on page 22

FEATURED FARM

TAFEL FARM, LAURENS, NY

continued from page 21

onto hay fields. Heifer pack manure is also spread on Sudangrass field and rotovated in pre-planting,” Adam said. “Before the pit we used up to 400 tons of imported chicken litter each year. Now with the ability to store our dairy manure we have reduced chicken litter use to about 70 tons each year.”

Getting Grass to the Herd

Another new addition to the farm was two new silos, one built in 2017 and one moved from another farm in 2019, to join the two which already existed on the premises. One 20 by 70 foot silo is used to store sorghum-Sudangrass and Sudangrass forages, which they have planted extensively for the past ten years. While about a third of the 150- 225 acres planted to these grasses each season is grazed, the rest is used to fill the silo, and for baleage.

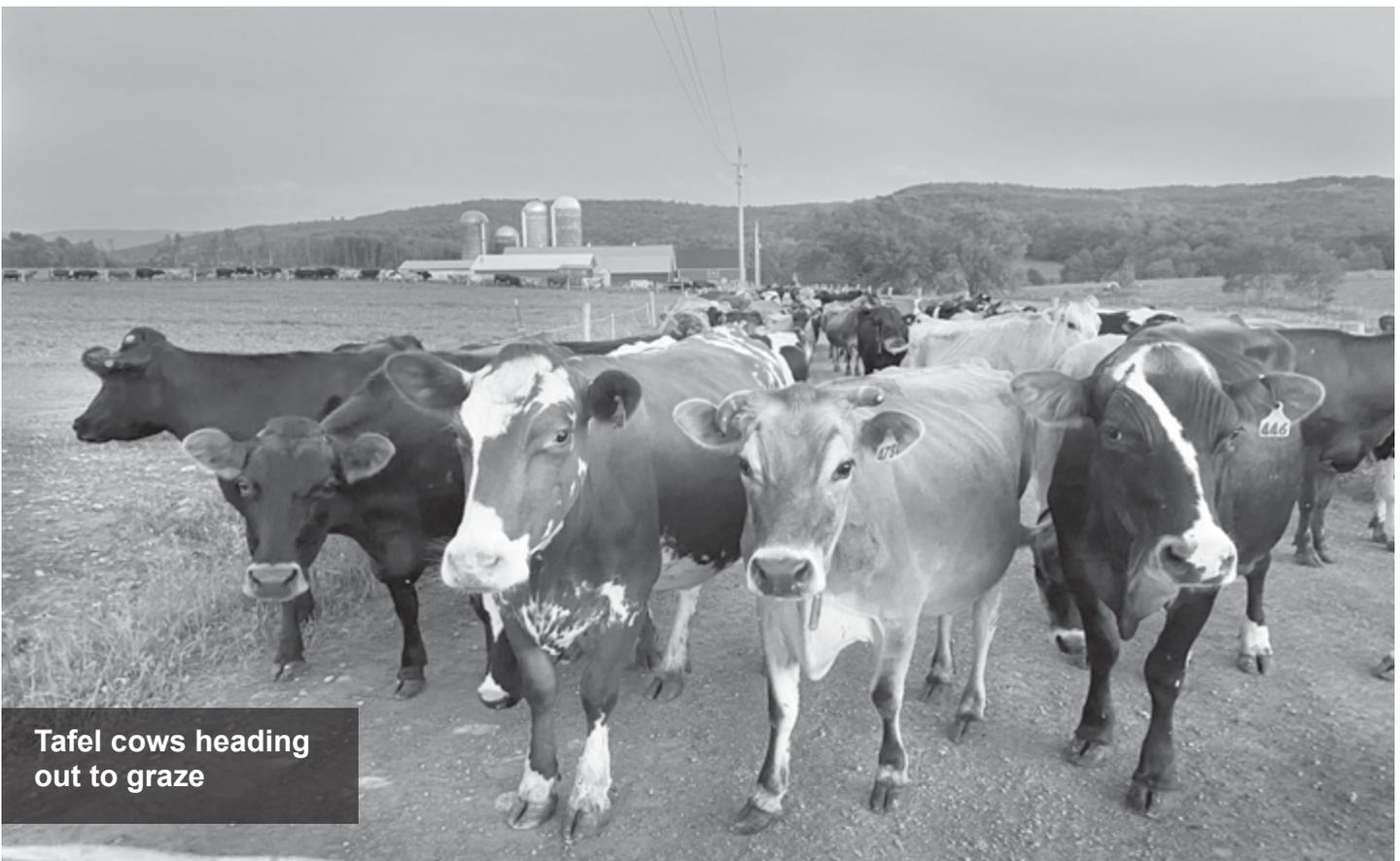
The milking herd does not receive any total mix ration, but are fed 10 - 25 percent Sudangrass silage, and 25 - 50 percent early first cut silage, with the remainder of their fed ration coming from later cuttings. About 80 percent of the feed is chopped silage, while the rest is fed in dry rounds or baleage. The mix of different fed forages balances out the diet.

Sorghum and Sudangrass yield as well as other annuals, and make very good forages if harvested at the appropriate time, according to Adam. They use these crops as a feed ingredient in the same manner a conventional dairy utilizes corn. After two years of the annuals, the pastures are reseeded to perennials.

“Early first cutting and Sudangrass tend to be higher energy and third and fourth cutting have a bit more protein,” Adam said. “We like to always offer some sort of long forage or dry hay as we feel the cows like this and it helps balance out the rumen. Feeding a mix of each keeps cows from losing weight and keeps them milking well.

The milking herd generally begins grazing in late April, with no-till winter rye in the Sudangrass fields giving a jump to the season. This year, they began to graze on April 25th. At first, the cows get about 50 percent of their diet from grazing the winter rye, with another 40 percent coming from Sudangrass silage and the remainder from last June’s first cut hay. The DMI from grazing increases to 90 percent by the time the cows are on pasture 24/7.

Sudangrass is grazed beginning in early to mid-July, to take the pressure off of the perennial pastures. If it is dry, the cows will move indoors during the day to reduce grazing pressure on the pastures. During the mid-summer heat, the milking herd will



Tafel cows heading out to graze

FEATURED FARM



One of the Tafel sons playing with a calf and the family dog.

get between 50 and 90 percent DMI from grazing, depending on how hot and dry it gets. When moisture allows, the herd will begin heavy grazing again in mid-September.

Fields are renovated when the yield drops, or the legume-to-grass ratio needs to be adjusted. They will plant Sudangrass for two years, followed by a spring no-till seeding of perennial pasture mix into the stubble. Tillage is done with a rotovator to a three inch maximum depth. Soil tests will pinpoint issues - pH and phosphorous are common concerns. If issues are found, bone meal is used to increase phosphorous and an application of lime will increase pH.

The milking herd moves to new paddocks or breaks every 12 hours, after each milking. Heifers and dry cows move every one to three days, depending on pasture needs. Calves on milk are rotationally grazed through a two-acre paddock near the barn. Heifers are pastured 100 percent throughout the grazing season, with the exception of a bale being fed occasionally in mid-summer to slow the grazing rotation and allow grasses to recover.

In the non-grazing season, heifers receive the later first cutting, sorghum, or second cutting feedstocks. These are not high enough quality for the milking herd.

Calves are fed good quality dry grass hay or baleage. Calves are fed grass or dry hay from day one. They are weaned either at three months or sometimes up to five months.

“There is no doubt that five-plus month weaning age is better for the calves than three months,” Adam said. “When weaned at five months they seem to hit the ground running better when moved to the heifer farm. Our issue is labor and space. When we are weaning at three months we can get calves to the heifer farm sooner and just allows more space in the calf barn and on the calf pasture.”

They’ve found that successful weaning at three months requires good forages to be available at all times, whether grazed or stored feed, to avoid a post-weaning slump.

continued on page 24

FEATURED FARM

TAFEL FARM, LAURENS, NY

continued from page 23

No matter when they will wean, all calves do better when they are born outside, and move directly to the calf pasture without ever being in the barn, Adam said. Calves are fed with mob feeders, and kept in one multi-age group until weaning.

“I don’t believe that cows fed starter or grain as young stock will ever do as well as cattle never fed grain. I also believe this to be critical to the rumen development and success of grass-fed cows,” Adam said, explaining why the calves are fed grass from birth.

Production and Health

Per cow production in April 2021 was 9700 pounds of milk per cow. Fat is at 4.2 percent, with protein at 3.4 percent, and other solids at 5.6 percent. The somatic cell count is about 220,000, and averages around 200,000 year round, running between 180,000 and 220,000, with spikes more likely to occur in summer’s heat.

Any cows with mastitis have their milk segregated and fed to pigs or to calves. Quarters with persistent issues are dried off and cows are culled if the high cell counts continue. They occasionally culture, and for the past ten years have had a Dairy One tester come to the farm monthly. The tester monitors individual milk weights, SCC, fat, protein and other data on each cow. They have found this information to be invaluable.

Other health concerns are fairly rare, but sometimes come in waves, such as milk fever, which will affect a handful of cows in a row, and then not occur again for months. Adam believes that nutritional issues may be the culprit, with an abundance of potassium at some time later causing these milk fever outbreaks. Milk fever is treated with intravenous calcium. Another nutritional issue is low selenium levels, which Adam believes is the cause of the conception issues which occasionally occur in the herd. If blood selenium levels are low, they’ll add vitamin E and selenium minerals. If animals have a fever, due to retained placentas or some mild pneumonia - both rare occurrences - aspirin and Banamine are used.

While they do not have a nutritionist, they do test forage nutrition levels routinely and closely monitor MUN levels. The veterinarian visits every few months for pregnancy checks and to monitor selenium levels.

The main health issue seen with calves is E. coli. A First Defense bolus is given within 12 hours of birth during the winter months. The first week is when problems arise with E. coli and it is

not always a concern, but ebbs and flows at times, despite not changing any procedures with cow and calf care.

They don’t see coccidia in any significant amounts and simply let it run its course in the animal. They do, however, use it as an indicator that there is a stressor - poor feed, cleanliness issues, or housing concerns - that needs to be addressed. Any occasional scours seen is treated with homemade electrolytes. They do not routinely use other vaccinations or supplemental therapies for their calves.

They currently don’t vaccinate the herd at all, although they used to do so annually. After falling behind schedule, they’ve never caught back up, but do believe vaccines to be valuable, and are considering starting with an annual schedule again.

Lessons Learned

The Tafels have learned and incorporated lessons from both the conventional and organic dairy sectors in their farm management. Adam attends meetings hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension, which typically address the needs of confinement dairy farmers. Dave Balbian, of the Central New York Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops Program, has been a tremendous help throughout the years, and Graze magazine has served as an educational resource as well.

“There is a wealth of knowledge there that is sometimes dismissed by organic producers,” Adam said. “I have to sift through and adjust what I learn from them to make it fit organic, but I feel as though I always walk away with a lot of useful information.”

Adam believes that one threat facing the organic dairy industry is the negative marketing done by milk alternatives, which claim to be environmentally-friendly and to avoid dairy’s animal welfare concerns. But those milk alternatives aren’t the answer, he advocates, while responsible organic dairy farming is.

“I think the organic dairy industry needs to push the narrative of regenerative agriculture as a way to sequester carbon and combat global warming,” to make consumers aware of the facts, Adam said.

The Tafel’s organic, grass-fed dairy has grown along with the family, which includes three young sons - Moses, Henry and Riley. The boys, along with Adam’s father and several employees, including Rachel Stone, who has been with the farm for seven years - are instrumental in keeping this family dairy productive.



Adam and Margaret Tafel can be reached at 1342 County Highway 10, Laurens, New York 13796, 607-263-5774, tafelam@gmail.com

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Vilsack's Checkoff Problem

continued from page 13

In theory, the OIG operates independently from the rest of the USDA. But emails surfaced in which top officials at the agency overseeing the checkoffs, the Agricultural Marketing Service, appeared to try to influence the OIG report. The Organization for Competitive Markets sued Vilsack and the USDA to see what documents auditors had originally reviewed. But lawyers for the USDA and NCBA, which asked to join the lawsuit as a defendant, have used motions to delay the case, which seven years later is still awaiting a ruling.

In the wake of the OIG report, checkoff critics again began clamoring for the USDA to take more forceful action. In June 2014, a group that included Stokes and a Cattlemen's Beef Board member named Dave Wright met with Vilsack in Washington to discuss how the beef program had been seized by lobbyists. They believed if they distilled the message for the busy secretary, he'd empathize with their plight. Wright told me his parting words were: "Mr. Secretary, the beef checkoff is the most corrupt program I've ever seen in my life." The crew left semi-hopeful, but the meeting brought no changes. "He didn't say no," Stokes recalled. "He just let us vent, then did nothing."

Vilsack, though, was developing his own plan. Back in 2011, he had been persuaded by the industry to create the Beef Checkoff Enhancement Working Group, ostensibly to recommend ways to reform the checkoff. It seemed destined to fail, a cacophony of antagonistic voices shouting past one another — the NCBA and Big Dairy's lobbyists at one end of the table, and groups representing independent producers, like the National Farmers Union and the U.S. Cattlemen's Association, at the other. By 2014 the group had made zero headway. One member organization quit, declaring it "a waste of time and money."

Reportedly unhappy with the lack of progress, Vilsack put forward a solution that November. In a statement he said, "Beef industry representatives agree this important program needs more resources," and proposed using his executive authority to create a second, \$1-a-head checkoff program. That may seem illogical, but at the time even the big meatpackers were complaining about the size of the checkoff's budget. Vilsack never offered much in the way of an explanation. But while most changes to checkoff programs require amending the law, this end run, via executive order, would have increased the beef checkoff budget to as much as \$80 million without any congressional action.

Vilsack's proposal was poorly received. In fact, the secretary later acknowledged that it was "fairly obvious the industry was not

interested in having a second checkoff." His idea even troubled Congress, which took the extraordinary step of warning Vilsack to abandon it in the 2015 appropriations bill. Vilsack pinned the blame back on producers: "They have prevented me from doing the one thing I had the capacity to do. So now it's really totally up to the industry."

Critics hoping for reform felt ignored. Dudley Butler, who by then was back in Mississippi farming and practicing law, wrote a letter calling on Vilsack to resign.

"Many producers, conservative and progressive, believed your promises and were hopeful for a new day at USDA. Some took brave stances based on your promises to their own peril," he said. "Instead, they got more of the same — an agency controlled by the big food companies and the big meat packers ... Your lack of leadership has ensured that independent cattle producers will continue to be systematically pushed toward the slaughterhouse of vertical integration."

- Dudley Butler

A year later, Vilsack did try to resign. In late 2015, he marched to the Oval Office and told President Obama, "There are days when I have literally nothing to do." Obama convinced Vilsack to stay, getting him to shift his energy to overseeing the government's response to the mounting opioid crisis.

By then, though, scandals had boiled over inside the pork, egg and soybean checkoffs, as well as the beef program.

When Vilsack entered office in 2009, there was already a wild complaint filed by soybean growers against the United Soybean Board. It accused board members of a grab-bag of crimes, everything from embezzlement and sexual harassment to an alleged knife assault by Dan Duran, CEO of the U.S. Soybean Export Council, during an event. The Office of Inspector General investigated this too, and in 2010 revealed that the Export Council had also "paid approximately \$320,000 in bonuses" to staff with checkoff funds.

At the same time, the National Pork Board allegedly was involved in a scheme to channel funds to the industry's main lobbying group. In 2006, the National Pork Producers Council

continued on page 26

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Vilsack's Checkoff Problem

continued from page 25

(NPPC) — the lobbying operation — sold the pork checkoff board licensing rights to the iconic “Pork, the Other White Meat” tagline, which, for a complicated set of reasons, the NPPC owned. The pork board agreed to pay \$60 million, or \$3 million a year for 20 years. Technically, farmers had already paid an ad agency to invent this slogan back in 1987, with their annual checkoff dues, and now they were paying again to buy it back. A group of angry hog farmers filed a lawsuit in 2012, alleging the board was funneling money to industry lobbyists, but lost on appeal in 2019. Although “the Other White Meat” was officially retired in 2011, the board continued to pay out the contract. Since then, it has used producer dollars to develop a new motto: “Real Pork.”

Then came 2015, when the American Egg Board behaved so inappropriately that Congress debated whether to intervene. An open-records expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology named Ryan Shapiro published emails showing the board had plotted to crush a popular eggless mayonnaise called Just Mayo. Producer checkoff dollars were spent trying to convince grocers to remove Just Mayo from stores, members deleted pertinent emails that had to be recovered using forensic methods, and the board joked about “put[ting] a hit on” Just Mayo founder Josh Tetrick. The OIG investigated again, and the egg board was punished with three years of increased management review and a directive to retrain staff on “proper email etiquette and ethics.”



Jars of Just Mayo by Hampton Creek and Hellman's Real Mayonnaise by Unilever in a supermarket in New York in 2014.

(Photo by Richard Levine/Corbis via Getty Images.)

A bipartisan group of senators who watched the egg board go rogue decided to impose their own oversight. Democrats Cory Booker and Elizabeth Warren, and Republicans Mike Lee and Rand Paul, co-sponsored a checkoff reform bill, the OFF Act, that would have banned lobbying groups like the NCBA and NPPC from accessing checkoff funds. Lee, chair of the Senate Judiciary antitrust subcommittee, warned Vilsack that the programs were “behav[ing] like state-sponsored cartels,” and Congress could simply stop authorizing them.

Over 100 agriculture groups backed the OFF Act, but it went nowhere. Lobbyists for the NCBA, the NPPC and other trade groups spent millions painting the reforms as the work of “militant vegans and extreme political organizations.” The bill was voted down 38-to-57 in 2018.

The final scandal was Vilsack's own creation, involving the dairy checkoff. The dairy program is unique among checkoffs in that Congress requires the agriculture secretary to submit an annual report disclosing the past year's expenditures. Vilsack upheld that duty from 2009 to 2012, but then in 2013 he stopped and never issued another report. Watchdogs cried foul, including a Tufts University food economist named Parke Wilde who has monitored checkoff misbehavior for years. He filed a Freedom of Information Act request to force the release of the reports, but the USDA told him no.

By the time Sonny Perdue, Donald Trump's agriculture secretary, released the delinquent reports in 2017, Vilsack was crisscrossing the world convincing nations like China and Mexico to import more U.S. dairy, a job he said kept him “surprisingly more busy than I was when I was secretary.”

Vilsack has frequently compared being USDA secretary to having two sons — corporate agribusinesses and family farms — and wanting to “love 'em both.” Independent farmers say Vilsack's metaphor ignores the fact that the bigger brother is a bully. “The problem with his ‘two sons’ propaganda,” wrote Roger Allison, the director of Missouri Rural Crisis Center and a longtime checkoff critic, in December 2020, “is that corporate agriculture is doing everything they can to put independent family farms out of business ... and they are doing it with the policies and checkoff dollars that Vilsack has vehemently promoted.”

For this story, I asked multiple current and former USDA officials how they think Vilsack will handle checkoffs this time around. Like the USDA itself, most didn't respond, and others wouldn't talk on the record. After a turbulent transfer of power in Washington, the feeling may be that now isn't the right time to rock the boat.

“Our nation has recently been going through a major political crisis,” Wilde, the Tufts food economist, told me. “I think

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

people may be politically loyal currently rather than aiming for perfection in government.” But, he added, the checkoffs have benefitted from “a long history of revolving doors, where key people go back and forth between well-paid checkoff positions and senior government positions.” In this case, the door is revolving from the second-longest-serving USDA secretary, to highest-paid checkoff CEO, back to USDA secretary.

One former official said Vilsack’s team has been in touch to discuss taking on Big Ag, but that the conversation didn’t venture into checkoff reform. And Mike Eby, of the Organization for Competitive Markets, told me his group had been in active dialogue with the Trump White House about checkoff reform. The administration ended before the conversation went anywhere, but that progress was more than they made in eight years with Obama and Vilsack.

Others aren’t sure it even matters who’s agriculture secretary. Jerry Hagstrom, a veteran agriculture journalist who writes the Hagstrom Report and has covered every administration since Reagan, says the majority of farmers pay no attention to how their checkoff dollars are spent. That means the loudest voices pushing for reform “aren’t mainstream groups. The mainstream groups are very supportive of the checkoffs as they are. Pressure has to come more from the farmers themselves.” Hagstrom compares the fight to shareholder activism: “Like these controversies where stockholders try to influence company policy and find it very difficult. Management manages to stop them from doing it.”

But the secretary is right about this being a different time — one in which Congress or White House officials might get pushier about program oversight. Biden’s economic team includes some big-name trustbusters, like Lina Khan and Tim Wu, both of whom have Big Ag in their sights, as well as Big Tech, and haven’t shied away from criticizing the Obama administration’s failures at reform.

Sen. Booker, just appointed to the Senate Agriculture Committee, tells me that while he believes Vilsack is “committed to transformational change at the USDA,” he also plans, from his new perch, “to exercise oversight and push for reforms to the commodity checkoff programs to be included as part of that change.” Booker’s short list includes making checkoff budgets publicly available, enacting what he calls a “bright-line rule” barring lobbyists from receiving any checkoff dollars, and urging more action from the USDA, which he says “has authority to conduct more robust audits and require more transparency of the organizations using checkoff funds.” It’s simply chosen not to exercise that authority.

If the USDA did — even requiring programs to post full financial records, as the Government Accountability Office recommended

in 2017 — critics argue new abuses by the checkoffs might come to light, such as recent cases where \$2.6 million of Oklahoma’s beef funds were embezzled to open a clothing boutique, or where \$40,000 of Washington state’s beef funds were stolen by an employee with access to her office’s credit card.

One Obama-era USDA official who did speak on the record was Dudley Butler. I asked what checkoff reform needs to look like, hypothetically, and he invoked an analogy of bulldozing a decaying barn. “When you have a damaged barn on your farm that is compromised and has lost its structural integrity, it is usually the best decision to demolish it and build a new one,” he told me. “Those in charge should reach the same decision — demolish the current checkoff, and develop a more equitable and accountable system.” ♦

Note: This story has been updated to correct the name of the director of Missouri Rural Crisis Center to Roger Allison.

You made it this far so we know you appreciate our work. FERN is a nonprofit and relies on the generosity of our readers so that we can continue producing incisive reporting like this story. Please consider making a donation to support our work. Thank you.



FERN'S AG INSIDER

THEFERN.ORG/AG_INSIDER

Daily reporting and analysis on food, agriculture and the environment

ONE MONTH FREE TRIAL

THEFERN.ORG/SHOP/

Less than \$7 per month with a one year subscription

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

SAVE THE DATE: the 21st Annual NODPA Field Days

By Nora Owens, 

X ♦



UPSTATE NIAGARA
COOPERATIVE, INC.
FARMER OWNED

At Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc. our member dairy farmers work passionately to ensure delicious, high-quality milk. In 2006, we introduced an Organic Program to our members. We have proudly produced organic dairy products ever since.




CERTIFIED ORGANIC MOLASSES

Family Owned & Operated



Serving USA & Canada

BUFFALO MOLASSES
MOLASSES & LIQUID FEED SUPPLEMENTS

Excellent Energy Source / Nutrient Value / Enhanced Palatability
Bio-Brix Soil Amendment to Promote Healthy & Rich Soil.
Pickup or Delivery for Any Size Operation.

716.714.9709 | BuffaloMolasses.com | North Java, NY

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

PFAS and Agriculture: What It Means

By Tamara Scully, NODPA Contributing Writer

This article originally appeared in Country Folks, March 6, 2020

The Dairy Voice podcast from the National Dairy Herd Improvement Association's (NDHIA) media partner, Dairybusiness.com, recently hosted a discussion on a relatively new and emerging concern for the dairy industry: per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). These manmade chemicals are known as "forever" chemicals, and have caused undue hardship on a dairy farm in New Mexico, as well as one in Maine, both of which were found to have high levels of contamination in their milk. Detectable levels of PFAS have also been found on numerous dairy farms in Michigan, one of a handful of states which have been testing for these chemicals to see just how ubiquitous they are.

This isn't just a dairy problem. PFAS are cropping up in soils, water, food and feed across the nation. But PFAs aren't farm-derived. These synthetic chemicals, which do not readily break down and therefore can continue indefinitely and accumulate in the environment as well as in our bodies, are commonplace in

consumer personal care products and household goods. They are detectable and commonly found in our bloodstream.

PFAS repel oil and water, are temperature resistant, and decrease friction. They are found in common household clothing and fabric items that are stain resistant or water repellent, and in non-stick cookware. They are found in cleaning products and waxed dental floss, and in food packaging. And they are now being tested for and found in food itself, in soils and water, and in our bodies, typically at low levels.

The reason PFAS are so formidable is the bond between the carbon and fluorine atoms, which is "actually the strongest bond in nature," environmental engineer Matt Schroeder, of the Dragun Corporation in Michigan, said on the Dairy Voice podcast. "We've found that, potentially, they have some health issues at very low levels."

But how are they finding their way onto our farms?

PFAS may have negative health effects in the part per trillion range, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has begun testing for these chemicals - there are more than 5,000 - in foods.

Dairy Concerns?

In 2016, the FDA tested milk samples, with no PFAS found in 49 samples commercially available milk tested. Raw milk samples included one of 12 with PFAS at detectable levels. That one farm had applied biosolids to their fields.

Field application of biosolids may be a concern for dairy farmers moving forward. But the biggest dairy farm contamination - that in New Mexico - occurred on a farm located next to an Air Force base, where aqueous film forming foam, a firefighting product loaded with PFAS, contaminated ground water. Other contamination situations have occurred in proximity to manufacturing plants where PFAS are produced or utilized in production.

According to the North East Biosolids and Residuals Association website (<https://www.nebiosolids.org/pfas-biosolids>), "typical biosolids with no direct large industrial inputs are unlikely to impact ground and



Dairy farmer Fred Stone watches the milk collected the previous day go down the floor drain, after discovering the soil, hay, and the milk from the cows on the farm contain extremely high levels of PFAS chemicals resulting from a 1980's state program to fertilize the pastures with treated sludge waste and making the milk unsuitable for sale, at the Stoneridge Farm in Arundel, Maine.

Picture taken March 11, 2019. REUTERS/Brian Snyder

continued on page 30

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

**PFAS and Agriculture:
What It Means**

continued from page 29

surface waters at levels above U.S. EPA’s health advisory level for drinking water (70 ppt).”

Wisconsin attorney Leah Ziemba, also interviewed on the Dairy Voice podcast, advises dairy farmers to “remain level-headed about this,” and to examine “the risk profile on your operation. There’s a lot of information about sites” known to be high risk for PFAS contamination. https://www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019_pfas_contamination/map/

Biosolids sourced from a treatment plant accepting wastewater from a primary PFAS user are the principal concern. Farms located in proximity to these sources should also be concerned about PFAS levels in their soil and ground water.

Scientific Perspective

Dr. Linda Lee of Purdue University holds a doctorate in soil chemistry and contaminants hydrology and is an expert on

PFAS. She was recently featured on the Water Environment Federation’s Words on Water podcast.

PFAS are very water soluble, with shorter chained PFAS more soluble than the longer ones. PFAS also are unstable in the manner in which they move through soil profiles, and the soil/water interface - the zone where crops grow - is particularly problematic. PFAS do not move quickly through this zone, and “PFAS do weird things” while there, Lee said.

Biosolids are derived from wastewater treatment plants, where water from residential, commercial, industrial and other uses are treated and separated into sludge and effluents, along with a small percentage of volatile material which is released to the air, Lee explained. Although PFAS dissolve in the effluent, the dilution effect keeps their levels low, so they don’t tend to accumulate in our rivers and fish at unacceptable levels.

“The problem with biosolids is that they have really high nutrient value, (and) high carbon value, to them. They’ve been land-applied for decades,” before there was any concern about PFAS. Today, we primarily need to investigate “how much is the land-applied biosolids contributing to our total load of PFAS in our drinking water, and our food system,” Lee said.

Products for Your Organic Herd

Feed Ingredients • Pest Control • Health Care

OMRI lists hundreds of products for organic livestock, all monitored for formula changes and new ingredients so that you can move forward with confidence.

OMRI LISTED

Download the **OMRI Products List®** today
[OMRI.org/download](https://www.OMRI.org/download)

OMRI Listed – Naturally Trusted

Make Your Feed Succeed With Thorvin

Thorvin is nature’s most complete mineral source. Loaded with bioavailable nutrients, Thorvin supports reproductive, digestive, and thyroid health...for just pennies a day!

Animals Thrive on Thorvin

#1 Organic Feed Supplement

USDA ORGANIC

Thorvin™
 World's Finest Nutrients

www.thorvin.com
 800.464.0417

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Biosolids are a resourceful way to recycle our own waste and to help combat climate change via carbon sequestration. Lee believes that the benefits of biosolids production and reuse as soil amendments outweigh the PFAS risk, as biosolids are not normally a source of PFAS contamination. The issue comes from industrial contamination from manufacturers of PFAS or heavy users of products in which the chemicals are found, such as airports.

“I suspect that at least 95 percent of biosolids that get produced by municipal plants have...relatively low PFAS loads, that when they are land-applied are not going to be significant,” Lee said.

Dilution of land-applied PFAS, by mixing biosolids with other materials to meet the nitrogen needs of the land, is recommended. If biosolids were simply applied based on land nitrogen needs, it could require a large amount, maximizing PFAS load on the land.

The PFAS in land-applied biosolids don't disappear, Lee said. Those with smaller chemical chains are more mobile, while the longer chained PFAS tend to stay in the soil and accumulate. Large PFAS do very slowly degrade into smaller PFAS. The key is to keep the PFAS load from biosolids low enough, via dilution with other materials, to allow this degradation process to occur,

so the total PFAS load of the soil remains within regulatory limits. The half-life of long chain PFAS is about five years.

If effluent from water treatment plants is used for irrigation of crops, some PFAS volatilize into air. Most remain in the soil until they hit groundwater, or are discharged in tile drainage, Lee said.

Short chain PFAS from biosolids or effluent are taken up by crops, or move into groundwater. But these have shorter half-lives, and much higher concentrations are needed to reach levels where adverse health effects are of concern, Lee said.

Another issue is the use of any crops where PFAS are detected. Are these crops being directly consumed by humans, or are they being used for animal feed? Will the PFAS accumulate in livestock over time, to unsafe levels, and then be found in their milk or meat?

All of these questions, and more, still need to be quantified. Keeping the direct-to-body levels of PFAS, measured in parts per trillion, very low is the key to mitigating any adverse health effects, Lee emphasized.

Want to learn more and assess how PFAS contamination could impact you and your community? Plan to attend the 2021 NODPA Field Days where we will have a session that focuses on PFAS and Organic Dairy Farming. ♦

Subscribe to the NODPA News and support NODPA!

By becoming a subscriber you will receive 6 copies of the NODPA News and help support the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance. NODPA depends on your contributions and donations. If you enjoy the bi-monthly NODPA News; subscribe to the Odairy Listserv (http://nodpa.com/list_serv.shtml); visit our web page (www.nodpa.com) or benefit from farmer representation with the NOP and processors that NODPA provides, please show your support by making a generous contribution to our efforts.

Note that if you sign up for the NODPA Voluntary Organic Milk Check-Off, you will be automatically signed up as a NODPA News subscriber.

- | | |
|--|---|
| _____ \$50 to cover an annual subscription to NODPA News | _____ \$300 to \$500 to become a Friend |
| _____ \$50 to become an Associate member (open to all) | _____ \$500 to \$1,000 to become a Patron |
| _____ \$100 to become a supporter of NODPA | _____ \$1,000+ to become a Benefactor |
| _____ \$150 to become a Business Member | |

Name: _____	Farm Name: _____
Address: _____	
City: _____	State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: _____	Email: _____
Date: _____	Are you a certified organic dairy producer? YES NO
Number of milking cows _____	Milk buyer _____
Are you transitioning to organic? YES NO If yes, anticipated date of certification: _____	

Please mail this form with a check to: Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director, 30 Keets Rd, Deerfield, MA 01342, or by fax: 866-554-9483 or by email to ednodpa@comcast.net. Please make your check payable to: NODPA

Credit card: Master Card Visa	Card #: _____	
Name on Card: _____	Expiration Date: __ __ 202__	Security Code on Card: _____

Calendar

Thursday, June 10, 2021 - 7:00 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.

STORIES FROM 50 YEARS OF NOFA-VT: STORYTELLING EVENT

As part of our celebration of our 50th birthday this year, we are excited to invite you to join us for an evening of “Moth”-like storytelling this June for Stories from 50 Years of NOFA-VT! During this event, we’ll hear stories relating to two themes: Birth (think movements, the National Organic Program, animals, communities, businesses and more!) & Community (think the wider-than-human, barn dances, mutual aid, resilience, meal trains & more!)

Join us to hear stories from the NOFA-VT community from the people who have helped grow and sustain this community over the last half century about the good, the bad, the ugly, and the hilarious -- the personal but interweaving tales that together braid our shared history. The last fifty years have passed in the moments big and small: starting up farms, sharing food over potlucks, keeping calves warm by woodstoves -- and all the hilarity, trial, loss, and tribulation in between. We’re looking forward to an enjoyable night around the (virtual) fire with you! Visit our website for more information:

<https://nofavt.z2systems.com/np/clients/nofavt/event.jsp?event=112&>

June 16, 2021, 2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. EDT, Zoom Webinar

COMPOST: CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Composting can be a critical component in addressing global climate change. This webinar will cover the carbon cycle as it relates to composting organic wastes, and the sequestration of carbon in soils when finished compost is applied back to the land. The webinar will discuss factors that affect the ability of soils to sequester carbon from composts, as well as some potential carbon debits, such as methane and nitrous oxide emissions, that may need to be controlled. Finally, the webinar will briefly discuss some of the existing models for estimating greenhouse gas debits and credits from the composting process and from compost use. Advance registration required at: <https://www.compostingcouncil.org/events/register.aspx?id=1507236&itemid=5cf89589-af7f-423e-8d43-ac478392f8b1>

June 17, 2021, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EDT, Zoom Webinar

COMPOST ON THE FARM

A free online workshop on compost will be led by the Santa Rosa Junior College Shone Farm, and co-sponsored by the Sonoma RCD. You will hear about the use and benefits of compost, the CDEA Healthy Soils compost demo project at Shone Farm, a keynote presentation from farmer Phil Foster, and enjoy an engaging panel grower discussion. Please register in advance at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/compost-on-the-farm-tickets-153681963891>

**Friday, June 18, 2021 through Saturday, June 19, 2021
12:00 p.m. (June 18th) - 5:00 p.m. (June 29th)**

THE AGRARIA CENTER FOR REGENERATIVE PRACTICE: NOURISHING LIFE CONFERENCE

The Agraria Center for Regenerative Practice is hosting an online conference, Nourishing Life, June 18-19, 2021 to address the interwoven threads of soil health, nutrition, and community health.

We face climate crises, epidemic chronic disease, a global pandemic and major threats to our food supply. How we nourish ourselves and our soil is intimately related to each of these challenges. Imagine regenerative solutions that tap the wisdom of nature, our ancestors, and our new understanding of the physiology of immunity and chronic disease.

Nourishing Life will inspire and inform healthcare providers, curious farmers, and concerned community members with action steps for their personal and professional lives, their communities, and our world. Be an agent of change in your community. Please join us as we rejoin with nature and our ancestors in the cycle of Nourishing Life.

Confirmed speakers and topics:

Vandana Shiva, PhD on the broken global food system and the link between soil health and human me cases, even reverse, metabolic disorders and chronic disease. Dr. Clark-Ganheart will speak about racial disparities in health and wellness and her approach to addressing metabolic syndrome. Christine Jones, PhD on optimizing the liquid carbon pathway and microbial diversity in healthy soil and more!

Contact: Rachel Isaacson: 937-767-2161 or <https://nourishing-life.eventbrite.com/>

Tuesday, June 22 | 2-2:45 p.m. Online webinar

**EXTENDED ROTATIONS WITH RED CLOVER,
HOSTED BY PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA.
PRESENTER: BEN DWIRE**

Red clover might just be Ben Dwire's favorite crop to grow. During this episode, we'll talk with Ben about all things red clover and how this nitrogen-fixing cover crop can help other parts of his extended rotations and his livestock operation.

We'll take a peek at the red clover he's underseeded with his oats and discuss how he manages his cover crop together with his small-grain crop. Then we'll hop over to the other side of the road and take a look at corn that followed last year's red clover, where Ben is experimenting with taking nitrogen credits and cutting nitrogen by roughly 40 units.

Topics: Establishing and managing red clover, nitrogen credits to corn; extended rotations, cost-share opportunities. The Dwires grow soybeans, corn, oats, wheat and annual forages on 550 acres, and are 100% no-till and non-GMO. They have an additional 150 acres of hay and pasture where they raise cattle, pigs and chickens. Ben is chairman of the board at the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition. To learn more and to register for this free event visit their website: <https://practicalfarmers.org/events/field-days/live-from-the-farm/extended-rotations-with-red-clover/>

Friday, July 30, 2021 - 7:00 p.m. to Friday, August 6, 2021
- 8:30 p.m. via Zoom

**47th ANNUAL NOFA SUMMER CONFERENCE:
CULTIVATING THE GRASSROOTS ORGANIC MOVEMENT**

We still can't gather together safely in person at the capacity we'd like to, and we're super sad about missing your grass stained t-shirts and gritty handshakes for yet another year. But the next best thing to group hugs is a virtual gathering of grassroots farmer and gardener minds to celebrate NOFA's 50 year anniversary. We will celebrate 50 years of organic farming and food advocacy and look towards the next 50 years of work in the food system. Register now: <https://web.cvent.com/event/6363fd53-1a4a-4fec-9380-8ea7dd5783f9/summary>

Cost: Sliding scale: \$45-\$250.

Contact Jason Valcourt, email: jason@nofamass.org

CORRECTION: On page 22 of the March/April 2021 NODPA News it was incorrectly stated in an article and photo caption that on the Alexandre Farm "There is also the egg operation, with over 400,000 laying hens pastured across 300 acres." The correct number of hens should have been 40,000. We apologize for this error.

NODPA News

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

Website & E-Newsletter Advertising

Website Advertising

NODPA.com receives over 2500 visits each month navigating to an average of 3 pages/visit.

E-Newsletter Advertising

Two banner ads are located at the top of each E-Newsletter, going out monthly to over 2,000 individuals through our E-Newsletter, the NODPA-Odairy discussion forum, and NODPA's Facebook page.

Discounted rates for commitments of 6 months or more.

Interested in one or both of these opportunities?
For more information, contact Nora Owens at:

Email: noraowens@comcast.net

Phone: 413-772-0444

Advertise With Us!

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

Join as a **Business Member** and receive an additional 5% off all advertising. To learn more about Business memberships and the Web Business Directory, go to www.nodpa.com/directory.shtml or contact Nora Owens.

2021 Ad rates and sizes listed below.

**Deadline for advertising in the
July 2021 issue is June 15, 2021.**

Full Page Ad (7.5" W x 10.25" H) = \$660

1/2 Page Ad (7.5" W x 4.5" H) = \$340

1/4 Page Ad (3.5" W x 4.75" H) = \$190

1/8 Page Ad/Business Card:

(3.5" W x 2.25" H) = \$100

Commit to a full year of print advertising and get 10 percent discount: Full: \$600, Half: \$306, Quarter: \$171, Eighth: \$90.

Classified Ads: Free to organic dairy farmers and business members. All others \$20 for the first 30 words; \$.20 per word over 30

For advertising information call Nora Owens:
413-772-0444 or email noraowens@comcast.net.

Please send a check with your ad (made payable to NODPA).
30 Keets Rd., Deerfield, MA 01342

Classified Ads

ANIMALS

FOR SALE: Certified organic cow/calf pairs, bred cows and open heifers, mixed breeds. On pasture. Fair prices. Phillip Cutting, 802-254-6982, neros75@comcast.net

Location: Guilford, Vermont

FOR SALE: Heifer and bull newborn bottle calves. Jersey cross and Friesian genetics, mostly New Zealand. Certified OPT 100% grassfed organic. \$25 to \$200, depending upon age. Rob Moore, land line 607-699-7968 cowpoke2@verizon.net

Location: Nichols, NY

EQUIPMENT FOR SALE

FOR SALE: JD 494A and JD 1240 (plateless) CORN PLANTERS, JD 30' and NI 36' Hay/Grain ELEVATORS, DUAL WHEELS 18.4 - 38 Clamp On, Gehl HiThrow BLOWER. Contact Jeff @ Mitchell Farm 607-566-8477 or Mitchellorganics@hotmail.com

Location: Avoca, NY-Stueben County

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

DAIRY PRODUCTS SPECIALIST II, Agriculture, Food & Markets Agency, Bennington or Windham County, Vermont; Permanent, Full Time

Do you have a background in dairy product processing? Do you care about high quality dairy products being processed safely for all consumers to enjoy? Would you like to be a part of a team that works with all Vermont dairy processors? If so and you want to put your public service values into action, then the Dairy Products Specialist II position is for you! The Dairy Products Specialist II provides regulatory support to Vermont dairy processing facilities that produce a myriad of value-added dairy products, including award-winning cheese, butter, yogurt and ice cream. The Dairy Product Specialist II

plays a vital role in our food system by overseeing the manufacturing, processing, and distribution of nutrient dense dairy products to all consumers of Vermont dairy. This position may also assist with technical support to Vermont's dairy industry members through educational seminars in multiple platforms on an ongoing basis.

This position allows the successful applicant to engage in a rewarding mix of regulation, education, and technical assistance. Vermont's dairy industry has experienced significant growth in the past decade, especially in the dairy processing sector. Due to this evolution and the many industry advancements that accompany it, this position will work with a large diversity of processing operations and products.

Apply for this position now and take advantage of the opportunity to join a dynamic group of committed public service providers and thrive in a position where the days pass quickly due to the diversity of responsibilities. The pay grade for this position is 23 and offers career ladder opportunities over time depending on knowledge, abilities, and certifications. The successful applicant will be assigned to a territory including Bennington and Windham Counties but work in other parts of the state will be necessary on an intermittent basis. The hired candidate must reside in Bennington or Windham County. For more information and to apply: <https://careers.vermont.gov/job/Home-Based-Dairy-Products-Specialist-II-VT/747801800/>

CREAMERY PRODUCTION MANAGER

Larson Farm and Creamery is a 40-cow organic 100% grass-fed Jersey herd with an on-farm creamery, making cream-top whole milk, yogurts and Italian gelato and selling unpasteurized 'raw' milk. We are seeking someone to conduct the day to day operation in the creamery. Candidate must be team player, able to communicate well and work positively with our sales person and P/T creamery assistant and work with owners planning weekly and monthly production goals. Creamery or food service experience is a plus, but not required. What is required is a high level of sanitation, ability to follow detailed procedures, keep accurate records for food safety regulations, and spend

much of the day on your feet. Contact Rich Larson, 802-645-0865, richardrobertlarson@gmail.com Check out our website, LarsonFarmVT.com.

Location: Wells, VT

SEEKING ASSISTANT EXTENSION PROFESSOR AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ANIMAL SCIENCE

The University of Maine Cooperative Extension invites applications for a full-time, fiscal-year, continuing contract eligible faculty appointment as Assistant Extension Professor and Assistant Professor of Animal Science. This position is an 85% appointment with UMaine Extension and a 15% teaching appointment through the University of Maine School of Food and Agriculture. The successful candidate will be located on the campus of the University of Maine in Orono, Maine. The faculty member in this position will develop and lead educational outreach and applied research with an emphasis on dairy science; work with other UMaine faculty and professionals, advisory boards, and volunteers to offer off-campus programs addressing the educational needs of the Maine dairy industry and other agricultural industries; teach undergraduate courses in the School of Food and Agriculture (SFA). For a complete job description and to apply: <https://umaine.hiretouch.com/job-details?jobid=66728>

Website & E-Newsletter Advertising

NODPA is pleased to provide additional advertising opportunities for our organic dairy supporters and resource individuals through our Website and our monthly E-Newsletter.

Website Advertising

Three banner ads are located at the top of the home page and at least 10 other pages on NODPA's website. NODPA.com receives over 2500 visits each month navigating to an average of 3 pages per visit.

Ad Design: Display-ready ads should be 275 pixels wide by 100 pixels tall. Your ad can link to a page on your website.

Cost: Display-ready ads are \$150 per month.

E-Newsletter Advertising

Two banner ads are located at the top of each E-Newsletter, going out monthly to over 2,000 individuals through our E-Newsletter, the NODPA-ODairy discussion forum, and NODPA's Facebook page.

Ad Design: Display-ready ads should be 300 pixels wide by 125 pixels tall. Your ad can link to a page on your website.

Cost: Display-ready ads are \$125 per month.

Discounted rates for commitments of 6 months or more.

Interested in one or both of these opportunities? For more information, contact Nora Owens at:

Email: noraowens@comcast.net

Phone: 413-772-0444

Go to the following web page for more information:

www.nodpa.com/web_ads.shtml



Subscribe Today!
Visit www.nodpa.com
for details.

NODPA News
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers
Alliance (NODPA)
c/o Ed Maltby
30 Keets Road
Deerfield, MA 01342

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SPRINGFIELD, MA
PERMIT NO. 1094

Online and
in Print!

NODPA News

Advertise with Us in 2021

But be sure to check out our July issue of the

NODPA News

Reach an audience seeking the latest in organic dairy industry information.

See page 33 for complete details or visit

NODPA's website: www.nodpa.com

