NODPA News

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

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A special thanks to Wolfe's Neck Center for generously hosting the 21st Annual NODPA Field Days!

Autumnal grazing, Choiniere Farm.

FEATURED FARM: CHOINIERE FAMILY FARM, HIGHGATE, VT

Going Unconventional: A Grass-Fed Journey

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer, with assistance from Kathie Arnold

Transitioning a conventional dairy to an organically certified one is a decision often made for reasons other than a deep-seated belief in organic farming philosophy. Economic opportunity, improving the farm's environmental footprint, or building a niche market to support the next generation on the farm often spurs the conversion.

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The Organic Dairy Community Coming Together to Explore Its Challenges and Opportunities

The 21st Annual NODPA Field Days
September 30 & October 1, 2021

Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment
The Mallet Barn, 625 Wolfe's Neck Road, Freeport, Maine 04032

By Nora Owens, NODPA Field Days Coordinator

After almost two years of social distancing and remote programming, the 21st NODPA Field Days will offer everyone an opportunity to come together to explore the current state of organic dairy, and to identify the opportunities and challenges we face. Perhaps most important to everyone is that

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Message from NODPA Co-President

It is a season of extremes. Our dried-out fields and burnt-up pastures have been replaced with acres of wet, boggy conditions and lush regrowth. We feel fortunate that the rains came, but we are apprehensive at the same time. Now we must wait for the hay fields to firm up after all this precipitation. My neighbor suggested that we not pray quite so hard for rain during the next drought.

Last year around this time, we had to make the hard decision to postpone the in-person Field Days. Many of us took part in other conference opportunities online, but it lacked the personal conversations and meeting up with old and new friends.

Things in my corner of New York have returned (mostly) to pre-pandemic normal. We are emerging from the mask-wearing and constant sanitizing to enjoying family and friends again. I suppose the growing percentage of vaccinated people around us helps to give us a sense of security. So we are thrilled that this year's Annual NODPA Field Days will be an in-person event held Thursday and Friday, September 30th and October 1st at Wolf's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment in Freeport, Maine. Nora Owens has been working tirelessly to make this event safe and enjoyable for all! I hope you will consider joining us for two days on Maine's rocky coast! Please mark your calendars today!

Liz Bawden, NODPA President
Hammond, NY | Phone: 315-324-6926

The 21st Annual NODPA Field Days - September 30 & October 1, 2021

Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, Freeport, ME

EARLY BIRD RATE **NODPA is offering an early-bird rate for those who register by Saturday, September 18th. You can still pay in-person, if you prefer, but you must let us know that you are planning to attend (by phone, email or mail) by September 18th. FOR FURTHER DETAILS, PLEASE SEE THE REGISTRATION FORM ON PAGE 17.**

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From the NODPA Desk:

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

NODPA Field Days and Annual Meeting are in Maine on September 30th and October 1st this year. We are hoping as many producers as possible can make it and also attend the producer-only meeting on that Friday morning. We have some ideas about the future of NODPA and also where we go from here for future advocacy on pay price, regulations and policy. The demand for organic milk has changed in the last four years and is settling into a similar pattern as conventional milk, which benefits large scale, low cost production.

Small to mid-size organic operations, which make up the majority of organic dairy farms, do not have the protection of the Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) or government subsidies that reflect the increased cost of production over conventional milk. While still being part of the FMMO, organic producers only have the protections and pay-price transparency tied to the conventional market. The main objectives of FMMOs are to (1) promote orderly marketing conditions in fluid milk markets, (2) improve the income situation of dairy farmers, (3) supervise the terms of trade in milk markets in such a manner as to achieve more equality of bargaining between milk producers and milk processors, and (4) assure consumers of adequate supplies of good quality milk at reasonable prices. We do not have that within the supply monopsony of the organic milk market. The effects of the lack of choice in marketing of milk, the lack of negotiating power and leverage, and the arbitrary nature of fixing pay price has been firmly established by milk buyers in the last five years. Every new attempt to market organic milk at scale has hit against the wall of the consolidation of organic dairy. Is the fate of small to mid-size organic dairy operations to rest on payments for their environmental benefits, for the economic contribution to the rural economy or their retention of working farmland? These are all questions that need to frame our future policy and advocacy role.

Consistent enforcement of organic regulation is the single biggest tool that producers have to maintain their businesses, which requires commitment from the National Organic Program (NOP) and all certifiers. No favor for any reason; be it a reason with good intent or one to benefit the producer and certifier financially. Too many times I have heard certifiers or inspectors say we turned a blind eye to infringements of regulations because we support producers. NODPA submitted its comments on the Origin of Livestock (OOL) Proposed Rule along with many other organizations who supported positions that can be enforced by regulation. In going through the process of writing comments and working with as many different organizations as possible to coordinate a coherent position on future regulation, it is ironic that there is no economic reason for small to mid-size dairies to transition from conventional to organic production. The intent of the exemption is, and has been to allow conventional dairies the ability to transition to organic production without losing valuable genetics and herd based health immunities as you transition the land necessary to maintain the herd. If you are transitioning and can find a buyer at this time, the operation would need to budget for loses as pay price is below the cost of production.

There are also those that support being able to sell transitioned animals as organic for dairy. This is a position that totally undermines organic integrity. If that is allowed there will be no need for regulation or enforcement as this will open up a massive loophole that will allow large dairies to expand their milking cow numbers almost at will in response to increased demand for supply. It may benefit some producers who can obtain a better price for their dairy replacement; will undoubtedly be cheaper for the organic operations that buy transitioned animals; easier for certifiers to verify herd record keeping; guarantees a low pay price for processors and saves the NOP time, money and personnel to educate producers and certifiers about the requirements of the regulation.

Given that the OOL has been interpreted in many different ways since the start of the NOP twenty years ago, it is incumbent on the NOP and certifiers to immediately enforce that a transitioned animal now being documented as unable to be sold for organic meat add that they cannot be sold for organic dairy production. This will send a clear message to existing organic producers, those that might want to transition to organic dairy, and to organic consumers, that NOP and the organic industry want to maintain organic integrity rather than just increase organic sales and more profits for organic processors and retailers. Hopefully, it will send the same message to milk buyers and processors: that they cannot bend the regulations to suit market demand.

The new administration has initiated many requests for comments and input on a whole host of issues with the promise of money to support their implementation. We all know that there is a massive difference between the promise of money and the actuality of receiving it in Washington DC. But, it would be irresponsible not to take the opportunity to present the organic alternative to Big Ag and consolidated organic businesses. NODPA does this through their membership and active participation in organizations whose mission is to take the organic principles to Congress. Working within the National Organic Coalition, the newly formed Organic Farmers Association and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition we can give organic dairy producers a louder voice in the policy and regulatory arena. Not as loud and well-funded as the Organic Trade Association but still able to promote innovative, fair and equitable policies that promote organic integrity with strong, enforceable, and continuously improved standards based on the intent of the Organic Foods Production Act, not just on increased dollar sales of organic product.

Last year, one of the very many things that we missed was the opportunity to get together with good company, good food, some learning and plenty of socializing. Hoping to see as many of you as possible at the 21st Annual NODPA Field Days in Maine at the end of September. ◆

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Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment: A leading demonstration farm and educational resource center for innovative practices in regenerative agriculture

By Leah Puro, WNC Agricultural Research Coordinator

Wolfe's Neck Center (WNC) is hosting the 21st Annual NODPA Field Days. Join Lea Puro, Agricultural Research Coordinator for a pre-meeting Pasture Walk on Thursday morning, September 30th (please see the Field Days schedule on page 18) where she will describe the relevant and interesting research projects, training programs, and education opportunities at WNC.

Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment is a nonprofit organic dairy and vegetable farm located along the Maine coast in Freeport, Maine. The center is open to the public all year as an educational center, a research center, and a campground, making the farm a bustling tourist destination as well as a functional production farm. Our management practices reflect these multi-layered goals of the operation. We started our dairy production in 2015 and prior to that, beef cattle were raised on the pastures. Currently, we are milking 30 certified organic cows in our parlor. We also have a dozen sheep and goats, laying hens and broilers in the summer, and pigs from the spring to the fall. We are home to a vegetable apprenticeship program and host dairy apprentices through the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship program as we believe that inspiring and training young farmers is integral to our agricultural and food systems. Over the last two years, we have been building up our research project portfolio and investing in infrastructure to conduct research on agricultural practices that can hold up in the face of unpredictable weather patterns and climate change. Some of our projects include The Bovine Burp Buster Project, the Maine Soil Health Network, and OpenTEAM.

Our dairy cows are on the front lines fighting climate change! Wolfe's Neck Center is part of the Bovine BurpBusters (B3) Project, spearheaded by Bigelow Labs in Boothbay Harbor that aims to assess the impacts on methane emissions when adding supplemental seaweed to dairy cow feed. The vast majority of the methane released from cows during their natural digestion process is through burps; this release contributes to global warming. This has implications for the individual cows and for the environment. At the global level, methane has 30 times more global warming potential than carbon dioxide. With over 1.4 billion cows in the world, using seaweed to reduce enteric emissions could contribute greatly to minimizing our greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts. During the B3 project, we quantified the effects of certain seaweeds on animal health as well as on the methane emissions of our cows. Seaweeds contain different compounds that may aid in the reduction of methane that builds up in the cow's rumen. Starting from a simple seeded line on an aquaculture farm floating along Maine's coast, certain species of seaweed are grown and harvested. Processors then clean and dry it for distribution to feed producers who, in turn, mix it with grain as a nutritional supplement for dairy cattle. As Maine's oceans warm, aquaculture can contribute to robust coastal livelihoods as local seaweeds find new markets and support sustainable economic activities. Our partners are conducting a supply chain analysis and producing economic tools to help seaweed and dairy farmers balance profitability and environmental impacts in forging links from sea to pasture, to locally-sourced dairy products. The first 10 week trial with our cows at WNC has been completed. We enrolled 22 of our milking cows in the study and divided the group into two groups, the control group and experimental group, to test the effectiveness of the seaweed to reduce methane emissions. The control group was fed the same normal grain and forage ration as the rest of the milking herd and the experimental group was fed forage, customized grain, and the seaweed supplement of interest. Both the control and experimental groups had access throughout the study to The GreenFeed (C-Lock Inc.). This is a system designed to measure gas fluxes of methane (CH4), carbon dioxide (CO2), hydrogen (H2) and oxygen (O2) from individual animals. By enticing the cows with grain pellets, the cows place their heads in a feeder for a few minutes while the gases from their breath and burps are quantified. The GreenFeed has a cow ID chip reader that can identify each cow and provide data to the team on the gas emissions, the amount of time each cow spent at the feeder, and the number of times each day that the cow entered the feeder. In addition to collecting data on methane emissions, we collected data on milk production, milk quality, animal weight, and overall animal health biweekly to understand the impacts of the seaweed on animal health and production. Now that our first trial is complete, the WNC team and our collaborators will work together to organize and analyze the data to understand how the seaweed additive impacted the methane emissions from our cows.

The Maine Soil Health Network is a project launched through collaboration between Wolfe's Neck Center and Maine Farmland

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Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment

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Trust (MFT) to provide Maine farmers with information and support to improve soil health on their farms. This year is our pilot year in which we have enrolled 10 farms in the program that all have MFT land easements ensuring the land will remain in agriculture production. We have a mix of vegetable and livestock farms all across Maine that are participating. This year, the enrolled farmers will have the opportunity to participate in a regional soil health study managed by Pasa, the Pennsylvania based sustainable agriculture association, which involves tracking management practices and soil test results, access resources in Maine and beyond for technical assistance, and join group calls to share ideas and experiences, as well as focused discussion on topics of interest to the group.

With its launch of a new major initiative in 2019, OpenTEAM Wolfe's Neck OpenTEAM (Open Technology Ecosystem for Agricultural Management), Wolfe's Neck Center is transforming into a hub for soil health research, demonstration and education for farmers and the general public with the intention of inspiring action and innovation. The OpenTEAM community is a collaborative community of farmers, scientists, industry leaders and ag technologists with a goal to support producer transition, adoption and support of soil health management practices. The OpenTEAM community offers field-level carbon measurement, digital management records, remote sensing, predictive analytics, and input and economic management decision support in a connected platform that reduces the need for manual data entry and simultaneously improves access to a wide array of tools. OpenTEAM supports adaptive soil health management for farms of all scales, geographies and production systems, and are working to accelerate scientific understanding of soil health by providing more high-quality data to researchers collaborating on the project. In the last year OpenTEAM has grown from 35 to over 200 participants every month. As our membership grows to over 36 collaborating organizations, we are accelerating our shared learning around how we can change our food and agriculture systems through technology. Through OpenTEAM, we are tackling challenges that are often impossible to solve alone using an open source framework to accomplish what Wolfe's Neck mission is all about: transforming our relationship with farming and food for a healthier environment. ◆

NET UPDATE

Recent ODairy Discussions

By Liz Bawden,
Organic Dairy Farmer, NODPA President

A producer was experiencing a high rate of ketosis in his Jersey herd when they were transitioning from stored feed to spring grazing. Roughly 25% of his cows refused to eat the grain offered in the milking parlor, and they refused the dry hay offered in the barn. It was suggested that the producer graze taller swards, as they will have more energy. It was also suggested that graining cows in the parlor when they come right out of lush pasture can lead to serious rumen acidosis; adding baleage before milking should help. Another suggestion was to put molasses on the dry hay to make it more palatable.

In the last issue of the NODPA News, we reported on the discussion surrounding the mysterious deaths of two first calf heifers coming due with their first calf. The discussion, supported by the input of veterinarians on the list, concluded that the animals' most likely cause of death was due to casting. The discussion continued into a recent post where the farmer shared the necropsy results which seemed to point to casting as the most likely cause of death, as no other conclusive cause could be found at the lab.

The group was asked for their experiences and advice on how a pasture might respond to a "sabbatical", where it was given a long rest with no harvesting or cultivating. This producer was looking for an alternative method of dealing with the mature, headed out grasses that would not remove it from the field or smother regrowth. One farmer shared his experience: "It's a good way to reseed the pastures; but in our experience, we obviously lost diversity for numerous years afterwards as the dominant species are the ones that put down the most seed and came back so strong the lesser robust grasses and forbs did not express themselves for a number of years following. Based on our experience it's better to just increase the days rest between grazings to benefit pastures rather than a partial or complete fallow." ◆

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

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Pay And Feed Prices July/August 2021

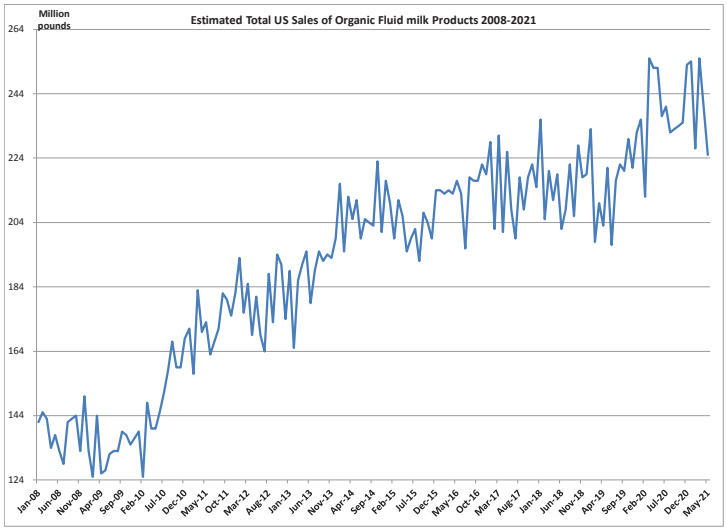
By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

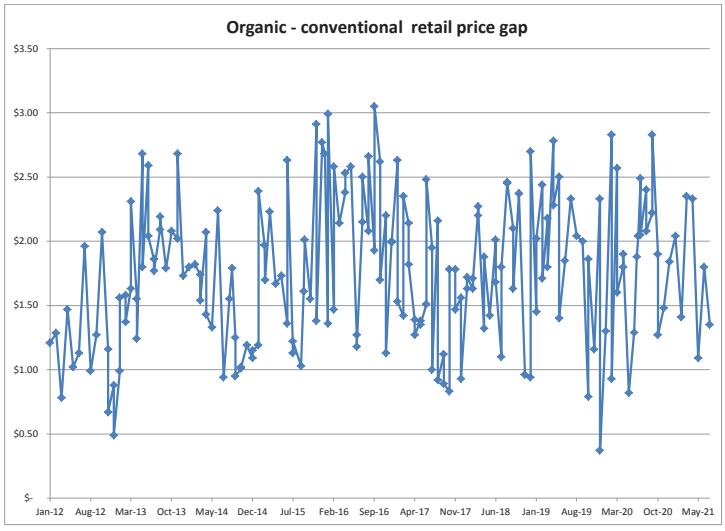
Sales of organic milk fluid products has increased slightly year to date. Total packaged fluid milk products sales of 3.6 billion pounds were shipped by milk handlers in May 2021. This was 4.3 percent lower than a year earlier. Estimated sales of total conventional fluid milk products decreased 3.9 percent from May 2020, and estimated sales of total organic fluid milk products decreased 10.6 percent from a year earlier. A better comparison would be to May 2019 which had 221 million pounds in sales of organic fluid milk products, 2 per cent lower than 2021.

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) reports estimated US sales of total organic milk products for May 2021 were 225 million pounds, down 10.6 percent from May 2020 but only down 0.4 percent year-to-date. Organic whole milk sales for May 2021, 104 million pounds, were down 8.0 percent compared to a year earlier and 0.7 percent lower compared with year-to-date 2020. Reduced fat milk (2%) sales were 73 million pounds, down 16.3 percent from the previous year, however are up 1.5 percent year-to-date. See chart.

The reporting from the Federal Milk Marketing Order 1 (FMMO 1) for the utilization of organic fluid milk in June 2021 shows a leveling off in growth after an aggressive start to the year. Utilization of organic milk in FMMO 1 is approximately 13% of total fluid packaged milk sold and therefore a key indicator of sales. Organic Whole Milk increased utilization over June 2020 by 4% and combined Non-Fat organic products increased by 3%. Utilization of all organic dairy fluid milk products in year to date was up 11% over 2020.

In a letter dated July 9, 2021, Pool handler Dairy Farmers of America, Inc. (DFA), Agri-Mark, Inc. (Agri-Mark), and Boonville Farms Cooperative, Inc. (Boonville) received





Estimated Total U.S. Sales of Organic Fluid Milk Products, May 2021

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	May-21	2021 Year to date	May-20	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	104	532	-8.0%	-0.7%
Organic Reduced Fat Milk (2%)	73	412	-16.3%	1.50%
Organic Low Fat Milk (1%)	25	136	-15.4%	-3.9%
Organic Fat Free Milk Skim	16	77	-4.1%	-8.7%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	8	45	26.7%	15.7%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	0	0	-49.2%	-60.3%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	122	670	-12.0%	-0.2%
Total Organic Milk Products	225	1202	-10.6%	-0.4%

Utilization of Organic Fluid Milk in Federal Order 1 – Northeast in million pounds

Year	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	31.0%
Feb-21	13.62	0.33%	7.42%	17.94	37%	31.56	18.0%
Mar-21	14.78	4%	9%	17.09	25%	31.87	14.0%
Apr-21	13.47	-3%	12%	15.5	0.06%	28.97	-1.3%
May-21	13.99	1%	-10%	15.73	9%	29.72	6.0%
Jun-21	12.59	4%	-11%	15.82	3%	28.41	-3.5%

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a temporary authorization from allowing pool handlers to dispose of surplus milk at a farm or non-plant location. The period covered by this action was June 1, 2021, through July 10, 2021. In their request, DFA noted that production has not changed appreciably, but that regional processing capacity has been severely impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to food service businesses is still limited in some cities as public safety orders remain in place. Labor shortages have further intensified the capacity loss, with processing plants not able to fully staff all shifts and haulers lacking enough drivers to keep up with milk pickups. There is no data about how these issues have affected organic milk processing although any dumping of organic milk would need to be paid at the same rate received if there was processing available.

Anecdotally, it has been reported that that there are termination letters headed out to 23 Maple Hill producers in DFA's network that tell them their milk will no longer be needed after Jan 2, 2022. Those are just the farms with DFA, so there may be more. "Logistics" was the reason cited.

Upstate Niagara Cooperative reports that they continue to experience strong growth in their organic supply but this growth is outpacing their commercial ability to market all of their supply as organic. This is increasing balancing costs against the organic program. The Board of Directors of the Cooperative approved the following changes to their Organic Pay Program, effective with milk shipped starting August 1, 2021:

- The Volume Premium will be cut by 50% at all three levels. Retaining some volume premium is important to recognize the efficiencies that have been built into the hauling routes.
- The Regional Market Adjustment Premium will be set at -$0.25/cwt.
- The Seasonal Premium will be reduced from $2.00/cwt. to $1.00/cwt. for milk shipped from October 1, 2021-December 31, 2021.
- The Incremental Growth Premium will be reinstated but will now be utilized to disincentivize growth. This adjustment will be set at -$1.60/cwt. It will be charged against year-over-year growth each month.

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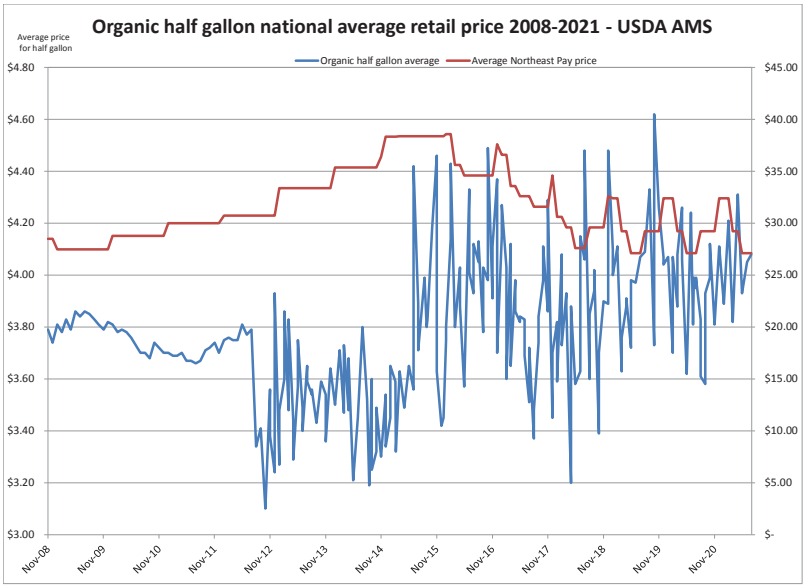

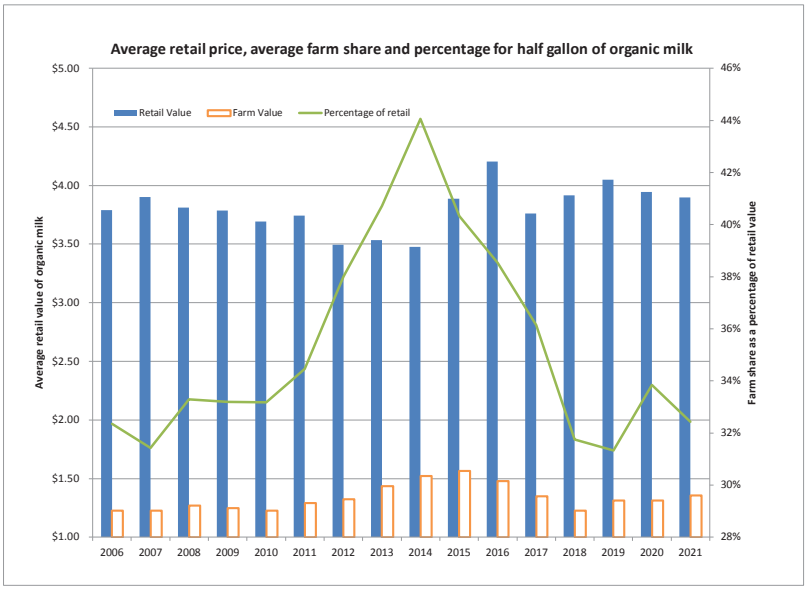

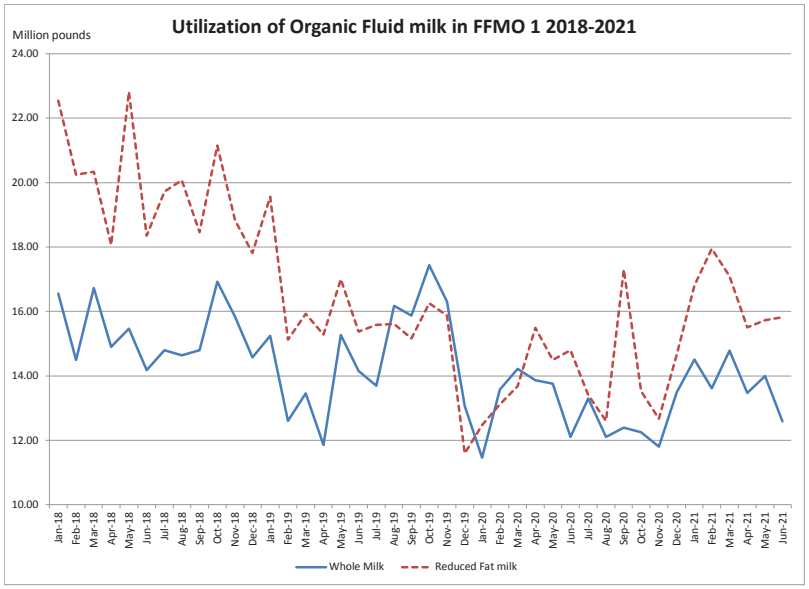

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Pay And Feed Prices

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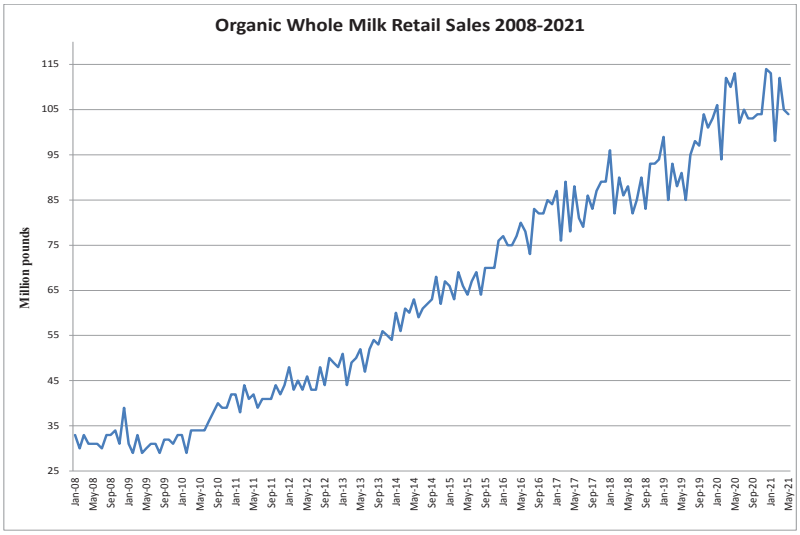
Horizon/Danone are again looking at their trucking routes to assess their viability but there's been no response from their membership relations folks. A CROPP representative said that they have no plans to change their pay price and are committed to their member owners. CROPP is transparent with its pay price and publishes it on its website- see below.

CROPP Cooperative/Organic Valley – 2021 farm gate pricing

Month/Year	$/cwt
Jan-21	$32.42
Feb-21	$32.42
Mar-21	$29.24
Apr-21	$29.24
May-21	$27.13
Jun-21	$27.13
Jul-21	$27.13
Aug-21	$29.24
Sep-21	$29.24
Oct-21	$29.24
Nov-21	$29.24
Dec-21	$32.42
National Average Quality Premium	$2.05
12-month Average Price*	$31.55

**Total solids 12.9%. MW base pricing as determined by CROPP Cooperative's Board of Directors. Subject to adjustment. This is the base price plus, not including market condition adjustments.*

The future of McMinnville's Organic Valley milk processing plant in Oregon that was destroyed by fire in April is uncertain. The Yamhill County News Register reported that CROPP Cooperative remains undecided if and when the McMinnville plant will be rebuilt. Steve Pierson, president of the nationwide coop, owns Sar-Ben Farms organic dairy just south of Newberg, one of 27 Oregon dairies that sent milk to the McMinnville plant. He is reported as saying that Oregon has the second-largest pool of milk in the Organic Valley system, and it is "very high quality milk." He added that it was clear that the Cooperative needs a processing facility on



the West Coast since the McMinnville plant was processing 4 million pounds of milk per week. "McMinnville is definitely an option," he said. "But it's not the only option. We're committed to having to look at all the options. We've doubled our commitment to having a facility in the Northwest." The loss of the plant increased the pressure on other plants already suffering from a lack of capacity as reported above.

A $1 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and EPA is helping fund what organizers hope will lead to the first regenerative organic dairy supply chain in the U.S. in Pennsylvania. The American Agriculturist reports that PASA — along with the Center for Dairy Excellence, Ephrata National Bank, Mad Agriculture, Origin Milk, Rodale Institute and TeamAg — is leading the effort to transform "dozens of dairies into 100% grass-fed organic farms, helping them attain regenerative organic status while at the same time addressing nutrient management concerns in the southeast part of the state, especially Lancaster County." This ambitious goal will depend on the marketing of the A2 organic grass-fed milk through Origin Milk and whether they can break through into a very tight market on a sustainable level. Origin Milk was founded in 2014 by Adrian Bota. In a June 29, 2020 profile article in Company Week he commented about his previous career in pharmaceuticals, saying, "We were always interested in nutrition and how to use food as medicine." He says the status quo in the dairy industry doesn't allow for nutrition and quality to be a differentiator, which is something Origin seeks to change. "Dairy has been doing very poorly over the past eight to 12 years or so," says Bota. "If you do it right, we can get people back to dairy." The first 18 months involved jumping through a number of regulatory hoops, and the company went to market in the Midwest in 2016. After launching in Ohio and Pennsylvania, Colorado was the third state on Origin's list, partnering with third-generation dairy farmer Terry deGroot of Colorado Cow in Kersey, CO. Colorado Cow started with about a dozen cows and now has about 100. Bota says he's looking for partners in North Carolina, Texas, Idaho, and Arizona to scale the company region

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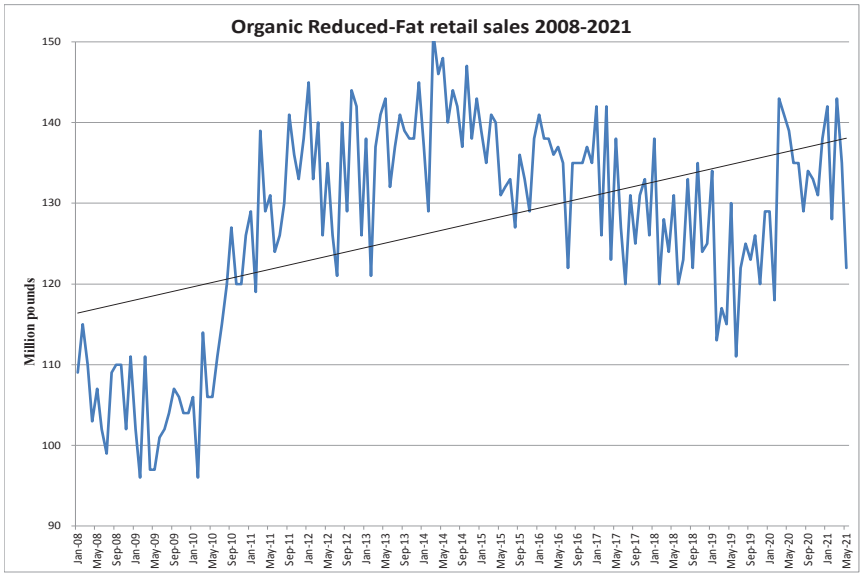
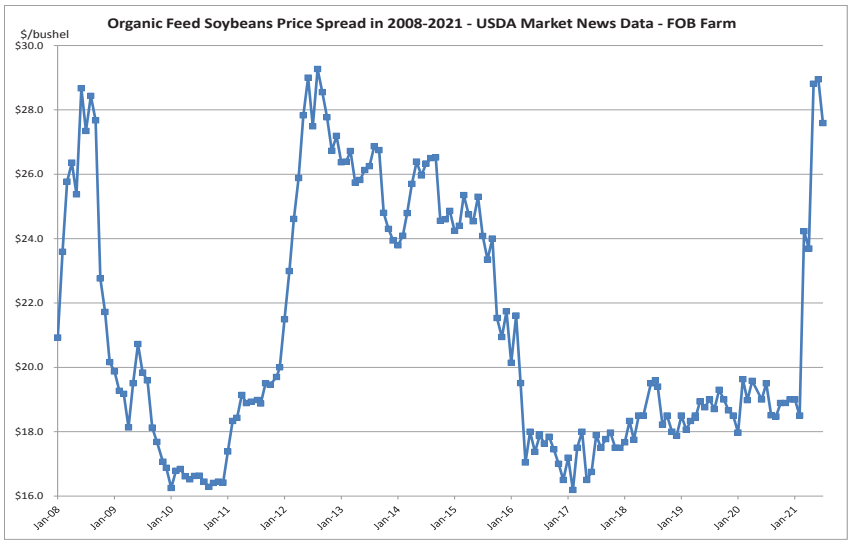
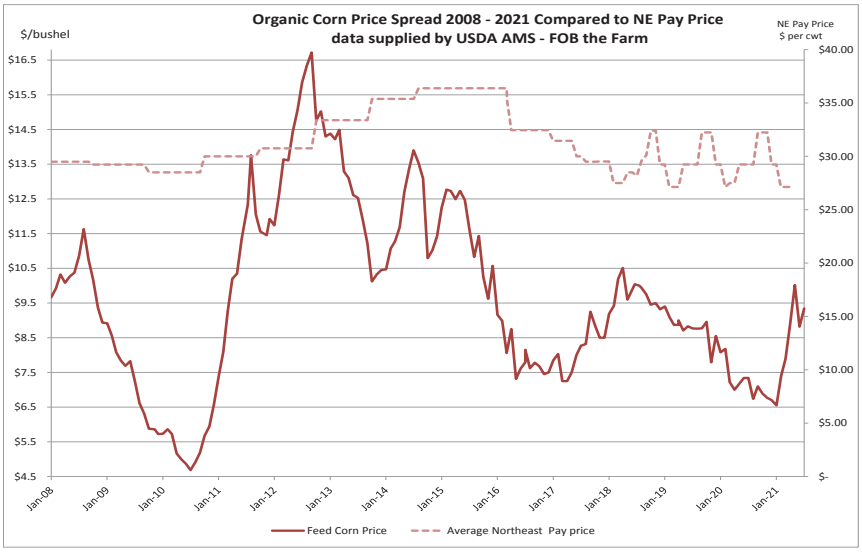
by region instead of centralizing it with a singular national hub. Currently they produce Whole Milk, Chocolate Milk, 2% Milk, Heavy Cream, A2 Butter, A2 Cheese, and A2 Ghee. New product categories -- including ice cream, cheese, infant formula, and protein powder could offer other catalysts. "We can always expand and scale-up but continue to be small by offering a diversity of products," says Bota. They are currently paying 'upward of $40' per hundred pounds. As past evidence has shown, a $40 pay price for grass fed organic lower producing cows is break even for experienced grass fed producers. Transitioning producers into that market will take time and capital reserves which a million dollar grant will not cover. Tread cautiously, as Terry deGroot admits that he doesn't yet pay himself a salary.

Feed and weather

At mid-July 2021, drought covered the Upper Midwest, the northern Plains, and almost all areas from the Rockies westward. Conditions promoted the rapid development and expansion of western wild fires during the first half of July. Meanwhile, farther south and east, a slow decline in drought extent and intensity continued. South and east of the northern Plains, drought is now restricted to parts of the Great Lakes and the upper Northeast. This general pattern is expected to continue through October, with further improvements in the central and eastern states, and more expansion and intensification in the northern Plains, Rockies and Far West. Any improvement there should be limited to the southern sections of the High Plains and Rockies, where heavy monsoon-related showers and thunderstorms are expected during the first few weeks of the period. The Crop Progress Report from USDA NASS shows that the pasture and range condition in the northeast is good to excellent; it just needs to stop raining! In the uncertain world of growing organic grain, the prices for feed grains is high, hitting $29 a bushel for feed soybeans and corn around $10 a bushel. Enforcement of regulations will be key to maintain a fair price for domestic grain. ◆







The 21st Annual
NODPA Field Days

The Organic Dairy Community Coming Together to Explore Its Challenges and Opportunities

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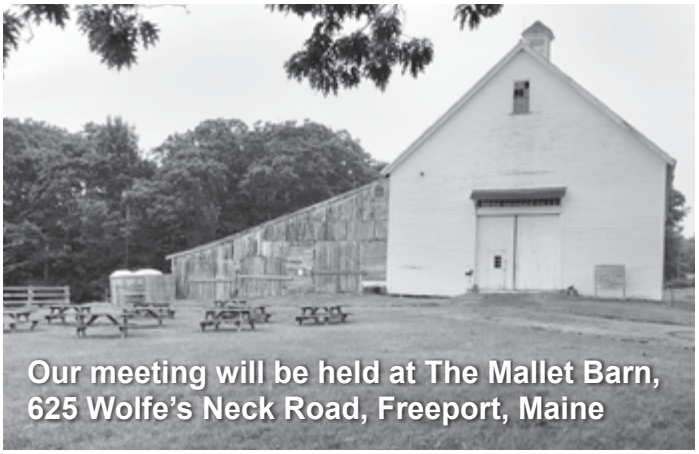
we can do it face-to-face. Farming, by its nature, is an isolating profession and adding the pandemic on top of that, folks have expressed a real desire to gather together again, and now that vaccinations have provided us with a modicum of safety, the NODPA Board believes that the time is right for the 21st NODPA Field Days. Even though so many organizations have done a phenomenal job of offering virtual learning opportunities during the height of COVID-19, nothing can quite replace in-person gatherings. In conjunction with Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment (WNC), NODPA will offer a safe, well ventilated and secure meeting experience. There will be some changes, such as we will only have events on site at WNC rather than going to a pre-Field Days off-site farm tour. Yes, there will be plenty of hand sanitizer and we strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated prior to attending (and those not vaccinated will be required to mask up).

The 21st Annual NODPA Field Days will be held along the beautiful coast of Maine, just down the road from the center of Freeport, Maine. Situated on over 600 acres of preserved coastal landscape, Wolfe's Neck Center (WNC) uses its diverse landscape to connect people of all ages to the food they eat and where it comes from. Encompassing a demonstration farm, both an organic dairy and vegetable operation, oceanfront campground, wooded trails, and historic buildings, its vibrant campus serves as a unique hub for education and exploration. As a nonprofit, WNC draws upon a rich history of innovation and experimentation to continue the legacy of this place today. Through regenerative farming, innovative soil health research,



Our meeting will be held at The Mallet Barn, 625 Wolfe's Neck Road, Freeport, Maine

and visitor interactions, the land is used as an educational resource to create a healthier planet for all.

The NODPA Field Days officially starts with registration and lunch at noon on Thursday, September 30th. But for those arriving earlier, there will be a pasture walk, led by WNC's Research Coordinator Leah Puro who will spotlight the research projects taking place, the innovative, high tech equipment that they've acquired to carry out some of this research, and will describe their OpenTEAMS project. The OpenTEAM community is a collaborative community of farmers, scientists, industry leaders and ag technologists with a goal to support producer transition, adoption and support of soil health management practices. For more information about the pasture walk, please see Leah Puro's article on page 5.

Following lunch, the education program gets underway with an important and very timely workshop on PFOS/PFAS, referred to as the 'Forever Chemical'. More specific to the dairy industry, PFOS, the specific chemical called perfluorooctane sulfonic acid, which has found its way into the environment in biosolids, aka sewage sludge that was used for decades as fertilizer in many

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The 21st Annual
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farm fields. Increasingly, farms throughout the country are facing PFAS/PFOS contamination.

Maine has been at the forefront of addressing PFAS, with recent legislation to restrict PFAS air and water pollution, with this session's presenters, Maine State Toxicologists Dr. Andy Smith and Tom Simone, being at the forefront of that work. They will describe the development of models to predict dairy milk PFOS levels from soil PFOS levels, the use of these models to develop soil screening levels for regulatory purposes, and the use of these models to help dairy farmers with land use decisions such as whether contaminated fields can still be used as pasture, to grow hay, or to grow corn as silage or grain. They will also discuss new data from their own studies of the uptake of PFOS by pasture plants.

Back by popular demand, our next session will be *Ask the Vets Q & A: A Roundtable Discussion*. A highly interactive session, attendees can submit questions to our two Maine large animal veterinarians, Drs. Meghan Flanagan and Simon Alexander. This session always offers participants the opportunity to share their expertise as the hands-on experts.

Just before the Banquet and NODPA Annual Meeting, everyone gets a chance to visit the trade show, talk to the vendors and fellow attendees during the Social Hour. Light refreshments are served while we all get a chance to catch up with old and new friends.

NODPA's Field Days has been known to have serious keynote presentations and discussions, but this year, the planning committee suggested that folks might need to have a bit of fun for a change. So, we have invited Dr. Simon Alexander, DVM, to do two things: first, share his thoughts and observations about how he and farmers have experienced the past 18 months of living with COVID-19, and second, to do a bit of storytelling,

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September 30 & October 1, 2021
Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment
The Mallet Barn, 625 Wolfe's Neck Road, Freeport, Maine 04032

The 21st Annual
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The Organic Dairy Community Coming Together to Explore Its Challenges and Opportunities

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for which he is known in Maine. Happily, he's agreed to do both. His presentation promises to be both thought provoking and hilarious.

Friday morning starts at 6:30 am with continental breakfast for those attending the Producer-Only session at 7:00 am. This session, again being facilitated by past president Henry Perkins, gives producers the opportunity to openly share their thoughts and experiences without fear of reprisal, and as a group, look at ways they and NODPA can address their shared concerns. Discussions on Pay Price, Origin of Livestock Rule, and the future direction of NODPA will take place. For those not attending this meeting, the continental breakfast will be available until 9:00 am.

We are happy to announce that Sara Ziegler, University of Vermont Extension's Soils and Crops Coordinator for the Northwest Crops and Soils Program, will lead the first session on Friday morning. In discussions with Sara, it became clear that she has an important message for farmers: Invest in your forages.

Sara describes her session, **Invest in your Forages like your Dairy Depends On It… Because it Does!**, as follows:

> Cool season perennial forages are a staple for every organic dairy farm in the northeast. They are even more critical to systems feeding higher forage rations or managing the herd 100% grass-fed. Although farms often move to these systems to gain pay price advantages, they also require a wider land base and open the farm to vulnerabilities of relying so heavily on one feed source. As we continue to experience increasingly challenging and erratic weather conditions, major fluctuations in forage productivity and quality will likely become more dramatic. In organic systems, these fluctuations can't be smoothed over as easily or in a cost-effective manor with cheap grain and concentrates like in a conventional system. Therefore, it is imperative that you take a closer look at your forage system and make sure you're maximizing every acre and utilizing every opportunity to bring in new nutrients and seed to maintain productivity and quality into the future. All too often this ends up an afterthought. How many times have you looked at the fertilizer bill and decided not to fulfill it or skipped reseeding to save some money? Do you have and follow a plan to rotate and renovate your fields regularly or has it been a couple of decades? Don't neglect your most important asset. Although good grazing and harvest management can go a long way, management alone isn't enough to overcome major nutrient imbalances, issues of low plant density or poor species composition. These require attention, effort, and investment.

Along with Sara, Mike Brown and Patrick Harrison will share their experiences and advice on how they've worked to manage their forage systems. (Unfortunately, Melanie Harrison will be supervising calving at the farm and miss this panel.) There will be plenty of time for questions and discussion, too.

Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director, will update us on the industry and policy news that is critical to all organic dairy farmers and industry representatives; answer questions; and encourage discussion during this session.

Wrapping up the morning, and ahead of the farm tour, the Wolfe's Neck Center staff, including Ben Gotschall, organic dairy manager and WNC administrative staff, will provide an overview of the WNC organization and programs. The Dairy Grazing Apprentice program apprentices will describe their program and experiences, too. Rounding out this session, Dr. Andre Brito, professor of Dairy Cattle Nutrition and Management, University of New Hampshire, will discuss the research being conducted at Wolfe's Neck Organic Dairy on seaweed feed additive as a means of methane emissions reduction.

After lunch, everyone will board WNC wagons for a guided tour of the center and farm. Since these are open wagons, we suggest you plan for all different weather conditions! The 21st Annual NODPA Field Days adjourns back at the Mallet Barn at the tour's end.

Take Advantage of the Early Bird Rates!

Are you planning to come to the 21st Annual NODPA Field Days? Would you like to save some money? **You can take advantage of the Early Bird rates by registering no later than Saturday, September 18th.** If it's more convenient, you can pay when you arrive on-site but we must hear from you by the early bird rate deadline in order to get the money-saving rates. This year, due to COVID restrictions, supply shortages, and higher food prices, it's more important than ever that we provide our caterers with accurate head counts as early as possible. So, please register early! Details and the registration form are on page 17, plus the NODPA Field Days brochure will be in your mailbox in the next week.

The 21st Annual NODPA Field Days

Final Details

Once again, NODPA is keeping the costs of attending Field Days as low as possible, with free registration for all farmers and their families, and a minimal registration fee for non-farmers, with only the cost of meals passed along. We are grateful for our sponsors, supporters, and trade show participants for helping us keep the costs low, and for their ongoing support for NODPA's work. Please be sure to visit all of them at the trade show!

Lodging

There are many lodging options in the Freeport area. NODPA has a room block at the Freeport Econo Lodge, 537 US-1, Freeport, ME 04032, approximately 10 minutes' drive from WNC. To receive the $90.00 rate, please call (207) 865-3777 and indicate that it is the NODPA Field Days Room Block. **This rate is available only until September 10th.**

Another option is the Maine Idyll Court, 1411 US Route 1, Freeport, ME, 04032, just north of Freeport, also a 10 minute drive from WNC. There are small cottages with from 1-3 bedrooms, kitchenettes, fireplaces, and more, for very reasonable rates starting at $84.00/ night. They were not able to accommodate a room block request but we recommend this as a good lodging option. To view the cottages and make online reservations, visit http://www.maineidyll.com/

Camping and camper options are available right at Wolfe's Neck Center. Visit their website https://www.freeportcamping.com/ or call (207) 865-9307 for more information and to make reservations. The campgrounds and administrative offices are at 184 Burnett Road, Freeport, and Field Days are being held at the Mallet Barn, 625 Wolfe's Neck Road, approximately 2.5 miles beyond WNC (watch for the directional signs).

Finally, due to the ongoing pandemic, **for everyone's safety, we strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated at least 2 weeks prior to coming to the NODPA Field Days.** If you are not vaccinated, you will be required to wear a mask at all times when inside, and at this time, we are relying on the honor system. We will continue to follow all requirements from the state of Maine and from Wolfe's Neck if they are different. There are opportunities for people to socialize and eat outside, weather permitting, and WNC is required by law to keep one set of barn doors open at all times, thus allowing for a healthy air flow. Because this is in New England at the end of September, and by the ocean, we strongly encourage people to pack clothing that will be comfortable, warm if necessary and protect from any possible bad weather. Of course, we expect only sunshine and blue skies!

Please contact Nora Owens, NODPA Field Days Coordinator, if you have questions or to register early. Please call 413-772-0444, if you reach our voicemail, please leave a message, or email her at noraowens@comcast.net. ◆

REGISTRATION FORM

The 21st Annual NODPA Field Days and Producer Meeting and Dinner

Early Bird Rates Until September 18th!

	COST			
	Early	On-Site	QTY	TOTAL
REGISTRATION: Thursday & Friday				
Organic dairy & transitioning dairy producers	FREE			$0
All who aren't organic dairy producers	$35	$50		$
MEALS: Thursday & Friday				
Thursday lunch for Adults	$10	$15		$
Thursday lunch (under 11)	$5	$10		$
Thursday dinner for Adults	$25	$35		$
Thursday dinner (under 11)	$12.50	$15		$
Transitioning farm member. Thursday evening dinner	Free			$0
Friday breakfast (7:30-9am)	$5	$10		$
Friday lunch	$10	$15		$
NODPA NEWS SUBSCRIPTION (6 issues)	$50			$
DONATION TO NODPA	$_____			$
	Total amount enclosed:			$

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Make checks payable to NODPA. Mail to:

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Master Card • Visa

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YOU CAN ALSO REGISTER ONLINE AT:
https://nodpa.com/p/117/

The 21st Annual
NODPA Field Days

Schedule

Thursday, September 30, 2021

8:30-11:30 am ***Pasture Walk, Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment (WNC), Freeport, Maine***
Leah Puro, WNC Agricultural Research Coordinator will lead a pasture walk to spotlight the research projects taking place at Wolfe's Neck.

Noon - 1:00 pm **Registration and Lunch**
The Mallet Barn, Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, 625 Wolfe's Neck Road, Freeport, Maine 04032

1:00 - 2:30 ***The Forever Chemicals: What the heck are perfluoroalkyl substances, aka PFAS, and why should we be concerned about them on our organic dairy farms?***
Dr. Andrew Smith, Maine State Toxicologist and Program Manager, Environmental and Occupational Health, ME Division of Environmental and Community Health, and Maine CDC, and Tom Simones, Maine State Toxicologist, and Jacki Perkins, MOFGA Dairy Specialist

Andy Smith and Tom Simones will describe the issues and why farmers should be aware of PFAS/PFOS on their farms, and Jacki Perkins will describe how this contamination may impact organic certification.

2:30 - 3:00 **Milk Break**

3:00 - 4:30 ***Ask the Vets Q & A: A Roundtable Discussion***
Dr. Meghan Flanagan, DVM, Annabessacook Veterinary Clinic, Monmouth, Maine and
Simon Alexander, DVM, Exeter Veterinary Services, Exeter, Maine

Bring all of your questions, your experiences, and advice to this roundtable discussion led by these two large animal veterinarians.

4:30 - 5:30 **NODPA Field Days Social Hour and Trade Show**
Enjoy light refreshments while visiting all of the trade show participants, and catch up on all the latest news with your fellow farmers.

5:30 – 7:00 **NODPA Annual Meeting and Banquet**
Liz Bawden and Kirk Arnold, NODPA Board Co-Presidents, and Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

7:00 – 9:00 ***Keynote Presentation with Dr. Simon Alexander, DVM***
It's been a tough, long haul this past year as we've all dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation, and lots of virtual gatherings. To celebrate NODPA's live, in-person event, we've invited Dr. Simon Alexander to share his thoughts on the past year and to entertain us with his incredible stories about life in Maine as a large animal veterinarian.

9:00 pm **Meeting adjourns**

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NORTHEAST ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK

The 21st Annual
NODPA Field Days

Schedule

Friday, October 1, 2021

6:30 – 9:00 am **Continental Breakfast, Mallet Barn**

7:00 – 9:00 ***Producer-only Meeting: A meeting in which producers can speak freely about all things related to the organic dairy industry***
Facilitated by Henry Perkins, Albion, ME, past president, NODPA Board

9:00 – 10:30 ***Invest In Your Forages like Your Dairy Depends on it—because it does!***
Panel Discussion

Sara Ziegler, Soils and Crops Coordinator, University of Vermont Extension's Soils and Crops Team, facilitator, and Mike Brown, Meadowbrook Farm, China, Maine, and Melanie and Patrick Harrison, Harrison's Homegrown Organic Dairy Farm, Addison, VT.

These panel members will describe the importance of investing in your forage system and the strategies they've integrated into their management systems. ***(For an in-depth description of this session, please read Sara Ziegler's session description in the NODPA Field Days article in this issue, on page 16.)***

10:30 – 11:00 ***Industry and Policy News: Updates on the issues that are critical to all organic dairy farmers***
Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

11:00 – 12:00 pm ***Introduction to Wolfe's Neck Farm***
Ben Gotschall, Dairy Farm Manager, WNF Dairy Grazing Apprentice Program Apprentices, and Andre Brito, DVM, PhD., Associate Professor of Dairy Cattle Nutrition and Management, Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH

In preparation for the farm tour, Ben Gotschall and staff at the Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment will discuss their mission, infrastructure and educational programs, including the Dairy Grazing Apprentice Program and other farmer training programs, and Andre Brito will describe their current research on feeding seaweed to cows to manage methane emissions.

12:00 – 1:15 pm **Lunch**

1:15 pm ***Farm Tour: Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment***
We will board the WNC wagons for a guided tour of the farm, research sites and grounds of WNC.

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NODPA Field Days

The Organic Dairy Community Coming Together to Explore Its Challenges and Opportunities

September 30 & October 1, 2021

Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment

The Mallet Barn, 625 Wolfe's Neck Road, Freeport, Maine 04032

Speaker Spotlight

Leah Puro

Agricultural Research Coordinator, Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, Freeport, Maine

My farming journey began on a diversified vegetable farm in the mountains of Northern Argentina and led me to farms in South Carolina, Vermont, and the Hudson Valley. Captivated by plants and soils, I went back to school for a Masters in Science in International Agricultural Development from the University of California Davis. As a graduate student researcher, I conducted research in Vietnam and Cambodia with the International Center for Tropical Agriculture and in California with the University of California Cooperative Extension. My agricultural experiences have ranged from collecting soils in Vietnam to crop rotation planning to trimming the hooves of 200 sheep and lots in between.

At Wolfe's Neck, I coordinate our on-farm research trials, work with OpenTEAM as a farm hub, and translate our exciting research into programming.

Andrew E. Smith, SM, ScD

State Toxicologist and Manager, Environmental and Occupational Health Program, Maine CDC, Augusta, Maine

Dr. Smith is a member of a multiagency/stakeholder task force on the historic and current threats to groundwater and to human health from the use of the PFOS/PFAS set of chemicals, and their release into the environment in "biosolids" aka sewage sludge used for decades as fertilizer in many Maine farm fields.

Jacki Perkins

Organic Dairy and Livestock Specialist, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), Unity, Maine

As MOFGA's Organic Dairy and Livestock Specialist, Jacki Perkins routinely deals with organic certification questions. She shares her experiences related to PFAS contamination and organic certification issues on Maine organic dairy farms.

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The 21st Annual
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Speaker Spotlight

Meghan Flanagan, DVM

Annabessacook Veterinary Clinic, Monmouth, Maine

Dr. Meghan Flanagan is a 2010 graduate of Cornell University School of Veterinary Medicine. Growing up in central Maine she attended the University of Maine where she developed her interest in dairy cattle. Over the last 11 years she has been practicing food animal medicine, supporting a variety of conventional and organic dairies, as well as beef, swine, small ruminant and camelid farms.

Sara Ziegler

Soils and Crops Coordinator, Northwest Crops and Soils Program, University of Vermont Extension

Sara Ziegler is a research specialist focused on perennial and annual forage production and pasture management with UVM Extension's Northwest Crops and Soils Team. She works closely with farmers on developing and maintaining nutrient management plans and manages several research projects focused on organic and grass-fed dairy systems.

Simon Alexander

DVM Exeter Veterinary Services, Exeter, Maine

Dr. Simon Alexander grew up in Easton, a small border town in Aroostook County. He completed his pre-veterinary studies at the University of Maine, and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, School of Veterinary Medicine in 2004. He returned to Maine where he has practiced both companion and large animals veterinary medicine, although is sole focus is now on large animals with an emphasis on dairy cattle. He founded Exeter Veterinary Services in 2013 and continues to serve clients in Penobscot, Aroostook, and surrounding counties.

Michael L. Brown

Meadowbrook Farm, China, Maine

Michael Brown raises Organic Grass feed Beef Cows and grows about 500+ round bales of organic feed and organic vegetable seed for catalogue sales in China, Maine. Currently, he's the Regional Pool Manager for Organic Valley and previously worked for Johnny's Selected Seed as a seed production manager, finding seed growers across the world to produce organic and conventional seed for commercial and home gardeners.

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Supporters

The 21st Annual
NODPA Field Days

Speaker Spotlight

Melanie and Patrick Harrison

Harrison's Homegrown Organic Dairy Farm, Addison VT

Patrick and Melanie Harrison farm 900 acres of owned and rented ground in Addison County, Vermont. They milk 180 Jersey cattle and raise 150 heifers. Since transitioning to organic in 2012, their goal of producing high quality forages has meant focusing on building fertility and improving sward density and composition while managing compaction on their heavy clay soils of the Champlain Valley.

André F. Brito DVM, PhD

Department of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems University of New Hampshire

André F. Brito DVM, PhD., is a Veterinarian and Associate Professor of Dairy Cattle Nutrition and Management in the Department of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH. He has partners with Wolfe's Neck Center in order to carry out research at the WNC's organic dairy farm.

Ben Gotschall

Dairy Farm Manager, Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, Freeport, Maine

I was born and raised on a ranch in the Sandhills of southwest Holt County, Nebraska, where we raised beef cattle, dairy cattle and bison. I obtained an MFA in poetry, which enabled me to publish a full-length collection of poems and work as a college professor for several years teaching writing and literature before returning to agriculture full-time.

In addition to owning and managing several organic dairy, micro-dairy and creamery businesses, I have previously worked in ag policy, grassroots environmental organizing, and local food cooperative distribution. Along with my wife Tammy and our daughter Charlotte, we also operate Holt Creek Jerseys, a grass-fed dairy cattle and genetics business that I began when I was 10 years old.

Life-long learning is important to me and I look forward to helping others make the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship program at Wolfe's Neck the best it can be. I believe that by working with nature, utilizing research, and enabling innovation, members of the dairy team here can become leaders in the exciting future of regenerative food production.

September 30 & October 1, 2021
Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment
The Mallet Barn, 625 Wolfe's Neck Road, Freeport, Maine 04032

FEATURED FARM

CHOINIERE FAMILY FARM, HIGHGATE, VT

continued from page 1

Those that become certified organic despite any misgivings, and fully commit themselves to an organic mindset often find themselves reaping unexpected benefits: improved herd health; better milk quality; enhanced pasture nutrition; increased soil health; and less stress for cows and humans. These farmers can become outspoken proponents for the organic dairy farming industry, becoming advocates based on their first-hand experience.

Guy (pronounced "Ghee") Choiniere, third generation dairy farmer at Choiniere Family Farm in Highgate Center, located in the northwestern region of Vermont, is one of those farmers. He farms along with his wife Beth and son Mathieu. Originally embracing organic milk for the economic opportunity and faced with the need for financial security in order to take over the farm from his father, Guy opted to transition the family's conventional farm to organic in 2005, to seize the opportunity presented by the profit potential in the growing organic dairy market.

"We've always followed the market," Guy said, explaining that each generation on the farm was successful, but farmed differently than the last.

His grandfather established the farm in 1945. He made square bales, the cows had freedom, and the milking herd "lived forever," Guy said. The dairy was passed on to his father, who followed the market and learned to feed corn and grain, as well as to select genetics for a high-production Holstein herd. The cows were confined, and per-cow milk production was the ultimate measure of success.

Guy knew he wanted to make changes on the farm. But the family's succession plan was the farm. Guy was to buy the farm from his parents and support their retirement.

Against the Grain

While his focus was originally on finding a more consistent and stable milk market, he also had a gut instinct about "how Mother Nature is supposed to work. I saw some things that I wanted to change. "

Many neighboring farmers in his conventional farming community did not believe that he would succeed with organic farming. It was the many mentors from the organic dairy farming community who generously shared their knowledge and skills that made that prediction come true.

"We had as many mentors as we had critics," Guy said of his decision to become certified organic. One main concern echoed by detractors was that "cows were going to get sick and die."

Initially, Guy remained afraid to make changes. It was only after spending time with organic farmers that he realized how confident they were in their methods. He saw relaxed farmers, families, and cows. He was amazed at how readily the organic dairy farming community shared information and supported one another - including welcoming newcomers.

"The strength and confidence I saw in the (organic) farmers" propelled him to transition, he said, providing the impetus he needed to leave the conventional dairy farming model.

He began the three-year transition and became certified organic in 2005. Sixteen years later, and herd health and productivity have only improved as Guy has learned to optimize soil health, so that plant nutrition provides the cows with the diet they need to produce milk and live long, productive lives.

"Cow health and production has always been very important to me," Guy said. "My conventional diet had it all: alfalfa; haylage; corn silage; high moisture corn; and topped with a 16 percent protein grain mix. My transition to organic diet was grass and legume round bale baleage, plus 10 pounds of organic cornmeal. My goal was to replace imported feeds with homegrown forages. But I knew my forages had to keep improving before I could eliminate any purchased feeds. Never did I want to neglect the cows from proper energy and protein levels."

He needed to focus both on getting the pastures to produce the high-energy diets needed for the herd to make milk, and getting the herd to be able to access the pastures and obtain the nutrition they needed from grazing. That meant revitalizing the pastures through adding fertility, planning a grazing strategy, optimizing forage species, and implementing some changes in breeding and genetics to select for production on pasture.

With cows unaccustomed to moving around or to consuming a grain-free diet, and pastures needing improvement, he soon found himself with a herd of skinny cows. The Holsteins could not, at first, meet there energy needs during the transition.

"I had to keep working on building organic matter and fertility, and the biological population" of the soil, Guy said. Two or three years later, he found that his pasture forages had enough energy and minerals to keep his Holsteins producing milk. But the Holsteins had to change a bit, too.

Guy took the transition slowly, removing two pounds of grain at every phase, until the last step, taken in 2014. With his son Matt

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FEATURED FARM

Happy Cow grazing tall grass- Choiniere Farm.

CHOINIERE FAMILY FARM, HIGHGATE, VT

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joining the farm as the fourth generation in 2015, the family opted to transition to grass-fed, taking advantage of the market.

That's when he went from six pounds of organic cornmeal in the cows diet to exclusively grass-fed, and did so overnight.

The cows, he said, didn't seem to notice.

Holstein Grazing

The Choiniere Family Farm consists of 500 acres of land. When conventional, the land grew corn for grain and silage, and alfalfa for hay. Today, it is divided between 150 acres of pastures for grazing and 350 acres of cropland in the form of permanent perennial pastures, some stands of which are more than 25 years old. They do not graze the cropland, nor do they harvest crops from the grazing pastures.

The pasture plants will set their own seed, as long as the land isn't being tilled. They do some frost seed, using a mixture of grasses, legumes and other forages and "hope for the best," Guy said. They also seed when spreading the bedded pack onto the fields, avoiding tillage while improving stands.

The cropland is harvested with large equipment, and they can harvest as many as 200 large round bales/day. They wrap their bales using a remote control bale wrapper for efficiency. Becoming more efficient in

FEATURED FARM

Cows grazing among sunflowers - Choiniere Farm.

harvesting by purchasing large equipment has allowed them to better retain feed quality.

The bales are a mixture of all of the plants in the perennial pastures, including those often thought of as weeds. Native forages make high quality feed, Guy said. Blue vetch is a native legume which he likes to see. Broadleaf plants - or weeds - are also a small part of the mix.

"If you cut them (weeds), they complete that bale. I've been creative in the types of plants we feed," Guy said, wanting the cows to receive a smorgasbord in every bite.

Orchard grass provides resilience in the pastures, while perennial ryegrass "is where I make my milk," Guy said. Meadow fescue, bluegrass, and timothy are fine, sweet and palatable, and the cows are permitted to graze those stands lower. But the fine stemmed forages just can't provide the bulk the Holsteins need in order to fill up.

While tall fescue can be invasive, Guy allows it to grow as it will provide forage during dry periods. He is careful to clip it to keep it from becoming the predominant pasture forage.

The grazing acres are occasionally planted to annuals, with 15 - 20 acres per year being planted to high-energy annual forages on a rotating basis, to keep those cows milking. He uses sorghum-Sudan grass mixes, but wet springs make it difficult to plant these. He is a fond of legumes, planting a variety of clovers. Other annuals planted include oats, peas, radishes, turnips, sunflowers and buckwheat. The annuals keep the ground shaded and cool, reduce soil compaction, and feed the soil as well as the cows.

The one forage he doesn't grow in his fields is alfalfa. The window of opportunity to harvest alfalfa is too narrow, and if the plant gets too old the texture will change as the plant becomes too stemmy. Guy prefers to keep the texture the same across pasture forages as much as possible.

"I try to create a buffet out there in the pasture and in the field. It's nice to have a diverse choice out there. Native grasses can carry us on the farm. They do very well. I encourage farmers to work harder to balance the soils...and allow the native grasses to grow," Guy said.

The transition to organic, and then to grass-fed, meant putting the 85 mature Holstein cows - of which 65 -75 are milking at any given time - out onto pasture from May until November. The initial challenge was to work with the existing Holstein herd, bred very successfully by his father for conventional production, and build a herd that could produce on pasture forages.

Guy began to breed, using bulls, to select for strength and size. He was looking for cows that could put on some mileage and still produce milk without relying on organic grains. He was also learning about managed grazing, and beginning to understand how Holsteins, in particular, have characteristics which further influence grazing needs.

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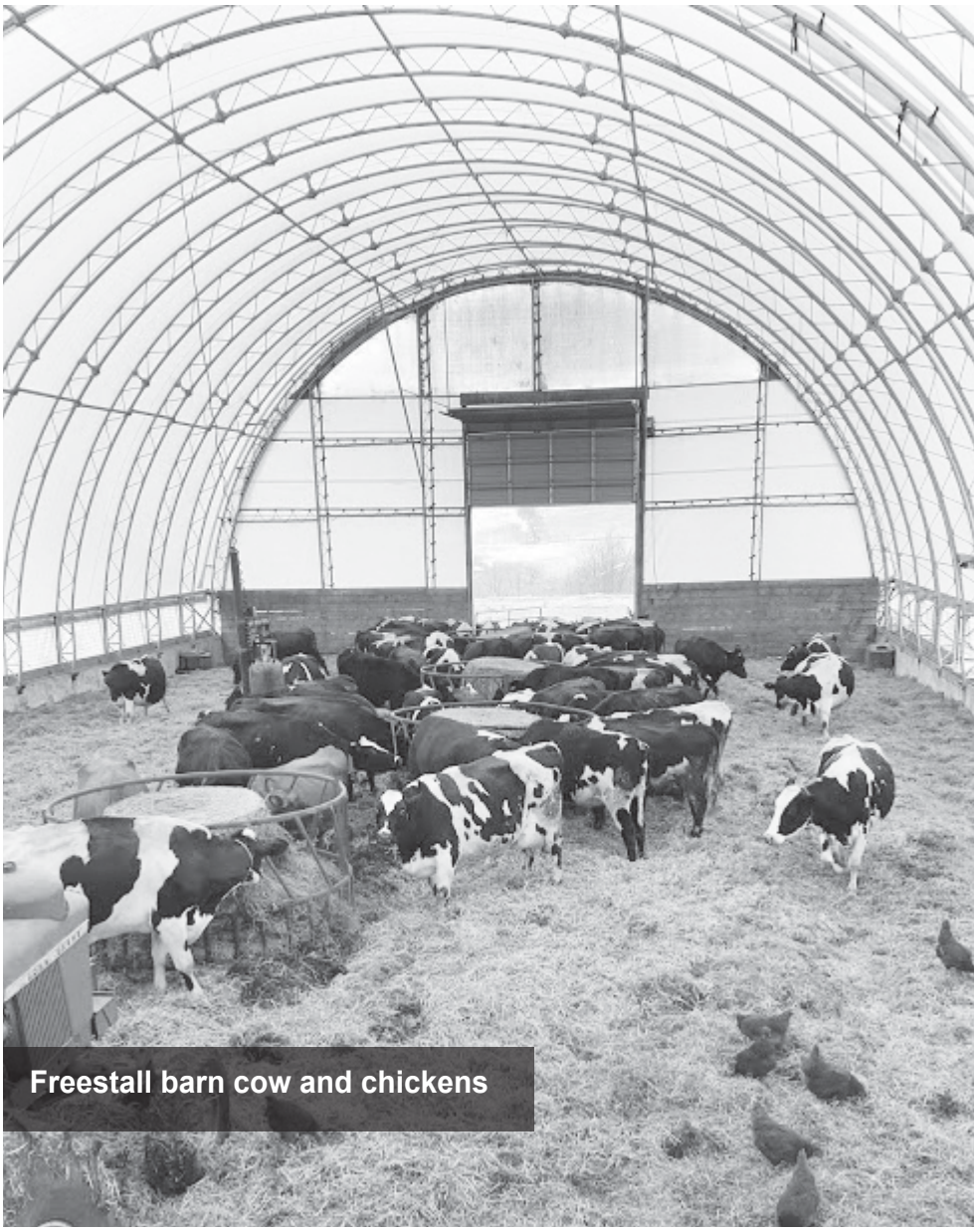
"Overgrazing is your worst thing to do to a successful grazing system," Guy said, and Holsteins can be aggressive grazers. Combating this tendency meant learning some particular pasture management techniques.

He's found that Holsteins require a lot of feed in the pasture. The grass has to be present in volume. About 10 -12 inches is the minimum height needed in a stand before allowing the Holsteins to graze. The stand needs to have volume for the first hour, when the cows will each consume 200 mouthfuls.

The other key to successfully grazing Holsteins is leaving heavy residue. He developed a nutrient management plan based around this strategy, spreading his bedded pack heavily onto fields in early summer, creating a barrier beyond which the cows won't graze. Guy is careful to leave at least four inches of residue after grazing.

Temporary fencing is utilized to further divide paddocks, so the cows cannot overgraze. New paddocks are provided to the milking herd every 12 hours, after each milking. Heifers and calves are moved once per day, and the dry cows and older heifers are located on far fields, and moved every two or three days. The grazing season runs from May 15th through November 1st on average.



Freestall barn cow and chickens

During July and August, annuals supplement the cool season perennial pastures. The annuals are fed to the milking herd in strips, so they are available to the cows only in very limited amounts. The herd typically has access for two hours only, in the mid-day heat, to provide "a great hit of high energy feed," and then they are returned to the perennial pastures when the day is cooling.

The energy from the annuals is equivalent to two pounds of corn meal, and helps to keep flies at bay, Guy said.

The milking herd receives roughly 70 percent of their dry matter intake from grazing pastures, and in a good year, that can increase to 80 percent. They are supplemented with round bales twice a day for two hour periods directly after milking, and fed in the hoop housing, which houses the bedded pack barns. The pastures are a long walk away, so this provides the cows time to rest, feed and lie down out of the sun, and also captures manure to prevent runoff into the nearby river.

The four hoop houses - three of which are utilized as bedded pack barns - were constructed under a contract with National Resources Conservation Service, to keep manure runoff out of the river. They also provide a source of fertility and add carbon to the fields

FEATURED FARM

when the bedded pack is spread. The hoop houses are utilized for herd housing for half of the year, accumulating enough of the manure and bedding mix to add back the needed fertility to the fields.

"Holsteins take a lot out of fields. I rest the pastures 180 days to get enough manure and spread it on the acres," Guy said, "You can be dying by neglect. You need to add nutrients to your farm."

That manure is mixed in with the bedding materials from the bedded pack hoop houses, which provide winter housing, and are also used throughout the year. Adding carbon back into the soils can prevent a downward spiral of decreasing milk production, decreasing money, and decreasing pasture fertility.

The manure, captured in the bedding, provides the farm's fertility, and is spread on the fields in the early summer. The bedding is a mix of straw, wood chips and hay and is stabilized with soft rock phosphate, which keeps the smell down, stabilizes the nutrients, and gives a "great boost" when spread on the soils, Guy said. It also provides the residue that keeps the Holsteins from grazing pastures too low. Approximately 1200 tons of bedded pack is spread on the fields in early summer, in a semi-composted state.

"We leave heavy residues," Guy said, explaining that this creates a buffer to prevent overgrazing, and also "creates a sponge layer that will grab all the rain.

They also avoid tilling by spreading seeds along with the bedded pack, feeding the microbiome and providing nutrients for the seeds while managing the manure and enhancing the soil. The surface nutrients supplied by the bedded pack fuels the grass, and cool season grasses like bluegrass and timothy respond to the fertility with high growth rates, which makes the cows quite happy.

The residue is spread after the cows do a first graze on a paddock.

After spreading the bedded pack, the cows are kept off that pasture for a 30 day rest period before being turned into that paddock again.

The manure management in the organic system has been crucial to creating a sustainable grazing system where the soil is continually fed, the plants receive the nutrients they need, and in turn provide nutritious forages for a productive grass-fed dairy herd, and the cows graze without depleting either soil or plant.

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CHOINIERE FAMILY FARM, HIGHGATE, VT

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Changing Infrastructure

Among the many changes that have occurred on the farm, in conjunction with the transition from conventional to organic to 100 percent grass-fed dairy farming, has been the infrastructure. The infrastructure changes have contributed to the overall health of the farming system. And one of the primary changes was erecting those hoop house barns, whose bedded pack housing provides the nutrients and residue needed to successfully graze the Holsteins.

Just this year, a new milking parlor was built, leaving the tie-stall barn as a holding area. With a new parlor replacing the tie stall and pipeline system -which had been in place for almost 50 years - the cows are more comfortable when milking. Along with new bedded pack housing, the new parlor has had a beneficial effect on the SCC, which has decreased to 160,000 on average.

When conventional, the herd SCC averaged about 300,000. The somatic cell count after conversion to organic dairy farming had been running about 250,000, stabilizing there after the initial transition, when SCC counts increased for a short period of time. Guy believes the increase in SCC often seen when transitioning is due to cows shedding somatic cells as their forages increase in energy and minerals over the first few years, and cow health improves.

The new parlor is a 20 cow one-sided parlor design, rather than a double-10, so that it could fit into the existing barn. It is a simple Larry Tranel retrofit design with elevated ramps, pitted floors and a lowline system to reduce the disturbance to the cows, keeping them less stressed during milking.

The bedded pack hoop houses provide housing in the non-grazing season, and provides a type of winter pasture, Guy said. Even when housed in the hoop structures, the cows are grazing, as they bedded pack is also a feed bunk, and in the winter the housing acts as a winter pasture. The bedding buffet is feed quality hay.

The 60' by 120' hoop structures are bedded first with a layer of wood chips. The wood chips - which are applied to the pack at a rate of six yards, every other day, trap air and keep the pack breathing. One round bale (1500 lbs.) of hay is spread each day on the bedded packs. At first, they tried

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Cows in hoop housing

creating a "TMR" of bedding, using a vertical TMR mixer, but found that the fine particles separated out of the mix. They now bed with a two yard bucket and a bale shredder, layering the wood chips, bedding straw and hay.

"The entire bedded pack is turned into a short-lived feed bunk every day. They are eating the best (of the bedding) and leaving the rest," Guy explained, "It's a critical piece and an example of expanding your feed bunk. It's very important to take competition away from grass-fed cows.

During the winter, the cows rotate browsing the hay in two of the bedded pack hoop houses. The milking herd receives 100 lbs. of feed in the form of baleage, plus consumes another five lbs. of dry hay from their bedding each day. The milking cows rotate out of the first hoop house and into the second, and are followed by the dry cows and heifers, which clean up extra feed. They always over-feed and over-bed in the hoop houses to insure the milking herd is consuming enough feed and to avoid any competition for food between cows.

The temperature of the bedded pack in the hoop houses remains around 90°F. Higher temperatures will cause aromas, while lower temperatures will cause the bedded pack to solidify. Managing the bedding properly keeps the temperatures within the desired range.

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A third hoop house is used for storing feed and bedding, while the fourth is used for housing the young stock.

During the winter, some of the milking herd is also rotated into the tie stall barn to keep the water from freezing. They also move twice per day into the holding area of this barn prior to milking. Each day, the milking herd moves outside between the hoop houses and the tie stall barn. A gutter system in the tie stall barn captures manure, which is injected into the fields to prevent odor and runoff while capturing fertility.

Herd Health and Reproduction

As the Holstein's began to graze within a system that supported pasture health, Guy began to see positive changes to herd health. He had learned right away to use tinctures and has a few treatments he routinely utilizes for the few health issues that may occur.

"I didn't realize in time that these things would also disappear," he said of the retained placentas, hairy heel wart and mastitis that plagued the conventional herd.

As soon as they went grain-free in 2014, all hairy heel warts disappeared. Guy attributes this to the dietary change, which results in a change in digestive system pH, and a decrease in cow stress.

The veterinarian is no longer needed to treat recurring health issues. Instead, they are developing a relationship in which the veterinarian is a team member, providing advice about preventative treatments, including nutritional aspects of herd health. The veterinarian performs pregnancy checks and does the dehorning. While their veterinarian was originally skeptical of the switch to organic farming, he has seen the herd health benefits, Guy said, and "praises the way we do things now."

The biggest herd health issue on the farm is pinkeye and ringworm, both of which flare up primarily in the winter and are due to mineral deficits, Guy said. These had been occurring on the farm for many years. Every cow on the farm gets minerals all year-long, with the milking herd receiving additional winter minerals during the non-grazing season.

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The mineral program consists of "a buffet," and provides the cows options of 2:1 calcium to phosphorous mix, as well as a 1:2 mix. They also have access to kelp and Redmond salt, plus vitamins A, D, and E.

If a cow goes off feed, Guy has learned that it signifies the cow is under stress. He works to alleviate that stress by providing the cow with what it needs to immediately be able to take in nutrition again. He uses volcanic clay - one tube - so the good microbes won't die off. The clay allows the cow to eat again.

"My feed is her savior," Guy said. "She needs to chew her cud," and to produce saliva to sooth her stomach.

He also uses clay in the rare instance of retained placenta. The clay helps to control temperature, as does Dr. Paul's CEG, which is used multiple times per day if a cow has a fever. The key is not to give a lot of the product at once, but to give the treatment repeatedly, Guy said.

He uses a liniment to increase blood flow in cases of mastitis. He's found that if he can just get the circulation going, the cows will recover. Pneumonia is the only issue that - if it arises - he's found difficult to treat.

"Cows are likely healing themselves," Guy said. "Health will contribute to production."

The cows produce 12,000 lbs. milk per cow per day on average, and that number is increasing. When the farm was conventional, the milk production was 18,000 lbs. per cow annually. They maintained well during the initial transition to organic. Upon transition to grass nine years later, production dropped to 9,000 lbs. milk/cow per year before increasing again.

The butterfat is now at 4.0-4.1 percent, up from the 3.6-3.8 percent the herd had been at previously. Guy attributes the increase to breeding, selecting for components, as well as to dietary changes as the herd has moved through the transition to organic, and then to grass-fed.

The transition to grass-fed also came with a switch back to breeding with AI, as Matt is now handling the breeding program and is focusing on strengthening those grazing genetics. They select for production, short stature, smaller legs, bigger barrels, temperament and lighter coat color, as well as components.

"We feel there are still improvements we can make with Holsteins," Guy said.

They no longer keep all of their heifer calves, as the productive lives of the cows have increased to the point where they no longer need them. They breed the lower 60 percent of the herd to Angus for beef sales, only needing the top 40 percent of heifer calves to produce their own dairy replacements.

Bull calves are raised as veal. Most of their veal is from Angus genetics, although some are pure Holstein. The veal calves are selected for bulk and heavy weights. All calves - including those destined to become veal - are raised on grass and milk only. Veal calves are raised with the mother for their lifespan of four or five month. If there are problems, they will put the veal calf into the calf pens.

"We are trying to find a purpose for these animals" Guy said.

Calf Program

All calves on the farm are raised by the dam for the first two or three months. Once they get adventurous, they are moved to a group calf pen and fed with mob feeders. They are now using bigger mob feeders and Peach Teat nipples, which squirt up and down rather than straight down the calf's throat, and helps prevent respiratory problems.

They've solved most of their calf health issue after Matt implemented an "all you can drink" program to promote calf

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All calves on the farm are raised by the dam for the first two or three months

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health. This was the exact opposite of what Guy had been doing - limiting milk intake. After making the change, scours are no longer an issue and there are no problematic calf health issues on the farm.

Moving the calf pens out of the tie stall barn, and into a hoop house bedded pack barn, has also contributed to the decrease in calf health concerns. The bedding is the same as in the cows' hoop housing, but requires increased maintenance to keep dry. The calves are also given the best hay.

They do not routinely give vaccinations at this time, which Guy attributes to having a closed herd and the improved housing and feed regimes.

The calves move back onto pasture, this time into a heifer group, at five months of age, where they have access to the hoop house and are transferred to new pastures daily.

Successfully Grass-fed

While some might be wary of building a grass-fed dairy with a herd of Holsteins, Guy is enthusiastic about their ability to utilize grass to produce a lot of organic milk.

"They've survived the transition to organic and to 100 percent grass-fed," Guy said of his Holsteins. "We've learned how to work with them. I figured it out and they figured it out. We just had to learn the limits on how much they can eat."

Change has been a constant since transitioning to organic farming. The land, the herd, the feed, the fertility - the entire farming system - was transformed. Guy has worked tirelessly to build a dairy that protects and respects the land, the animals, and the people. His system today, while still being refined, reflects what he has learned throughout the process.

Guy's knowledge of organic and grass-fed dairying has been self-taught - both from experience, as well as learned from books, other farmers, and experts in various fields. Guy emphasizes that attending farming meetings, even if he learns only one new thing per meeting, has been a linchpin of his success. Books, podcasts and educational meetings keep him - and now Matt - abreast of the latest in organic dairy farming, and connected to the wider farming community.

"Organic farming has been in place now for so long. There are a ton of resources out there. I can't think of anything that needs more support. Technical assistance is out there," Guy said. "Farming is still a great way of life."

The biggest concerns industry-wide are supply and demand issues. The ability to maintain the prices paid to farmers is an important factor in keeping small organic dairy farms in business, Guy said.

The family has participated in many conservation programs via NRCS, including cost-sharing for the hoop houses, to purchase

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the manure injector and to keep the cows away from the river banks. They've also completed higher level projects via the Conservation Stewardship Program, such as planting hedgerows, building birdhouses and having a forestry program.


Choiniere Family

They are very conscious of the water quality and their efforts have paid off. The farm is the recipient of numerous conservation awards, including a 2018 nomination for the prestigious Hugh Hammond Bennett award for conservation stewardship practices. They are also a part of the River Protection Program, and Guy is part of a team spear-heading payment to farmers for their ecosystem services.

"Water from this farm is clean," Guy said, and having a low-impact environmental footprint is an important and crucial piece of the sustainable farming puzzle.

He wants to show the community how a low-impact, back-to-basics farming lifestyle can be so beneficial to animals, the land, the water, and the people. The Choiniere family is dedicated to educating the public about healthy farming and food, and strives to keep their farm products reasonably priced for neighbors. They invite the community to enjoy the beauty of their farm. There is also a bike trail on the farm, and the local high school cross country team uses the farm as their home course track.

"It all started for financial reasons, but really in my gut I want to keep my family healthy," Guy said of his organic and grass-fed dairy journey. "The cows were the guinea pigs. We have the same lifestyle as the animals." ◆

Guy Choiniere and his family can be reached at Choiniere Family Farm, 2465 Gore Rd., Highgate Center, VT 05459, (802) 868-2131, choinierefamilyfarm@gmail.com

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Calendar

Wednesday, August 18, 12:00 - 2:00 pm

SUMMER 2021 DAIRY GRAZING PASTURE WALK SERIES, TROYER FARM, CANDOR (TIOGA COUNTY), NY

Troyer Farm with Upper Susquehanna Coalition Grazing Management Specialist and grass farmer Troy Bishopp, "The Grass Whisperer". Isaac Troyer operates a 40-cow organic grazing dairy. He gained experience dairying with his father, and recently relocated his herd to a new farm in Candor, NY. This summer is his second grazing season at the new location. Troy will discuss how he uses his grazing chart to proactively manage for expected and unexpected events during the grazing season and give a snapshot of how the grazing season is going. Expect some lingering grazing observations in the pasture, stockpiling strategies, and learning how the Troyer family is using pastures to achieve their goals. Registration link: https://scnydfc.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=1630. Join the South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Team for a series of pasture walks hosted by dairy farms throughout our region. Learn strategies for managing dairy cattle on pasture from experienced graziers and grazing educators. Be prepared for walking and standing outdoors. Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear, dress for the weather, and bring your own water bottle and snacks. There is no cost to attend, however pre-registration is required (address provided after registered). Register online using the link above or by calling Donette Griffith at (607) 391-2662.

Thursday, September 30 & Friday, October 1, 2021

THE ORGANIC DAIRY COMMUNITY COMING TOGETHER TO EXPLORE ITS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

21st Annual NODPA Field Days, Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture & the Environment, Freeport, Maine

The 21st Annual NODPA Field Days will be held in person this year. Please see the Field Days schedule, speaker information, and more, in this issue. We will have a trade show, farm tour, a great line-up of speakers, and the event will be fully COVID 19 compliant/safe. Call or email Nora Owens, NODPA Field Days Coordinator, if you have questions or are seeking further information: 413-772-0444, noraowens@comcast.net.

Classified Ads

ANIMALS

FOR SALE: A COUPLE OF CERTIFIED ORGANIC (VOF) YEARLING OPEN HEIFERS. We do not have room for them on our 2 cow farm. If I wanted to expand our little 'herd' I would keep them - they are beautiful. One is Jersey/Guernsey cross and the other is a Brown Swiss/ Guernsey cross. Both are beautiful and will make great family cows or would be a great addition to any herd. They are 100% grass-fed (no grain), doing well on a rotational grazing system. Contact Lisa McCrory, Earthwise Farm, Lmccrory560@gmail.com or call 802-234-5524.

Location: Bethel, VT

FEED

FOR SALE: Certified organic hay-both baleage and dry hay available. $65.00/bale. Call Dexter Knapp, 603-728-5904.

Location: Pike, New Hampshire

LAND FOR SALE OR LEASE

FOR LEASE: Certified Organic operating farm for lease. 60 milkers plus replacement. For more information, call or e-mail Raymond Tardif at 802-309-9152 or Juno2557@aol.com

Location: Swanton, VT

CUSTOM GRAZING

We are a custom grazing operation in Addison County, VT. We graze between 400-600 animals on multiple properties during the grazing season, depending on the year. This year we stocked on the lower end of that spectrum due to dry conditions, but we are now finding ourselves with more forage supply than demand. If you are short on pasture for your heifers, we'd love to take them off your hands for a few months. All our land is certified organic. Our rates are on a per head per day basis and includes minerals. We provide: secure infrastructure, high quality forages, intensive management (daily moves), written contracts, and we are fully insured. References are available. Interested, or have questions, please call Cheryl or Marc at 802-462-3759 (home) or 802-393-0306 (cell).

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

DAIRY HERD MANAGEMENT EDUCATOR - SMALL RUMINANT AND SMALL-HERD COW DAIRIES

The UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture seeks a Dairy Herd Management Educator to deliver dairy management outreach education and manage complex technical assistance projects. The educator will work directly with dairy farm business owners and managers in the areas of milk quality, dairy nutrition, animal husbandry, animal housing and facilities, and personnel management. This position will deliver individualized dairy herd management advising and prepare solutions–based management reports. This position will initiate and oversee dairy management teams to identify, evaluate and recommend implementation plans related to solving operational problems for grass-based, small ruminant, organic, transitional and small-herd cow dairies.

Bachelor's degree in agriculture, dairy science or related field, and one to three years' pasture-based experience required, as well as having basic knowledge of a wide range of dairy herd management practices, challenges, and benefits. Bilingual in English/Spanish is a plus. CONTACT: Linda Berlin EMAIL: linda.berlin@uvm.edu, WEBSITE: https://www.uvmjobs.com/postings/44869

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For more details see Page 1.

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