

NODPA News

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

May 2023

Volume 23, Issue 3

WWW.NODPA.COM

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Curious cows with facilities in the background, at Cahill Dairy.

FEATURED FARM: CAHILL DAIRY, FERNDALE, CA Owned and operated by the Cahill Family

California Organic Dairy Farming: Grazing Green at Cahill Dairy

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

“It’s a fine line between working with nature and trying to be profitable,” said Zach Cahill, a second generation dairy farmer who co-owns and manages Cahill Dairy, Inc. with his father,

Chris. “We monitor every day, to be stewards of the land, and manage employees and animals and keep them healthy and do our best for the environment.”

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Climate-Smart Commodities: Organic Milk Processors' Grants

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

The USDA’s recent grant funding program - Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities - has announced recipients from its December funding pool, which was inclusive of

projects seeking funds ranging from \$250,000 to under \$5 million. These recent recipients join previous recipients - announced in September 2022.

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Message from NODPA Co-President

I hope everyone is enjoying what I imagine is a busy spring. It sure seems to be the busiest time of the year on our farm. It's looking like we will have our spring turn out a little earlier than our normal May 5th-7th--maybe even in the month of April if the pasture keeps growing well. First turn out is always one of my favorite days of the year!

One of my favorite aspects of farming is the constant opportunity to improve and improvise and try new strategies. This year's focus has been mostly on the row crop and fertility application side of the farm. We've invested in a used camera guided cultivator hitch to help improve our row crop weed control. (Still using an old cultivator on the hitch at this point). The farm also got a new tine weeder to help control weeds pre emergence. Last year, my biggest field of corn ended up looking like a double crop of corn and mustard for much of the spring and I'm hoping to

prevent that this year and into the future! When your neighbor thinks your corn field is a soybean field it's probably time to look at the system.... I'm also trying out fall application of fertility in an effort to help reduce the weed pressure as well.

On the fertility application side, our farm had been using a local custom business to have chicken litter spread, but they have since moved and closed up shop and we were left without a good method to apply it. I found a budget friendly 80's truck-mounted lime spreader setup with large flotation tires that has worked out well so far. Having the ability to apply just before rain events and working around grazing cows has been much easier to not have to schedule this task. Also having the flotation tires has been a big plus!

Kirk Arnold, NODPA Co-President

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IS SOIL-BASED: A Fundamental Principle Underlying Organic Crop Certification

The USDA organic regulations define organic production in 7 CFR 205.2 as: “A production system that is managed in accordance with the Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) and regulations in this part to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.”

Organic production requires a plan of management that has been agreed to by the producer and the certifying agent and that includes written plans concerning all aspects of agricultural production described in the OFPA and the regulations. According to the OFPA 6513(b)(1), “An organic plan **shall contain provisions designed to foster soil fertility**, primarily through the management of the organic content of the soil through proper tillage, crop rotation, and manuring”

(emphasis added). Support for the idea that organic production is soil-based is found in the USDA’s preamble to the regulations published in 2000 which states, “The **soil fertility and crop nutrient management practice standard** in section 205.203 [of the National Organic Program Final Rule (the Rule)] **establishes the universe of allowed materials and practices**” (emphasis added). Hydroponic production was not included in that universe because hydroponic production does not manage soil fertility. 7 CFR 205.203(a-c) Soil fertility and crop nutrient management practice standard:

(a) The producer must select and implement tillage and cultivation practices that maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil and minimize soil erosion.

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— Emily Pankratz



EMILY PANKRATZ, herd manager

Holtz Ridge Grass Farm, RUDOLPH, WISCONSIN

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Emily (left) at our Central Plains Dairy Expo booth with her mother Peggy.

“We started using Udder Comfort™ a couple months ago to get better milk quality results. We keep using it because it takes edema out of udders more quickly than anything else,” says Emily Pankratz, herd manager for the 150-cow dairy at Holtz Ridge Grass Farm, Rudolph, Wisconsin, where she loves caring for the cows from calving through dryoff.

Emily stopped by our booth at Central Plains Dairy Expo after buying the donated gallon in the Dairy Forward auction. “Our protocol is to put it on after every milking (post-calving), until the cow or heifer is not high in the CMT anymore. This includes cows that may acquire mastitis or high SCC during lactation.

“What I like most about this product is how fast it works on edema. It helps blood flow and gets our heifers off to a quick start,” Emily explains.

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Climate-Smart Commodities: Organic Milk Processors' Grants

continued from page 1

The goal of the Climate-Smart Commodities funding is “to expand markets for America’s climate-smart commodities, leverage the greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart commodity production, and provide direct, meaningful benefits to production agriculture, including for small and underserved producers.” For the purpose of the Climate-Smart Commodities (CSC) grants, the USDA has defined a “climate-smart commodity” as an “agricultural commodity that is produced using farming, ranching or forestry practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon.”

CSC funded projects are required to fulfill several objectives, as per USDA’s guidelines:

- “Provide technical and financial assistance to producers to implement climate-smart production practices on a voluntary basis on working lands;
- Pilot innovative and cost-effective methods for quantification, monitoring, reporting and verification of greenhouse gas benefits;
- and Develop markets and promote the resulting climate-smart commodities.”

<https://www.usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities>

Over 25 million acres of working land is expected to be enrolled across the scope of all funded projects, which are anticipated to sequester over 60 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent throughout the life span of the projects. Some of the practices covered under the grant include: Cover crops; low-till or no-till; nutrient management; enhanced efficiency fertilizers; manure management; feed management to reduce enteric emissions; buffers, wetland and grassland management, and tree planting on working lands; agroforestry and afforestation on working lands; pasture practices, such as prescribed grazing or legume inter-seeding; and use of soil amendments, like biochar.

All projects need to meet USDA NRCS standards, and will need to be third-party certified. Producers already enrolled in NRCS programs are eligible to participate in a CSC grant-funded



At COP27 in Egypt, Secretary Vilsack showcased USDA’s farmer-focused, market-driven, voluntary, and incentive-based approach to addressing climate challenges, with the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities as the centerpiece. (Photo: ©USDA/www.fas.usda.gov)

project, but the same land can’t receive duplicate funding for the same practices. Farmers already utilizing strategies to reduce carbon and other GHG emissions, and who are enrolled in NRCS programs, can enroll more land, or adapt additional practices on the same land via participation in a CSC-funded project.

The USDA requires verification of carbon sequestration or GHG emissions reduction, and show that changes have been made from baseline data via third-party monitoring.

How will these funded projects impact Northeast organic dairy farmers? Where is the money going to be allocated, and how? What on-farm effects might dairy farmers expect? A complete list of all grants awarded, and details on what is funded and who is involved, is available here:

<https://www.usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities/projects>

In the Northeast, there are numerous grants that include dairy interests. Organic milk processors - including Maple Hill Creamery and Organic Valley - were among the grant

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Climate-Smart Commodities: Organic Milk Processors' Grants

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recipients. Stonyfield Organics will be contributing staff time and resources to two projects but did not receive any of direct funding from the USDA, but signed on as a participant in two projects.

Stonyfield Organics

Stonyfield has provided letters of support for two CSC-funded projects - Organic Valley's Carbon Insetting Program, and the other led by OpenTEAM.

"Stonyfield will be contributing our own staff time and resources to advance the work of these projects," Britt Lundgren, Senior Director of Sustainability and Government Affairs for Stonyfield Organic, said.

"Our goal is that the funds distributed to producers via CSC projects will contribute to both improved environmental outcomes at the local and landscape scale, and farm viability for small, organic dairy farmers."

As a participant in the OpenTEAM's The Alliance to Catalyze Transition Incentives through Open Networks for Climate Smart Agriculture (ACTION for CSA) program, Stonyfield will serve as potential purchasers of credits generated by any Stonyfield farmers participating in one of the regional pilot programs, including one focused in the Northeast. Stonyfield farmers who adapt specific carbon-friendly practices will earn credits, which they can then sell into a market of their choice, with Stonyfield Organics being one buyer of those credits.

In the carbon insetting project led by Organic Valley, which runs from May 2023 - spring 2028, money from Stonyfield will also be used to pay participating Organic Valley producers - at a market value - per ton of CO2 emissions sequestered or removed, as agreed upon by their cooperative members.

Through participation in either program, "organic dairy farmers will have the opportunity to be compensated for the work they do every day to steward natural resources and be

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Climate-Smart Commodities: Organic Milk Processors' Grants

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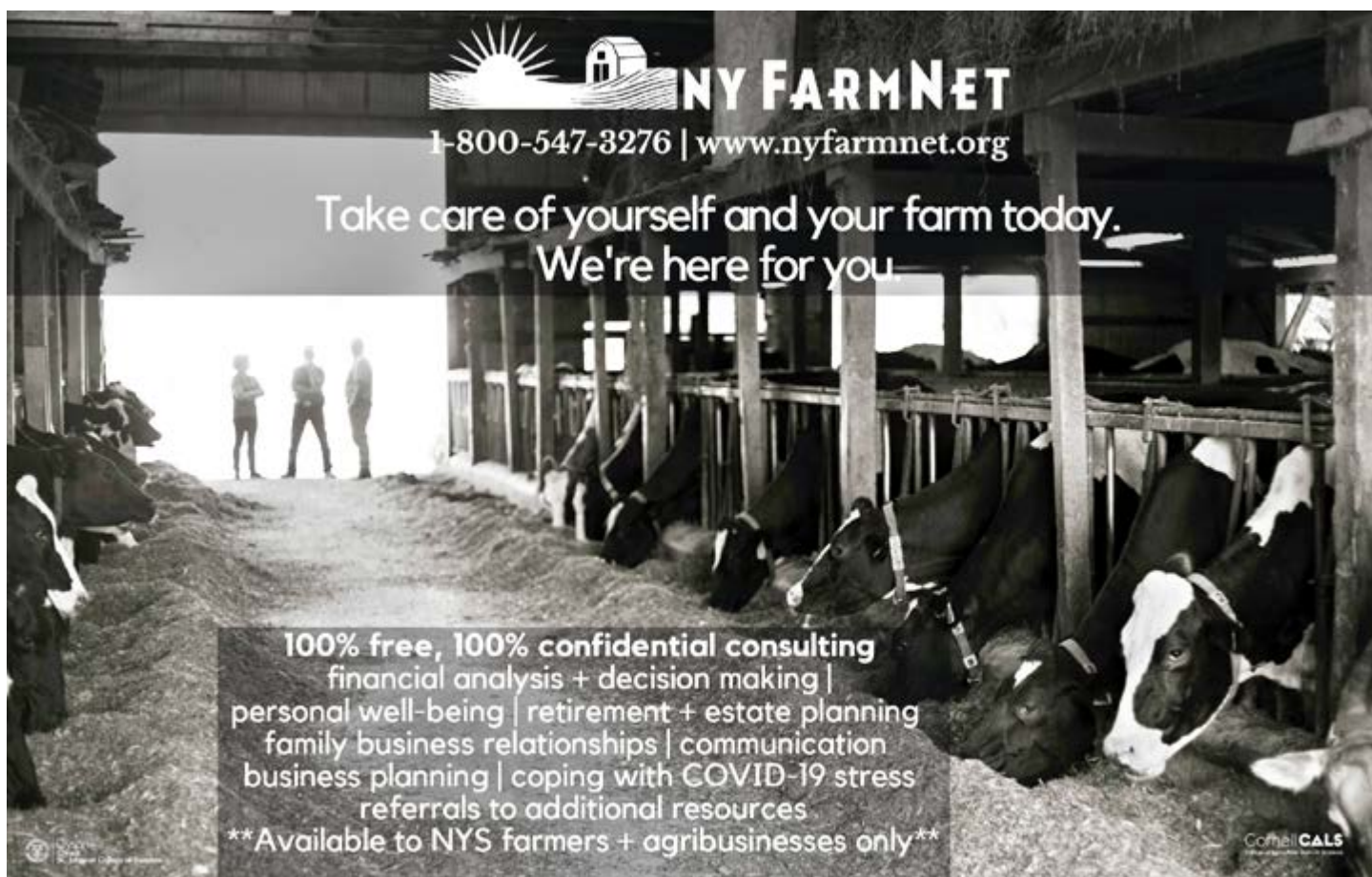
eligible for funds to further improve soil health, biodiversity, and air and water quality. Some of these actions, like on-farm energy efficiency and renewable energy adoption, should lower production costs while others like improving soil health may increase forage quality or quantity, thereby supporting animal health and milk production" Lundgren said.

Organic Valley

Organic Valley's \$24,999,735 CSC-funded CROPP Carbon Insetting Program (CCIP) is focused on carbon insetting - not offsetting. The objective is for Organic Valley dairy and egg farmers to implement climate-smart farming practices, thus reducing or removing carbon directly within the company's supply chain. This differs from carbon offsets, which allow other supply chains to benefit from carbon sequestration by purchasing carbon credits generated outside of their supply chains.

"Unlike offsetting, insetting creates a pathway for companies to invest in the ecosystems their suppliers/farmers depend on to increase resiliency and provide significant, measurable benefits to the communities surrounding the value chain. Carbon insetting results in carbon benefits directly tied to the production and sourcing of the climate-smart commodity, which consumers and buyers can reward at the point of purchase," Organic Valley said.

Projects eligible for funding under Organic Valley's CCIP include: "renewable energy-solar, improved manure management, enteric feed supplements, agroforestry, cropland and grazing enhancements," the company stated. "Additionally, climate-smart farming practices have many co-benefits beyond GHG emissions reductions and carbon removal. For example, on-farm solar electricity generation can reduce and stabilize farm energy costs, reduce labor and maintenance costs associated with fossil fuel-powered equipment and improve air quality in barns and buildings through reduced diesel



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emissions. Manure management improvements can result in labor savings by eliminating, in some cases, the need to daily haul manure. Water quality benefits can result when a dairy transitions from liquid management to dry storage, treatment and land application. When dry manure is composted and applied to pasture and croplands, yield and productivity improvements can be observed. Agroforestry-silvopasture can result in improved livestock health due to increased shade in summer months and more drought resilient pastures. Riparian buffers result in water quality improvements and increased biodiversity along streams and waterways.”

Organic Valley will pay farmers for verified practices at the time of installation, and then annually. Payments can be utilized by the farmer for practice implementation, or for capital needs. Historically underserved farmers and small family farmers will receive USDA carbon outcome payments as well.

Organic Valley’s own Powering the Good Loan Fund for on-farm renewable energy projects will be available to any participating farm pursuing renewable energy-solar projects through the CSC-funded CCIP. The company will also provide assistance for farmers in the form of helping to budget for projects, and assistance with securing grants or other cost-share

funding available to farmers interested in implementing approved CCIP projects. All Organic Valley dairy or egg farmers are eligible to participate, and funding will be distributed on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Maple Hill Creamery

“We’ve always been keen on trying to differentiate grass-fed from commodity, conventional, and organic milk as much as possible,” Phyllis Van Amburgh, co-owner with her husband, Paul, of Dharma Lea, one of the first farms to join Maple Hill Creamery founders Tim and Laura Joseph as they grew their brand. Phyllis partnered with Maple Hill Creamery on their Climate Smart Commodities grant, providing input and helping to develop a proposal that would work for the brand’s farmers.

Van Amburgh, at first, wasn’t sold on the premise behind the CSC program. She didn’t want to pay producers to convert crop land to pasture; Maple Hill’s dairy farmers have already done that, and she viewed that approach as a step backward from the regenerative philosophy of grass-fed dairy.

A lot of brainstorming on how to “use their (USDA) framework to pay our farmers for doing what they already have been

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Ask the Vet

Submitted by a NODPA News reader:

How do you prevent cross suckling?

Dayna Locitzer, DVM



Cross suckling sucks. It can lead to blind quarters and mastitis when nursed-on heifers freshen. I've seen fresh heifers come into a herd and start cross suckling on their lactating herdmates. One first calf heifer nursed on herself. That cow was quickly shipped. Managing cross suckling can feel like playing whack-a-mole. It certainly makes individual housing an attractive option. While individual housing is a viable option to raise calves, the industry is favoring group housing more and more –so it is best to tackle the problem rather than avoid it. It is important to understand natural behaviors and use them to your benefit to help prevent cross suckling.

Suckling is a natural behavior. It is instinctual and serves an important physiologic function. Once a newborn calf is standing, the first thing you want her to do is suckle. It is a

signal to us that she is ok.

When a calf suckles, the esophageal groove shifts. The esophageal groove is a fold of tissue that controls liquid flow into the stomach. When flexed, it shunts milk directly into the abomasum, avoiding the rumen and reticulum. The abomasum is the fourth chamber of the stomach. It is known as the true stomach because it is acidic like human stomachs and better suited to digest milk.

Calves also produce saliva while suckling. This saliva has enzymes and pH buffers that help with digestion during mealtime. For a calf with unlimited access to a lactating cow, either her own dam or a nurse cow, mealtime takes place about nine to twelve times a day. This means that between nine and twelve times a day, a calf is satisfying her urge to suckle and producing saliva. Dairy farmers can take advantage

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of these natural tendencies to help prevent cross suckling and grow healthier calves.

Most dairy farms bring milk to their calves two times a day. If you are experiencing cross suckling on your farm, consider feeding your calves three times a day. Though this is far from nine to twelve times, it will provide more time in the day for her to suckle. You can also do that by increasing the time she is drinking. Increased drinking time can be accomplished in two ways: by feeding more milk and by feeding milk through a nipple with an appropriately sized aperture. Calves should be fed a minimum of 10% of their body weight a day in fluid milk. This means that at about two weeks of age, they should be getting about 2 gallons of milk per day. This amount of milk will take time to consume—time that is being well spent satisfying her suckling instincts. If you use a mob feeder, you can even add warm water to it after the milk is gone so they spend more time suckling. In addition to increased nursing time, adding water also hydrates them and starts the cleaning process.

The milk will only take time to consume if the nipple on the feeding container (bottle, nipple bucket, mob feeder) has integrity. Slow feeder style nipples are the best option. Any that have cracks in them or have been manually enlarged by an inpatient human should be replaced. Slow feeder style nipples encourage an open-and-close movement of the mouth, promoting saliva production, esophageal groove adjustment, and slow drinking. They also help prevent aspiration. Though pail feeding has proven to be a safe way to feed calves, they are not satisfying their suckle needs. It has proven to increase the incidence of cross suckling compared with animals drinking milk via a nipple.

When manually feeding, there is a limit to the amount of times and quantity of milk that calves can be fed. To counteract these limits, you can provide the calves with a nipple attached to a bottle filled with a concentrate like grain or alfalfa pellets—for example, a Braden Bottle. This provides them with a productive object to suckle on. When milk is not available, they can nurse on this, potentially more attractive than their penmate's immature udder or a pendulous umbilicus.

Cross suckling behavior characteristically occurs at a predictable time: after milk feeding. Knowing this timing can help you prevent it. After a milk meal, they are

in a mad search for something else to put in their mouth, still craving the action of suckling. One tactic is to tie calves up during milk feeding and for about fifteen minutes after they are finished in order to prevent them from approaching their penmates. If you watch your calves closely, you'll often see that there is one instigator of this bad behavior. If she is removed, either to a pen by herself or culled, the other calves may drop the cross suckling habit.

Lastly, a point on nose rings. The best nose rings have a means to block calves' mouths from being able to suckle. Some nose rings have spikes on them, which may frustrate the calf being suckled on and lead them to walk away. But nose rings often fall out, or the calves figure out how to nurse with them on.

The nose ring method has varied success. But to be honest, all the tactics I've described have varied success. I'm sure many of you have tried one or more of these methods, or even a combination of them. Cross suckling can be a real battle. For a calf, suckling is very important when they are drinking milk. It's when they suckle outside of mealtime that it becomes a nuisance. A multipronged approach with consideration of the physiology behind suckling is your best bet for stamping out this habit. ♦

Do you have a question for Dr. Locitzer, or an area you'd like her to focus on in future issue? Please send them to the NODPA News editor, noraowens@comcast.net who will share them with her.



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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Pay and Feed Prices May 2023

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) reported January and February 2023 estimated organic fluid product sales. Sales of organic fluid milk products in January 2023 were 258 million pounds, **up 4.8 percent from January 2022, and in February 2023 they were 218 million pounds, down 3.1 per cent from February 2022.** In January 2023, fluid organic whole milk sales of 125 million pounds were up 10.2 percent compared to a year earlier. Reduced fat milk (2%) sales were 85 million pounds, up 1.1 percent from the previous year. This increase marked the highest monthly volume of fluid organic milk sales for one month except for early 2021 where sales were skewed because of the COVID pandemic. As a reminder, the December 2022 organic fluid sales were 9% lower than December 2021, so this may be a correction of data. February 2023 organic whole milk fluid sales were 106 million pounds, up 2.2 percent from February 2022. The organic reduced-fat milk fluid sales in February 2023 were 243 million pounds, down 7.2 percent from February 2022. The average retail price for organic milk in January 2023 was \$4.81 per half gallon, and in January 2022 it was \$4.26.

The March 2023 retail surveys of selected supermarkets in 30 US cities by USDA, identifies the retail prices of half gallon of organic whole milk. The prices ranged from a low of \$3.99 in multiple cities to a high of \$6.49 in Pittsburgh, PA. The simple average price, \$4.79, for March 2023 is lower than the previous month.

In a recent report from a livestock auction in New York, organic cull cows traded slightly below the conventional cows in March 2023. The average high price for the conventional cull cows was \$1.12 per hundredweight, compared to an average high price of \$0.92 per hundredweight for organic cull cows. The average price for conventional cull cows was \$0.80 per hundredweight, compared to an average of \$0.88 per hundredweight for organic cull cows.

Federal Milk Market Order 1, in New England, reports utilization of types of organic milk by pool plants. During February 2023, fluid organic whole milk utilization totaled 16.73 million pounds, up from 16.09 million pounds the previous year. The utilization of fluid organic reduced fat milk,

14.92 million pounds, decreased from 17.56 million pounds a year ago. In March 2023, the fluid whole milk utilization totaled 19.187 million pounds, an increase of 3.81 million pounds from March 2022, or approximately 27%. For fluid organic reduced fat milk, the 18.19 million pounds in fluid utilization in March 2023 was an increase from the 16.19 million in March 2022.

Mercaris supplies data on the average pay price for organic milk over the spot price. There was not a significant amount of trading on the Spot Market in February 2023. Processors and buyers report that organic milk is short in the Northeast.

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	Jan-23	2023 Year to date	Jan-22	2022 Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	125	125	10.2%	10.2%
Flavored Whole milk	1	1	-60.9%	-60.9%
Organic Reduced Fat Milk (2%)	85	85	1.1%	1.1%
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	27	27	1.3%	1.3%
Organic Fat Free Milk Skim	13	13	-6.8%	-6.8%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	7	7	8.7%	8.7%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	132	132	0.9%	0.9%
Total Organic Milk Products	258	258	4.8%	4.8%

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	Feb-23	2023 Year to date	Feb-22	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	106	231	2.20%	6.4%
Flavored Whole milk	1	1	-61.60%	-61.20%
Organic Reduced Fat Milk (2%)	70	155	-6.10%	-2.3%
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	22	49	-8.80%	-3.5%
Organic Fat Free Milk Skim	13	26	-20.30%	-13.9%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	6	13	24.60%	15.7%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	0	1	106%	262.5%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	111	243	-7.20%	-3.1%
Total Organic Milk Products	218	476	-3.20%	1.00%

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Update on action by USDA to provide Targeted Relief to organic dairy farm families

The details of the USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) newly announced Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (OD-MAP), which has funding of \$100 million from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), have become clearer over the last few months. The program will cover 75 percent of projected 2023 marketing costs for eligible organic dairy producers - targeting small and mid-sized operations. The payments will be paid in dollars per cwt based on 2022 milk production, and FSA will be using USDA's AMS estimated marketing dollars on a per

hundredweight basis with a 5-million-pound cap. The costs will include estimates of milk haulage, check off dollars, and other deductions based on conventional data provided by the Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) because there is a shortage of organic data. Since the program will be using the CCC funds, the money can only be paid for projected future marketing dollars. It cannot be used for loss of income in previous years. The initial projections are that producers will receive approximately 82 cent/cwt, but this may change slightly. The program is currently going through the approval process that all federal programs must follow. At the time of writing (4/24/2023), it is at the USDA Office of General Council (OGC) and after that will have to be

approved by the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), Office of Management and Budget (OMB). From there it will be published on the Federal Register with an immediate starting date. To receive the money, producers will need to visit their local FSA office with proof of organic certification and 2022 production records. The local FSA office will upload the information and verification of organic status to the FSA database, with payment follow-

UTILIZATION OF ORGANIC FLUID MILK PRODUCTS AND CREAM BY POOL PLANTS IN FEDERAL MILK MARKETING ORDER 1 (Million pounds)						
	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2023	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2022	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2021	Fluid retail Organic Milk 2020	Increase/Decrease of 2023 over 2022	Increase/Decrease of 2022 over 2021
JANUARY	37.00	29.14	31.32	23.93	27%	-7%
FEBRUARY	31.65	33.65	31.56	26.69	-6%	7%
MARCH	37.37	31.56	31.87	27.90	19%	-1%
APRIL		33.23	28.97	29.35		15%
MAY		30.49	29.72	28.25		3%
JUNE		31.53	28.41	26.90		11%
JULY		29.44	25.50	26.70		15%
AUGUST		32.12	27.18	24.70		18%
SEPTEMBER		35.00	30.26	29.70		16%
OCTOBER		34.83	29.47	25.78		18%
NOVEMBER		31.13	31.07	24.47		0.18%
DECEMBER		33.78	31.36	28.13		8%
ANNUAL	68.65	385.90	356.68	322.50		8%

U.S. Organic Dairy Prices (U.S. Dollars per CWT)		
Date	Spot Fluid Milk Price	Fluid Milk Pay Price
Mar-22	\$ 33.21	\$ 28.54
Apr-22	\$ 32.72	\$ 29.59
May-22	\$ 33.88	\$ 28.77
Jun-22	\$ 35.88	\$ 29.05
Jul-22	\$ 35.88	\$ 28.37
Aug-22	\$ 37.05	\$ 29.66
Sep-22	\$ 37.05	\$ 29.66
Oct-22	\$ 36.08	\$ 29.66
Nov-22	\$ 36.08	\$ 29.66
Dec-22	\$ 35.15	\$ 31.60
Jan-23	\$ 34.98	\$ 31.60
Data from Mercatus March 2023		

ing 'quickly.' USDA expects that the program will be available by the middle of May 2023. Organic Farmers Association (OFA) has been facilitating a weekly National Organic Dairy meeting including NODPA, WODPA, MOFGA, NOFA VT, NOFA NY and individual organic dairy farmers from the Midwest supported by regional members of Congress, to present a common approach in advocating for the program. By monitoring its progress through several meetings with the USDA, the group has made it plain that this is a relatively small amount of money for the large losses sustained by producers. While we do not expect that the payments will make the producer's whole, we are urging USDA to immediately issue a second round that producers can instantly apply for as the program has already been through the approval

continued on page 14

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Pay and Feed Prices

continued from page 13

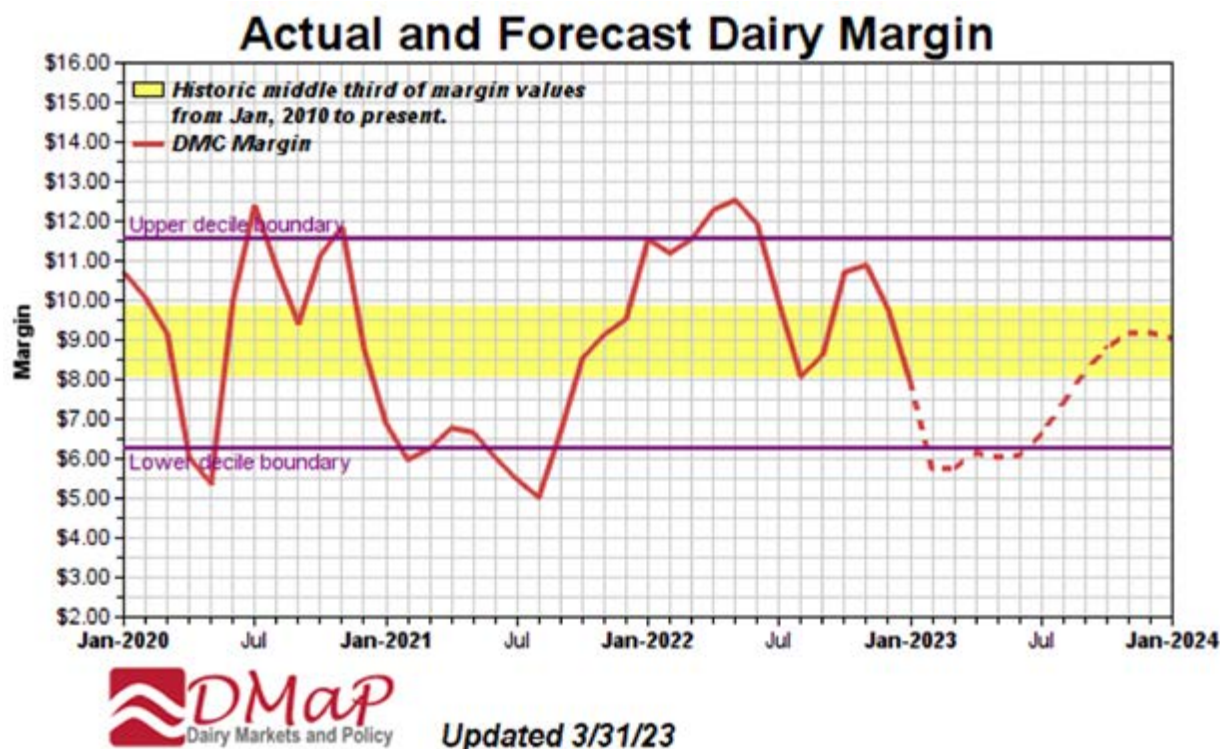
process. We will be advocating that, between the two rounds of payment, we will be able to get the total payment closer to \$2/cwt. Not enough but a payment that might cover a few months of winter feed. There are separate state initiatives, both Vermont, initiated by NOFA VT, and Maine, proposed by MOFGA, have had proposals before their annual budget committees for targeted relief for organic dairy producers in 2023.

In 2022, the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program made payments for only two of the twelve months, but it will pay an average of \$1.56/cwt for \$9.50/cwt coverage for January 2023 and February milk covered at the Tier I, \$9.50 level will receive an indemnity payment of \$3.31. The January margin was \$7.94/cwt, \$1.82 lower than December's and the February 2023 margin was \$6.19. A two-month drop of \$3.10/cwt in the U.S. average all-milk price, to \$21.60/cwt, accounted for most of the margin drop. A rise in the soybean meal price accounted for about two-thirds of the remaining margin fall, but higher corn and premium alfalfa prices contributed lesser amounts as well. Available forecasts from the DMAP (Dairy Markets and Policy) indicate that the monthly DMC margins will remain below \$9.50/cwt until September and average just below \$8/cwt for this entire calendar year. For the average size organic dairy (120 cows) they would earn approximately \$37,000 from DMC in 2023.

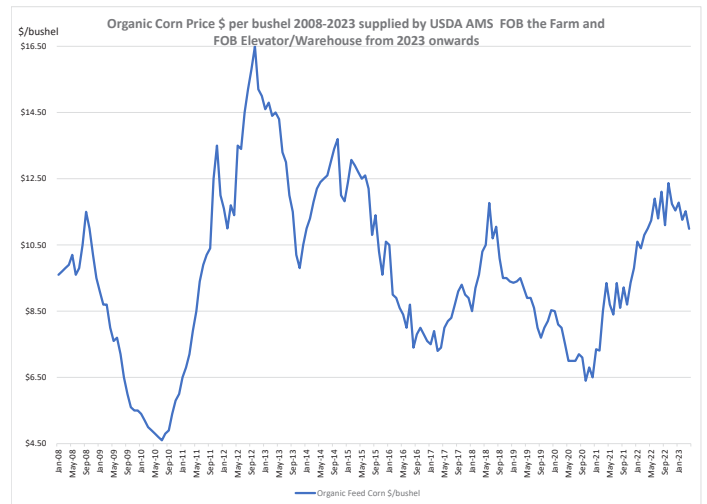
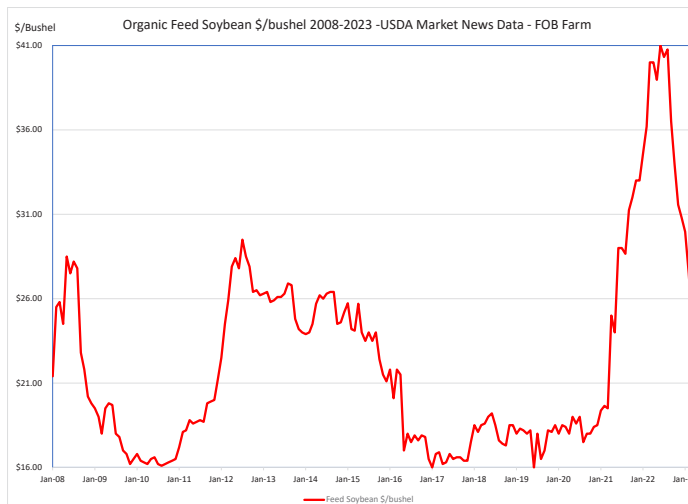
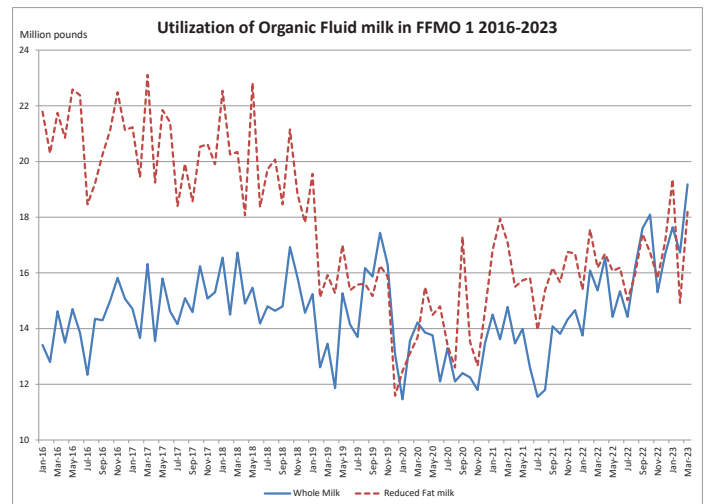
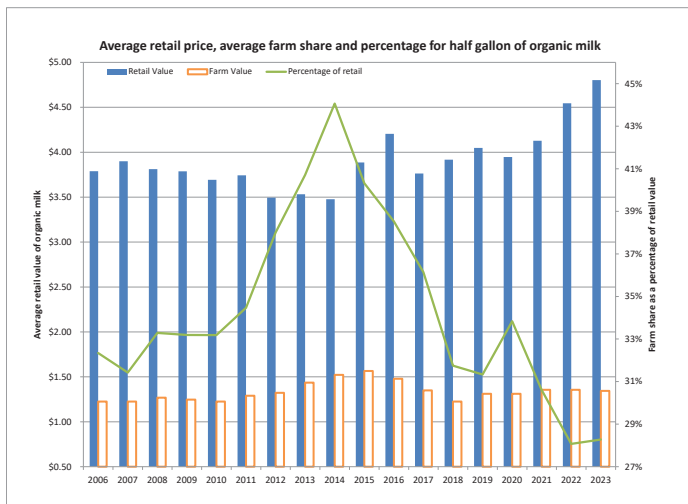
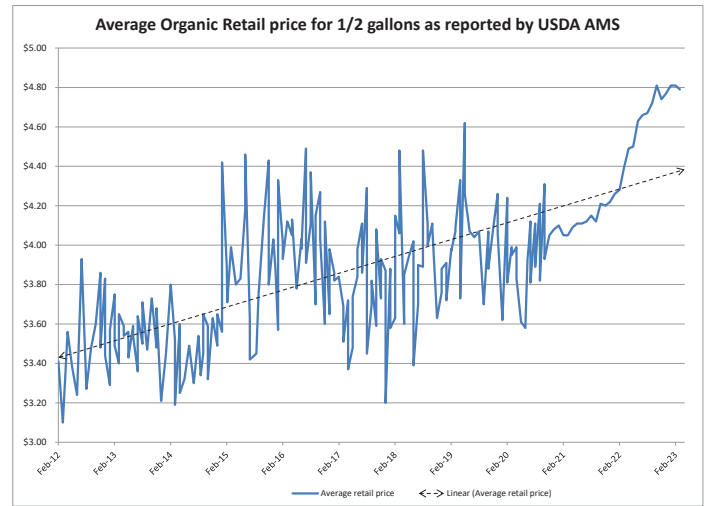
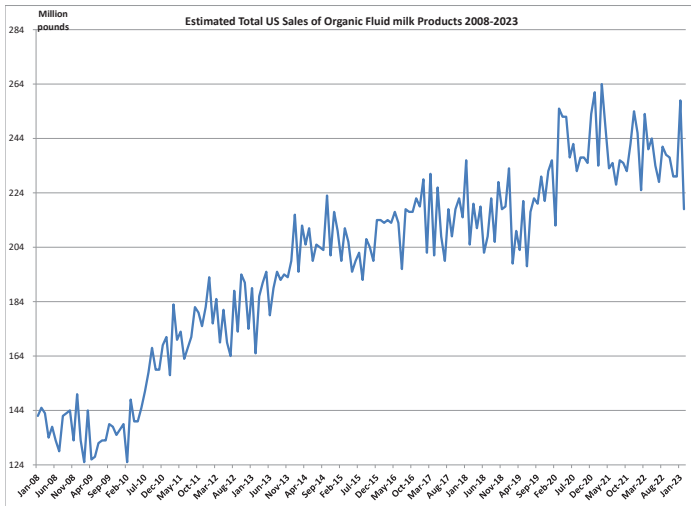
Maple Hill Creamery is actively seeking more milk and has had two pay price increases plus a promised distribution to their producers from their Climate Smart USDA grant of \$20 million – 'Growing the Supply and Market for Climate-Smart Grass-Fed Organic Dairy via Maple Hill Creamery.' For more details on how this will work with the grants to CROPP Cooperative (\$25 million) and Danone North America (\$70 million) see article on page 1.

Reports and anecdotes from producers report that CROPP Cooperative is looking for more milk, especially from small to mid-size dairies, but with no promise of an increase in pay price that we have been informed about.

USDA AMS reports that organic feed corn was \$11.19/bushel FOB the farm in March 2023 and \$10.99 in April 2023. Mercaris reports that organic whole and cracked corn imports remained below last year's levels, despite the return of organic cracked corn imports in February. Combined U.S. imports of organic whole and cracked corn reached 191,000 MT through March of the 2022/23 marketing year, down 19% year to year. Organic feed soybean was trading at \$24.59/bushel FOB the farm in March 2023 and \$25.12/bushel in April 2023. Organic soybean meal is averaging \$1,255 per short ton (ST) during the first quarter 2023. Total organic soybean imports through March of the 2022/23 marketing year were up 6% from the prior marketing year at 125,000 MT. ♦



ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS



The 23rd Annual NODPA Field Days

SAVE THE DATES! Farming with Financial Clarity, Confidence and Optimism (Without Digging the Hole Any Deeper)

The 23rd NODPA Field Days • September 28 & 29, 2023

Evangelical Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall • 200 E. Logan Street, Reedsville, PA 17084

All producers want to feel confident and optimistic about their farming operations but they don't always, given their current challenges. The 23rd Annual NODPA Field Days, titled *Farming with Financial Clarity, Confidence and Optimism (Without Digging the Hole Any Deeper)*, is all about acknowledging those challenges and offering strategies to realistically plan for your future.

We are excited to announce that Ted LeBow, the co-founder and managing partner at Kitchen Table Consultants and Taste Profit Marketing, Bala Cynwyd, PA, will be our keynote speaker. Ted LeBow says that he and his team have worked with hundreds of farmers over the last 15 years who come to them feeling stuck. Sometimes they wonder why they are making a profit but are

always strapped for cash. Others tell them they are drowning under quarterly losses or that the bank won't give them the financing they need to operate. "One of the main drawbacks for improving profits is rooted in a lack of focus on the financial side of their business, so they can't see what they can do to fix the situation," he notes. In his talk, Ted will show you how important, easy and rewarding a focus on financials can be.

Continuing with a focus on the financial and decision-making side of business, this year's educational program will include workshops on the Foundations of Profitability in Organic Dairy, with Alvin Peachey focusing on the key principles of profitability, from understanding the role of soil and animal health to important decision-making, and the practical implication of those principles. Alvin Peachey is an Amish organic dairy farmer and Keystone Bio-Ag consultant from central Pennsylvania. Over the course of more than a decade, Alvin has grown his operation to 90 100% grass-fed cows on 92 acres, implementing regenerative practices that flip the script of the status quo for dairy farmers.

Roman Stoltzfoos will present the 6 Principles of Soil Health, with a focus on where profit comes from and how to increase it every year. Roman Stoltzfoos, an early advocate for organic production started his organic journey in 1987 and was one of the first four organic milk producers in the country. He is a senior partner in his family's Springwood Dairy and owner of Springwood Poultry in Kinzer, PA. Roman remains an active and leading voice in organic production.

Dr. Cynthia Lankenau, DVM will focus on how holistic cow care is a key component in your farm's success. Dr. Lankenau is a holistic mixed animal veterinarian who is the owner operator of the Holistic Center For Veterinary Care, Colden, N.Y. She graduated from Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine and is certified in acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic and herbal medicine. Since 1991, she has been exclusively using alternative modalities. Dr. Lankenau is an internationally renowned veterinary herbal medicine and homeopathic specialist who enthusiastically shares her vast knowledge with all her audiences.

THIS MARK MATTERS.

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

The 23rd Annual **NODPA Field Days**

A panel of farmers, moderated by Ted LeBow, will discuss what profitability looks like on their farms, and will include the challenges and opportunities they each face every day as they strive for a balanced lifestyle and successful farm.

This year's NODPA Field Days will be located in central Pennsylvania, at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall, 200 East Logan Street, Reedsville, PA. The educational program begins on Thursday following registration and lunch. There is a pre-meeting farm tour at David Peachey's farm in Bellville, PA, for those arriving by Thursday morning. Following Friday's educational program and lunch, we will travel to Alvin Peachey's farm, Allensville, PA where he will showcase how he puts the foundations of profitability in organic dairy into practice.

There will be plenty of opportunities to connect with old friends and to meet and learn from new ones. During Thursday's Social Hour, everyone can visit the trade show, made up of the NODPA Field Days Sponsors and Supporters. Over refreshments, you can learn all about the products and services that they offer to enhance your business.

There will be an awesome local catering team serving delicious homegrown and homemade food for your enjoyment, including Thursday's banquet, which will be followed by Ted LeBow's keynote presentation.

There will be much more information in the coming months, especially in the July NODPA News and online, www.nodpa.com. Information for sponsors and supporters, including trade show information will be going out by mid-May. If you'd like information beforehand, or if you have any other questions, please contact Nora Owens, NODPA Field Days Coordinator, at 413-772-0444 or at noraowens@comcast.net.

For now, mark your calendars and plan to join us for the 23rd NODPA Field Days on Thursday and Friday, September 28th and 29th! Remember, it's never too early to look for lodging if you are coming from a distance. You will receive better rates and have more options, too. There are hotels in Reedsville and surrounding communities, and there are a number of Air BnB's in the area, too. ♦

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ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Raw Milk Quality and Bacterial Counts Matter

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

Bacterial populations in raw milk impact the finished dairy product. That was the message provided to attendees at the recent NOFA-NY Annual Conference by Nicole Martin, Ph.D., Associate Director at Cornell University's Milk Quality Improvement Program. Bacterial populations found in raw milk can survive and thrive in finished dairy products, reducing shelf life, causing undesirable odors and flavors and causing spoilage.

"Everything that happens at the farm level can have potential implications on the finished product," Martin said, so the topic is of the utmost importance to dairy farmers themselves. "What are the implications of these organisms in raw milk and in finished products?"

Microbes and Milk Quality

There are a wide range of spoilage microorganisms that impact organic raw milk, some of which happen in the cow udder, and others that can get picked up along the way, including in the finished product. Many of the microbes can and do occur even when milk is pasteurized.

Bacterial populations in raw milk can vary widely, particularly in their ability to tolerate a wide range of environments.

Temperature and salt levels are some factors which affect bacterial survival. And just as with soil, pH matters! Gram positive bacteria, particularly those that form endospores, can withstand pH ranging from basic to acid.

Endospores - formed by some bacteria under adverse conditions - aren't killed by pasteurization and are very difficult to kill with sanitizers, radiation or drying. These endospores survive through the processing steps, and then are capable of returning to a vegetative growth stage when conditions are again conducive to the bacteria's growth. Gram positive spore forming bacteria are one of two main groups of raw milk bacteria which impact fluid milk, cheese, yogurt and other processed dairy products.



Photo: © iStock

Gram positive spore forming bacteria cause sweet curdling, which appears as chunky clumps in milk, and occur due to protein breakdown and coagulation. In the absence of oxygen, anaerobic spores, such as *Clostridium*, produce gases which impact flavor and cause odors in semi-hard and hard aged cheeses.

Because these bacterial spores are extremely resistant to pasteurization, they also find their way into the powdered milk supply, where they accumulate. As the milk proteins in powdered milk are highly concentrated, the spores will cause issues when the milk powders are re-constituted and used in beverages or bakery products. For this reason, there are stringent regulations for bacteria levels in dry dairy powders.

Psychrophilic bacteria are the other main problem, and can grow and thrive in the low temperatures needed to hold dairy products. Included in this group are some *Pseudomonas* species which can produce enzymes that are capable of surviving in milk even if the organism itself is killed during pasteurization. These enzymes "cause a number of different issues" in dairy products, including decreased yields in cheesemaking, and flavor, odor, and texture defects in cheese, yogurt and fluid milk, Martin said. These enzymes therefore can cause issue even in milk that has undergone ultra-high-temperature processing (UHT). The longer the product shelf life, the more issues occur.

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Psychrophilic bacteria cause problems when; they are present in high quantities in raw milk; if milk is not properly cooled; milk is being held for long times, even if temperatures are cool. For pasteurized milk, the limit for psychrophilic bacteria is 100,000 colony-forming units (cfu)/ml as per the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO).

Farm Impacts

The farm environment influences what bacteria are present in raw milk. Recognizing the most important bacteria in raw milk, and effectively controlling these at the farm level, is important. Farm environmental factors which impact raw milk quality include: the presence of mastitis in the herd; milking hygiene; cleanliness of the equipment; water quality; and the handling of the raw milk.

The environment inside and outside of the udder is a causative factor in milk bacterial counts. When cows have mastitis, they can shed a large number of bacteria at once. Mastitis can occur if the cows' environment is not sanitary. Bedding that is not clean and dry, muddy conditions, and cows with damaged teats are risk factors for mastitis. The proportion of the herd

with mastitis, the organism causing the outbreak, and the stage of infection all affect the somatic cell count of the milk.

Milking hygiene that is inconsistent or not thoroughly performed will increase the amount of bacteria present in raw milk. Using soiled gloves, dirty towels, or incompletely removing dirt from the teat will all increase the bacterial count in the bulk tank.

"The consistent and thorough removal of material from the teat end," causes a decrease of more than 40 percent in the number of bacterial spores in the bulk tank, Martin said.

The teat end condition is also important. Thick, rough teat ends do not allow the canal to properly close, leading to bacterial exposure. Proper letdown, pre-dipping, forestripping and fully drying all teats; properly attaching and detaching the milking unit; post-dipping; and keeping cows standing until the teat closes 30 - 60 minutes after milking can all provide protection from bacterial infection and spore accumulation by keeping teats healthy.

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ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Raw Milk Quality and Bacterial Counts Matter

continued from page 19

Forestripping physically removes some spores from the canal. It also leads to unimodal milk curves. This means that low flow times, which can damage teats, are minimized. As kickoffs increase, the number of spores in milk increase due to exposure of the milking unit and the cow to contamination. Teat issues, discomfort or improperly attached milking units can cause kickoffs.

Organic bedding has been found to have more bacterial spore contamination, even in its unused state, than inorganic bedding. Research has shown that more frequent addition of clean bedding materials to stalls decreases spore numbers in the bulk tank, and that bedding is a primary factor in bacterial contamination found on teat ends.

In situations where spore count in bedding is high, hygiene in milking parlor teat preparation can keep final counts in raw milk low.

Milking equipment also plays a role in bacterial counts. Biofilms can form as milk travels through the equipment and attaches itself in hard-to-clean places. Rubber parts that aren't intact can harbor bacteria and allow biofilms to form readily. Preventative maintenance of equipment is required. Once biofilms form, they are notoriously difficult to eradicate.

Not only the milking equipment, but the bulk tank itself, needs to be cleaned and sanitized regularly, as the bulk tank environment can increase bacterial populations, too. Milk must be cooled quickly, and held at temperatures below 45EF - and preferably below 40EF - to prevent rampant bacterial growth in raw milk.

Spores in the bulk tank can occur due to poor overall herd management. If cows are breathing low-quality air or drinking water or consuming feed with high levels of bacterial contamination, they can then harbor the bacteria in their milk, increasing the amount of spores found in the cows' milk itself. Add to that the amount of spores originating from improperly



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ORGANIC PRODUCTION

cleaned and sanitized milking equipment, or from dirty teats during milking, and bacterial counts can be significant.

Raw Milk Testing

There are numerous types of testing which can help determine the quality of raw milk, and how it will impact the finished product. Total bacteria count (TBC) provides an indicator of quality. High quality raw milk should have a TBC of less than 5,000 cfu/ml, much lower than the 100,000 cfu/ml required by the PMO.

The TBC reflects the hygienic practices in place on the farm, and is impacted by mastitis, milking hygiene, equipment sanitization, water quality and the handling of the raw milk. It is also referred to as a “standard plate count.”

Limitations of TBC testing occur as these tests typically only detect aerobic and mesophilic bacteria. But it is the psychrophilic bacteria which produce heat-resistant enzymes that cause problems in finished dairy products. To detect these, flow cytometry (FCM), which enumerates the cells found in raw milk, is needed.

Preliminary Incubation count (PI) testing helps to predict keeping quality of the milk, and it is a measure of sanitary production practices. It is predictive of finished product quality only if the milk is held under abuse conditions.

Numerous other tests exist to test milk quality. For dairy farmers, the most important test is TBC, which is most indicative of on-farm risk and of raw milk quality, Martin said.

In order to best monitor on-farm raw milk quality, a baseline TBC should be established for the farm. Periodic tests will then detect any movement from the baseline. If the farm's TBC is exceeded, then other milk quality tests can be used to troubleshoot the issue and help to determine where the risk has originated.

The implementation of farm best management practices to decrease the overall bacteria counts in the raw milk itself, and those associated with environmental contamination of the raw milk during and after milking, ensures that organic dairy farmers can enhance both fluid milk and processed dairy product quality.

“It really is a lot of different management practices which go into making that high quality product. All of these things have to work together,” Martin said. “We’re really doing everything to prevent the entry of those bacteria from the environment into the raw milk.” ♦

OEFFA Launches Member-Driven Crop Insurance Platform

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) recently launched its Crop Insurance Platform and video, featuring interviews with 15 farmers about their experiences with crop insurance. Centered around OEFFA member proposals to make crop insurance fair, functional, and informed, the Platform includes recommended farm bill actions and changes to the crop insurance subsidy rate brackets. If implemented, the crop insurance program would better support small-scale, organic, beginning, and transitioning farmers, address disparities in crop insurance benefits and utilization, and save an estimated \$5 billion over 10 years.

Learn more about OEFFA's efforts to make crop insurance more fair, functional, and informed at action.oeffa.com/crop-insurance-platform.

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FEATURED FARM

**CAHILL DAIRY,
FERNDALE, CA***continued from page 1*

The Cahills - Zach and wife Kayla, along with his mother, Lea, and father Chris - live and work on their certified organic dairy farm in the town of Ferndale, located in Humboldt County, California. Ferndale, bordered by the Pacific Ocean and “behind a redwood curtain” of dense forests on the other three sides, is home to 39 organic dairy farms, and one conventional dairy, Zach said. The largest dairy in Ferndale milks about 1500 cows, while the smallest herds are under 100 head. Cahill Dairy has 500 milking head.

The family farm’s roots began with Chris, who entered a business agreement with a retiring dairy farmer, making it possible to begin the Cahill Dairy. He started with 40 cows and 40 acres of land in the 1990s. When certified organic



The Cahills - Zach and wife Kayla, along with his mother, Lea, and father Chris.



Cahill Dairy grazing pasture and cows.

FEATURED FARM

dairy farming boomed in the early 2000s, Cahill Dairy, along with almost every dairy in the area jumped onboard. While the premiums were a great incentive, organic just made sense. The Cahills were already maximizing dry matter intake from pasture with rotational grazing, and certifying as organic didn't require a lot of changes. The primary crop on Cahill Dairy has always been perennial pasture.

Grazing the milking herd is standard practice in Ferndale, where grass is the most valuable feedstock. The area is so remote that purchasing feed is not cost-effective. Luckily, the climate is very conducive to growing grass, and pastures rarely require any type of reseeding or renovation, with the natural grasses and clovers providing abundant, nutritious forages.

"We don't get the heat units or day lengths to grow many other crops," Zach explained.

Summer temperatures average around 65 degrees Fahrenheit, while winters rarely go below freezing. With an average of 45 inches of rainfall annually, conditions are almost perfect for growing grass. Grazing cows stay comfortable, too, as heat stress is not a concern. The mild winters keep infrastructure costs low, with out-wintered cows keeping housing costs at a minimum. Ferndale is in a valley, which is bisected by one main river artery, the Eel River. The entire basin sits on a large aquifer which is used to pump groundwater for irrigation.

The biggest weather-related concern is flooding. The Cahill's barns and houses are all elevated three feet above ground level, to keep them from being regularly inundated. The ground here consists of deep, fertile soils, due to sediment deposited from the regular flooding of the river which runs through the farm. River banks on the farm are planted with willows to shade the water and reduce stream bank erosion, and retaining walls shore up the banks in some places as well.

They don't have issues with erosion or runoff, as the ground is all covered with grass. When they do plow a minimal amount of acreage for corn, it is done very early in the spring, and after harvest the ground is planted to winter cover crops, or back to pasture. And the corn ground is almost always on higher elevation land.

The grazing season here runs from mid-March to late October, and the milking herd, which grazes on 200 acres of irrigated pasture, typically receives 40 - 50 percent dry matter intake (DMI) from pasture grazing. The 150 acres dedicated to grazing heifers and dry cows is unirrigated.

Feed production is primarily silage and baleage, consisting of rye grass and clovers. Dry hay is difficult to make, due to the ever-present fog and the lack of heat. Growing corn is challenging, but they do plant corn for silage, using the shortest day corn they can obtain.

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FEATURED FARM

**CAHILL DAIRY,
FERNDALE, CA***continued from page 23*

The milking herd is fed a total mixed ration every day at the feed bunk. Less TMR is needed during the grazing season, as pasture is the primary feed for the herd. Lower quality hay is purchased for dry cows.

“Our pasture is our best feed, our cheapest feed. And the cows go out and harvest it,” Zach said. “Whatever they don’t get off pasture, they get from rolled corn, barley and mineral blend,” plus alfalfa, grass and corn silages, and baleage.

Grazing Plan

The farm consists of 750 acres, both owned and leased. Two hundred of those acres support the milking herd’s grazing on irrigated pastures. Another 250 acres are used solely for feed production, with the remaining acreage used for grazing youngstock.

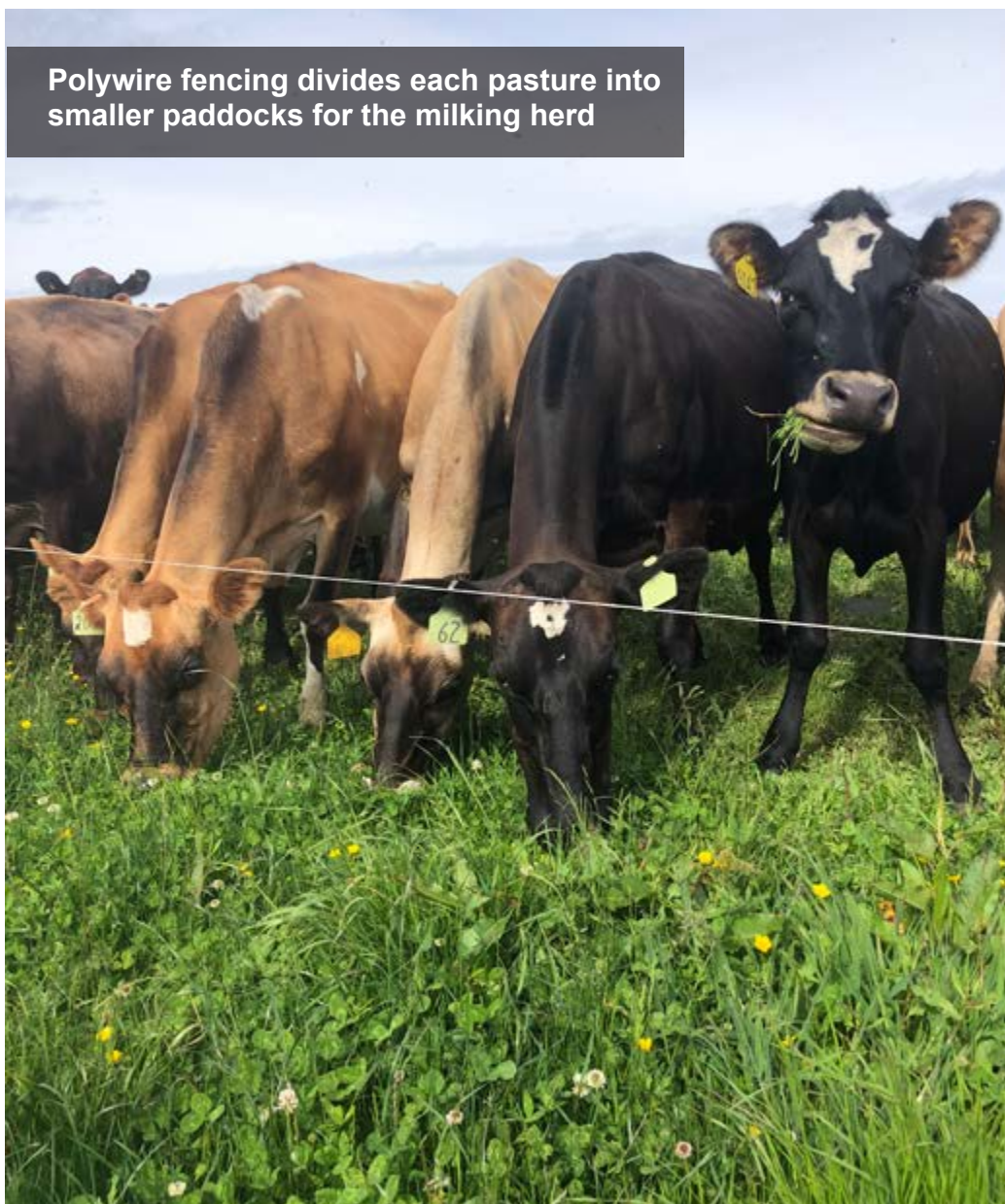
The dairy has enough land to support grazing for up to 700 milking cows, as well as the facilities to do so. But it doesn’t make economic sense to overstock. Although they are not looking to grow, they will do so strategically when warranted. This year, a family friend is selling his milking herd, and they will be purchasing his cows, and will run dry cows or heifers and raise feed on his acreage.

“We don’t go out looking, but do buy if the cows fit our criteria,” Zach said. “If we increase milk cows, we have to feed them. We need the land base to grow local feeds. We are so reliant on producing our own feeds.”

There are three traveling irrigation guns, and two pumps which run 20 hours per day to water the pastures. The guns are moved twice per day, every morning and evening. The rotation of the irrigation guns depends upon where the cows are going to graze, and where water is needed. Every 10 - 14 days, each piece of ground is re-irrigated.

The milking herd grazes in each pasture, which is further divided into smaller paddocks by temporary polywire fencing, for four or five days. The fields are clipped for thistles and irrigated immediately after the cows graze a paddock. Fields are irrigated once or twice before being ready to re-graze. Typically a pasture is irrigated 10 days after the cows graze, and then again two days prior to the cows moving back onto it, to give the grass “a last shot of re-growth” before being grazed again.

Polywire fencing divides each pasture into smaller paddocks for the milking herd



FEATURED FARM

Each pasture is typically between eight and 12 acres in size, and is divided into four to six paddocks. Every 28 to 35 days, the paddocks are re-grazed. They don't back fence the paddocks, but the cows typically stay together on the fresh pastures, and over-grazing is not a problem. The cows graze in a field up-close to the barn at night, so the morning milkers don't have to fetch them in from distant pastures. After milking, they are moved further out.

Heifers are kept on a separate ranch, where they graze exclusively. Young stock graze as a group, while breeding-age heifers are separated out onto pasture with a bull. During the winter, the heifers are pastured on some hay ground. Weaned heifers are turned out onto pasture at four or five months old.

Calves are housed in individual hutches until they are three to five weeks of age, at which time they are then moved to group pen, and weaned at three months of age. Individual hutches are placed on tall grass, which serves as bedding, and moved every week to fresh grass. The group pens are located outside, under a loafing shed, so ventilation is not a problem.

Newborn calves are fed colostrum twice after birth, and are tagged immediately at birth. They also receive Inforce 3® Dairy Intranasal vaccine, as well as Calfguard®. Calves are fed with milk straight from the milk line. They receive hay and grain once they are in the group pens. They use organic supplements and additives to bolster calf immune response, and focus on keeping the bedding clean and dry.

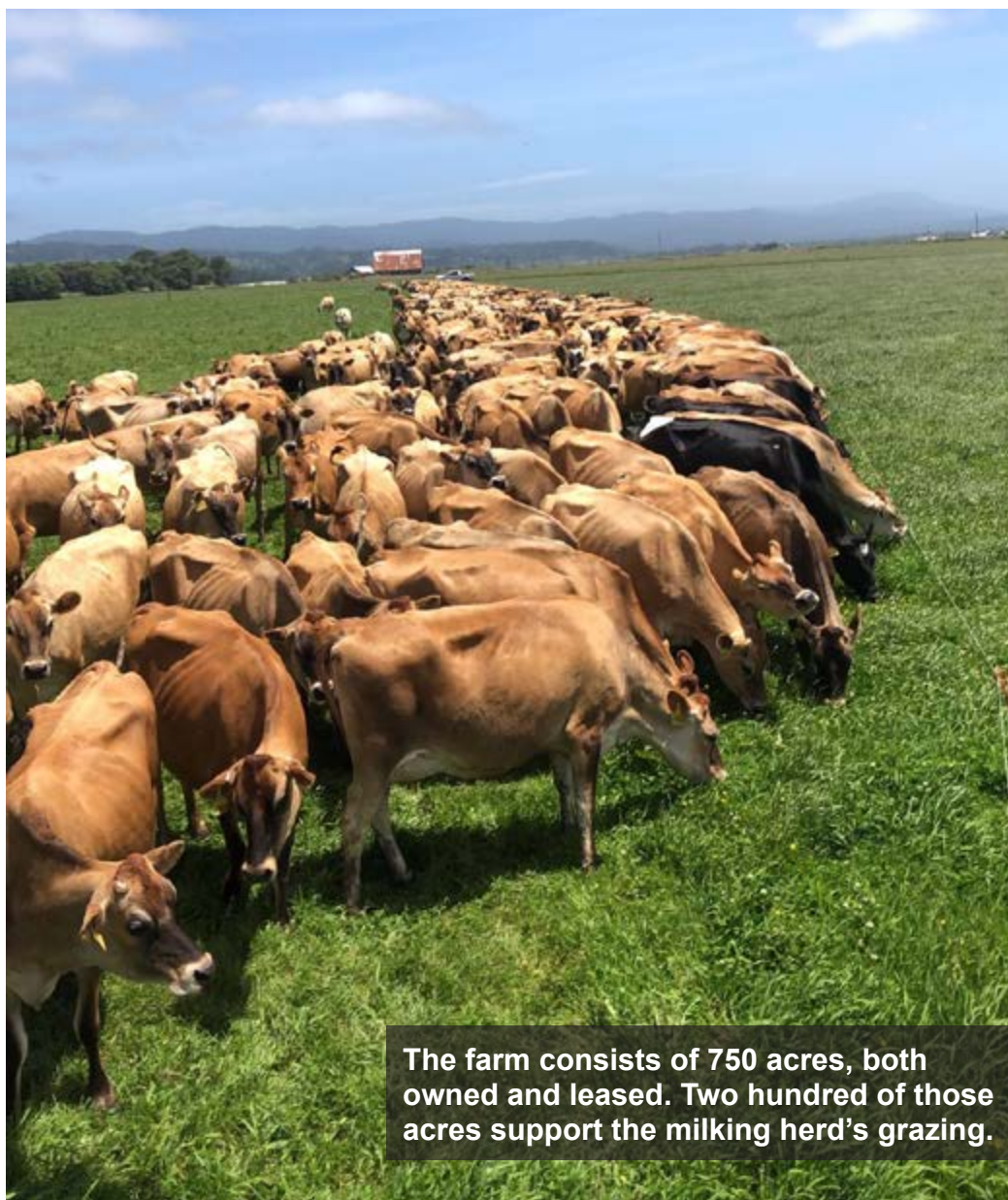
Herd Health

The biggest issue with calf health has been with calves from birth to 10 days of age, when cryptosporidiosis has caused death losses. As the microbe resides in walls or the ground, the calves can easily lick a rock, or the screen to the hutch, and ingest the pathogen, so "the issue may be where we raise our calves," Zach said. They have tried raising the

calves on concrete, gravel and shavings in the past, but using the tall grass as bedding seems to work best at preventing the disease.

Cows are vaccinated during the dry period with five vaccines. They utilize their veterinarian as needed for any serious health concerns, primarily calving emergencies, and for herd vaccinations. "It makes financial sense to vaccinate the herd preventatively," Zach said. "We don't really have that many issues with cows," with a bit of mastitis, some ketosis or the occasional case of pneumonia being the only real concerns.

continued on page 26



The farm consists of 750 acres, both owned and leased. Two hundred of those acres support the milking herd's grazing.

FEATURED FARM

**CAHILL DAIRY,
FERNDALE, CA***continued from page 25***Breeding**

The milking herd is primarily Jersey genetics. Crosses that are purchased over time are bred back to beef semen. Breeding takes place via AI at the feed bunk, which the cows enter directly after milking.

The bulk of the heifers are bred April through August. The bottom 60 percent or so of the milking herd, along with the tough breeders, are bred to beef semen. Ninety percent of the calves born in the winter are beef calves and are sold at one week of age to regular buyer.

The remaining 30 to 40 percent of the cows are bred with sexed Jersey semen, and these calves are born seasonally, to avoid winter months, as they've found that Jersey calves born in the winter don't tend to do well with the wet and cold conditions. They raise almost all of the heifers they need for replacements.

Cows are culled for disease, feet issues, reproduction concerns, high somatic cell counts and low milk production. Culling

decisions are based on "whether she is paying the bills or not," Zach said.

They aren't selecting for A2 genetics, but have found that in selecting for a moderate-framed Jersey cow with good feet and legs, good udders, and good components their herd genetics are also incorporating A2.

Milk

Production varies seasonally, but averages about 45 pounds of milk per cow, per day. The spring flush in April and May boosts production. All of their milk is sold to a local cheese maker, Rumiano Cheese. Fluid milk leaving Ferndale travels 100 miles north for processing. The Rumiano Cheese plant is the second closest processing facility, with one facility located on the outskirts of Ferndale. There are five milk buyers in the region.

Rumiano Cheese "gave dad a chance 30 years ago" and the farm has a good relationship with them, so they see no reason to sell elsewhere.

Because the milk is utilized for cheese, with a small portion for butter, they are looking for total components and total solids. They get bonuses for clean milk, and for butterfat content. Once per month, the milk is tested, with samples taken from some of the cows. Their butterfat ranges from 4.75 -5.2 percent. "The



FEATURED FARM



Helpful herders take a moment to relax in a Cahill Dairy pasture.

components are all over the place,” Zach said, but they do try to compensate through nutrition.

Components dip during the spring flush, when the cows are out on pasture and producing more milk. They feed additional corn silage during the spring to keep the energy in the cows, and add in a bit more straw - rather than alfalfa - to increase fiber intake and slow down the cows’ digestion. Sodium bicarbonate is also mixed into the ration to help buffer against the extra starch and acidity from the corn.

Infrastructure

The cows are now milked in a new tail-to-tail, double-12 pit parlor, built five years ago. It was designed for labor efficiency. Two milkers can now milk 125 cows per hour. The parlor also serves to keep their good employees on the job, including several who have been employed for many years, making it easier for them to continue to do the job of milking. Aside from Chris and Zach, there are six other full time employees on the farm, and a few others who help out with the irrigation during the summer months.

The new parlor was also designed to “create an environment that was more conducive to employee health and ease of milking,” Zach said.

The freestall barn is accessible to the milking herd if it is cold and wet, or if the fields are flooded, but the herd is on pasture year-round, day and night. The freestall is bedded with sawdust from the local logging industry, which is inexpensive and works better than sand, which they have used in the past.

There is a compost bedded pack barn for the close up dry cows or freshly weaned heifers. The bedded pack is cleaned out and either composted in windrows, or hauled directly to the field for fertilizer depending on season and need.

Manure from the feed bunk is scraped into the alley, and a newly-installed manure separator has eliminated the need to direct haul daily. Instead, the dry solids are now separated out and can be stored to apply as needed to the fields, optimizing fertility and increasing labor efficiency. The liquid waste is pumped out to be sprayed on the fields.

Farm Living

After graduating high school, Zach was determined not to be a dairy farmer, and left home for college. He realized that other people did not have the advantages he had growing up on a dairy

continued on page 28

FEATURED FARM

**CAHILL DAIRY,
FERNDALE, CA***continued from page 27*

farm, and began to fully appreciate the beauty of his hometown. The organic dairy program at Chico State was “a very beneficial experience” and he returned home with a renewed interest and passion in dairy farming.

Zach and Kayla were married on the farm, after the family took an old dilapidated heifer and storage barn, and renovated it to host their wedding. The barn now hosts 25 weddings each year, with Lea serving as wedding planner and hostess.

Later this year, the barn will host the WODPA conference. The Cahills invite all NODPA readers to come out to the farm and participate in the conference this November. <https://wodpa.com/conference-trade-show-23-1>

“It does get used for dairy purposes,” Zach said, although only for a few months of the year.

Zach and his father had to negotiate with his mother to have use of the barn, too. The deal is that they get to use it for hay and

equipment during the winter months, and it's hers to use the rest of the year as a wedding and event venue.

The farm also has another set of regular visitors, who make their presence known twice each year, during their spring and fall migrations. Aleutian geese, numbering about 200,000, visit the pastures twice per year.

The focus at Cahill Dairy is on profitably running a dairy farm in a manner which provides for animal welfare, human well-being and environmental stewardship. It's a balancing act: one that Zach doesn't take for granted as he proudly works alongside his father, supporting his family, their employees, the cows and the land by farming without harming the unique ecosystem found on the farm, and in the Ferndale, California community.

“The nature of organic dairy farming is a combination of working with nature and running a business,” Zach said. Cahill Dairy is successfully doing just that. ♦

Zach Cahill, Cahill Dairy, Inc., 1837 Home Ave, Fortuna, CA 95540, can be reached at 707-599-5194 or by email: zachcahill35@yahoo.com



**The renovated event
barn at Cahill Dairy.**

NET UPDATE

Recent ODairy Discussions

By Liz Bawden, Organic Dairy Farmer, NODPA Co-President

A producer reminded the group during a discussion about administering homeopathic remedies that it is always best to either put them in water that the cow(s) to be treated will drink or administer them vaginally. Another practitioner recommends they be diluted in water then sprayed on the nose leather where the cow generally licks it off.



Photo: Shutterstock-Birkir-Asgeirsson-481623085

Several researchers joined in a discussion surrounding the role of ruminants in reversing global warming. “All too often, discussions about climate change focus on the negative aspects of livestock production. But sustainable livestock farming (regenerative grazing) can substantially reduce emissions and deliver environmental and social benefits including promoting food security. Soils are a major carbon reservoir, storing more carbon than the world’s forests and atmosphere combined. Increasing carbon stocks in the top meter of the soil by one percent would capture more carbon than the total annual global emissions from burning fossil fuels, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.” And from another, “More and more we are turning in thought and practice toward an agriculture in which grass will act as the great balance wheel and stabilizer to prevent gluts of other crops—to save soil from destruction—to build up a reserve of nutrients and moisture in the soil, ready for any future emergency, to create a more prosperous livestock industry, and finally to contribute to the health of our people through better nutrition.”

There was a discussion following Dr. Locitzer’s article on *Staph aureus* in the last issue of this newsletter. In a nutshell, we can limit the spread of this mastitis-causing bacteria by wearing gloves during milking, promoting teat end health, using appropriate vacuum levels, proper udder preparation, and good calf management. A contributor

added that there is another factor as “research conducted a few decades ago demonstrated that staph is forcibly shoved up through the natural barrier of the teat canal by the action of the liner.” A farmer who tested all their fresh cows and heifers shared that there were numerous individuals that tested positive on day 1 after calving but tested negative after day 4 – their theory was that the *S. aureus* bacteria was there on the teat end but was flushed out in a few days.

A producer shared a photo with the group asking if he should be concerned about a first calf heifer just a few days before freshening showing quite a bit of udder and belly edema. Not uncommon in first calf heifers, it generally subsides within a week of calving. It is more prevalent in cows and heifers that are good producers. But it can be uncomfortable for the cow who may experience more pain or tenderness at milking, be more likely to develop udder sores, and lower feed consumption. Farmers usually limit salt intake in dry cows and springing heifers to limit edema. ♦

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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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Climate-Smart Commodities: Organic Milk Processors' Grants

continued from page 9

doing” and “to retrofit the grant to Maple Hill’s existing standards rather than try to do something new to get grant money” was involved, and eventually a plan was hatched “to reward the farmers for what they are already doing.”

Carbon sequestration is really the focus of grass-fed dairying, not something to do to be more sustainable. Maple Hill Creamery’s 100 percent grass-fed dairy farmers have been regenerative well before the term entered into the mainstream lexicon, Phyllis said.

“We use perennial agriculture to sequester carbon. Carbon represents the life cycle,” she said. “For Maple Hill Creamery, carbon sequestration is taking control of your own ecological domain. The ability to wield our own personal ecology is really important to us. To us, climate-smart is ecologically smart.”

These philosophical differences and their practical on-the-ground impacts led to hesitation around the concept of carbon markets. One feature of existing carbon markets is the concept of additionality - that their carbon wouldn’t have been sequestered if there were no payments being made to do so. This is not at all aligned to the philosophy behind the Maple Hill Creamery dairy farming model, Phyllis said.

Maple Hill Creamery’s self-reliant grass-fed dairy farmers don’t require the fuel, the equipment, the field crops and the infrastructure - all of the inputs which generate carbon and other greenhouse gases - that most non-grass-fed dairy farms rely upon, so their carbon footprint is already lessened. By managing perennial pasture, grass-fed dairy farmers are farming regeneratively, and growing the ecological resiliency of the farm and insuring its longevity.

Another concern when applying for CSC funding was that carbon offsets in the commercial market are paid well below the true value of sequestering the carbon. Maple Hill didn’t want to perpetuate this inequity, and if they were going to pay farmers to sequester carbon, it would need to be at a much higher rate than the standard \$15 - \$20 per ton.

Phyllis cites recent research that the real value of carbon sequestration in soils is calculated to be approximately \$400.00 per ton. If Maple Hill were to join in on paying carbon credits to farmers, those payments would have to reflect much more accurately the value of the sequestration.

Mitch Clark, senior vice president of supply chain, and their grant writer, Ben Shorofsky, P.E., of Stepwell Strategies, felt that although their farmers were already climate-smart farming, and doing so without many of the externalities associated with conventional dairy farming models, Maple Hill could write a CSC proposal which met the USDA’s guidelines for the program. This would allow them to further reward farmers for improving their regenerative practices.

“Our model is centered around getting more money into our producers’ hands, above our already higher pay price,” Mitch said. “This will ensure that Maple Hill Creamery will be a model for family-sized farms for generations.”

Maple Hill Creamery’s CSC-funded project, Growing the Supply and Market for Climate-Smart Grass-fed Organic



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Dairy, is focused on providing enhanced opportunities for their producers to improve their existing, already carbon-friendly farming practices and not “compete with those who are going to take crop land and turn it into perennial pasture,” Phyllis said. The program received CSC funding of \$20 million dollars and will run for five years.

Direct payments to farmers consist of \$13.5 million, while administrative costs will require \$1.5 million, with the last \$5 million set aside for marketing. The CSC program requires a marketing component. For Maple Hill, this marketing is meant to attract consumer attention, so more consumers will then vote with their pocketbooks for the climate-friendly farming their grass-fed model is built upon, ensuring that the model can continue in perpetuity, well after the CSC funds are dispersed.

Maple Hill already uses pasture scoring metrics for their existing “Pay for Progress” internal payment incentive program, and these will also be utilized to measure CSC improvements. Maple Hill will pay its farmers \$100 per ton for carbon sequestration via the CSC-funded project, tying pasture monitoring to soil sampling and cow body conditioning scores.

Pasture scoring indicators include: plant litter decomposition and incorporation into the soil; manure breakdown and decomposition; reproductive capacity of grasses, legumes and desirable forbs; population vigor of pasture forages; evidence of any wind or water erosion; evidence of micro fauna; and percentage of bare soil. The program’s approach piggybacks on both their existing Pay for Progress initiative, which emphasizes ongoing training to continually enhance ecological pasture improvements, and their Pasture Scoring metrics to measure that progress, so farmers learn to advance their carbon-friendly farming techniques, and are paid more as they get better at skills which enhance pasture ecology. They will also use USDA’s database of metrics for each practice to measure progress.

The CSC-funded project measures each farm’s individual baseline, and makes payments based on year-over-year improvements in scoring metrics, allowing each farm to work to improve its practices and be rewarded for doing so. These improvements also enhance the farm’s grazing ability, increase plant and cow nutrition and positively impact farm economics.

Another important part of the Maple Hill farming model is farmer-to-farmer education. Their “Pay for Progress” model relies on sharing knowledge, both to increase skills and to reduce farmer stress by creating supportive environments

for like-minded producers and helping farmers to grow farms which contribute not only to the planets and the animals’ well-being, but to their own. This will be supported under the CSC-funding and is intrinsic to the Maple Hill Creamery philosophy.

“The project in general, by incentivizing the ability to come together in groups and discuss these regenerative practices...it really does make a huge difference in all of the farmers’ lives,” Phyllis said. The time off-farm for regenerative education, if paid, can make it easier for producers to attend. By learning techniques to enhance pasture grazing, which enhances soil carbon and “the ecological resilience of the farm,” which decreases farm economic viability, and farmer stress, too.

CSC funding will be open to all Maple Hill producers, and they will begin signing up willing farmers immediately. They are even able to sign up new farmers to the Maple Hill family, who would then be eligible to participate, if they are family-sized grass-fed farms and are nearby to a hauling route, or perhaps if a neighboring group of such farms were in a new area, it could work, Mitch said.

Agriculture has a role to play in mitigating climate change. Financially compensating farmers for practices which are ecologically beneficial and do not harm the environment holds promise as a part of the solution. If the CSC-funded projects developed by organic dairy processors can effectively model how directly incentivizing farmers can increase participation in such practices, and increase consumer awareness and support of climate-friendly farming products, perhaps the true cost of farming and of various farming practices - both environmentally sound as well as damaging ones - can finally be acknowledged. And our food system can change into one based on ecological viability, or true sustainability, while also feeding the world. ♦

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ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IS SOIL-BASED: A Fundamental Principle Underlying Organic Crop Certification

continued from page 3

(b) The producer must manage crop nutrients and soil fertility through rotations, cover crops, and the application of plant and animal materials.

(c) The producer must manage plant and animal materials to maintain or improve soil organic matter content in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, pathogenic organisms, heavy metals, or residues of prohibited substances.

The general requirements in the USDA organic regulations also include a requirement that presumes soil as a part of an organic production operation: § 205.200: **Natural resources of the operation.** The physical, hydrological, and biological features of a production operation, including soil, water, wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife.

The National Organic Standards Board reiterated support of organic production as soil-based production in 2010 when it wrote, “Although the regulations do not specifically state ‘soil only production’, the exclusion of soil from organic production of normally terrestrial, vascular plants violates the intent of the regulations. This intent can be seen in these sections of the rule that require proper stewardship toward improving and maintaining the soil ecology within an organic farming system.” The 2010 NOSB recommendation titled, “Production Standards for Terrestrial Plants in Containers and Enclosures,” further confirmed that organic production was designed to be a soil-based system when it said, “Based on its foundation of sound management of soil biology and ecology, it becomes clear that systems of crop production that eliminate soil from the system, such as hydroponics or aeroponics, cannot be considered as examples of acceptable organic farming practices. Hydroponics, the production of plants in nutrient rich solutions or moist inert material, or aeroponics, a variation in which plant roots

are suspended in air and continually misted with nutrient solution, have their place in production agriculture, but certainly cannot be classified as certified organic growing methods due to their exclusion of the soil-plant ecology intrinsic to organic farming systems and USDA/NOP regulations governing them.”

Soil is important to organic systems because the nutrients come from the breakdown of organic matter by organisms in living



soil. This contrasts with nutrients being fed directly to the plant via the continuous introduction of soluble fertilizers that occurs with hydroponic growing methods. While the organic regulations and OFPA were designed around the principle that crops would be grown in soil, certain exceptions for the production of planting stock, sprouts, and annual seedlings are specifically mentioned in 7CFR 205.204 of the regulations in order to allow the production of crops which either a.) receive most of their nutrition from the seed, or b.) will eventually be planted in the soil and grown to maturity. The NOP clearly meant to allow these types of production but without standards specific to these types of production, certifiers are unable to consistently implement the rule.

The National Organic Program Final Rule states that production practices must maintain or improve natural resources, including soil and water quality (7 CFR 205.200). Furthermore, the Rule makes it clear that a producer must select and implement tillage and cultivation practices that

ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil and minimize soil erosion (7 CFR 205.203). Crop rotation is cited several times in the regulation as a primary method of managing crop nutrients and soil fertility, improving soil organic matter content, managing deficient or excess nutrients, managing crop pests, weeds, and diseases, and introducing biological diversity. Crop rotation cannot fulfill these functions if crops are not grown in soil. The regulations use the word “must” for each of these requirements, indicating that these practices are mandatory. Therefore, if an organic production plan is to comply with the full intent of OFPA and the National Organic Program Final Rule, crops must be grown in soil except with regard to those exceptions mentioned in 7 CFR 205.204.

Soil is defined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) as “(i) The unconsolidated mineral or organic material on the immediate surface of the Earth that serves as a natural medium for the growth of land plants. (ii) The unconsolidated mineral or organic matter on the surface of the Earth that has been subjected to and shows effects of genetic and environmental factors of: climate (including water and temperature effects), and macro- and microorganisms, conditioned by relief, acting on parent material over a period of time. A product- soil differs from the material from which it is derived in many physical, chemical, biological, and morphological properties and characteristics.”

The proposed organic poultry and livestock standards would define “soil” as “the outermost layer of the earth comprised of minerals, water, air, organic matter, fungi, and bacteria in which plants may grow roots.” If we view ‘soil’ in light of these important definitions and apply these definitions when we review usages of the term ‘soil’ throughout OFPA and the Rule, it becomes clear that a compliant organic production plan must root itself in the outermost layer of Earth where plants are to be grown to maturity in that substance.

The Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) begins by stating its purposes: §6501. Purposes. It is

the purpose of this chapter: (1) to establish national standards governing the marketing of certain agricultural products as organically produced products; (2) to assure consumers that organically produced products meet a consistent standard; and (3) to facilitate interstate commerce in fresh and processed food that is organically produced. Achieving OFPA’s second purpose builds on the first purpose in the list. We can only “assure consumers that organically produced products meet a consistent standard” after such standards are established.

Until the USDA publishes the standards it promised in the Preamble to the final rule in 2002, certifiers do not have consistent standards for the certification of beekeeping, fish, mushrooms, or greenhouses. It is clear that such operations were intended to be certified, but certifiers have had to develop their own policies in the absence of clear national standards, which is contrary to achieving the first and second purposes of OFPA despite the best intentions of the individual certification agencies. In the meantime, certifiers must enforce the regulations that exist bearing in mind the intent of organic movements worldwide. ♦

This position was developed by the following soil-based certification organizations: MOFGA Certification Services, NOFA-NY, OEFFA Certification, OneCert, Inc., OneCert International Pvt. Ltd., Real Organic Project, and Vermont Organic Farmers LLC.



Calendar

BIRDS, BEES, AND BENEFICIAL BUGS IN OUR LIVESTOCK SYSTEMS: 2 FARM TOURS

- **FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 2023 - 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**
at Owl's Head Farm in Richmond, VT
- **WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2023 - 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**
Rebop Farm in Brattleboro, VT

Join UVM Extension for two farm tours this summer to learn about ways to enhance bird, bee, and beneficial insect habitats in your rotational grazing systems. <https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Northwest-Crops-and-Soils-Program/2023%20Events/beneficial-bugs-02opt.pdf>. Free registration - call or email Kelsie Meehan at 802-656-4829 or kelsie.meehan@uvm.edu

Tuesday, June 20, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

VERMONT GRAZING AND LIVESTOCK WORKSHOP SERIES: Jonathan Gates

Howmars Farm, 348 Beaver Meadow Road, Franklin, VT

Pasture improvements and non-lethal beaver control. Focus on pasture and hay land improvement with soil fertility amendments and seedings, as well as non-lethal beaver

deterrent to control water table in pastures. This is part of a DBIC cohort and farmer innovation project. Registration is at <https://go.uvm.edu/2023grazingworkshops>. Choose Select a Date link to sign up. Contact is Susan.Brouillette@uvm.edu or 802-524-6501.

Thursday, June 22, 2023, 11 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

THE WCROC ORGANIC DAIRY & SWINE DAY

*West Central Research and Outreach Center,
46352 State Hwy 329, Morris MN*

Let's talk all things organic! Topics will include substituting hybrid rye in a traditional corn-soy swine diet, organic hybrid rye production, feeding and grazing organic dairy cows, and pasture walks. Hear from organic research experts and network with fellow producers. Bring your organic questions! Registration begins at 10:30 AM. Lunch will be provided. The event is free of charge, but RSVP is requested. Participants can register by calling the WCROC at 320-589-1711, or email Brad Heins, hein0106@umn.edu. Held at the West Central Research and Outreach Center, 46352 State Hwy 329, Morris, MN 56267

Thursday, July 13, 9:00 AM TO 2:00 PM

VERMONT GRAZING AND LIVESTOCK WORKSHOP SERIES

Cedar Mountain Farm, Hartland, VT

Dairy herd health workshop with Dr. Dayna Locitzer who will lead a day-long dairy herd health workshop with a mix of classroom time and pasture walk/herd observation. Topics to include physical exam of the cow, time budget, and veterinary skills. Register at <https://go.uvm.edu/cedarmountain>. Contact is Kelsie.meehan@uvm.edu or 802-656-4829.

Friday, July 14, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

VERMONT GRAZING AND LIVESTOCK WORKSHOP SERIES:

Ken Leach and Joanne Chickering

2710 VT Route 30, Pawlet, VT

Drought management. Discussion of drought stress and management considerations for following year as well as strategies to improve drought resiliency. Registration is at <https://go.uvm.edu/2023grazingworkshops>. Choose Select a Date link to sign up. Contact is Susan.Brouillette@uvm.edu or 802-524-6501.

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Location: Rutland County, Vermont

FOR SALE: Cow half pairs, bred heifers, mixed breeds. Certified organic, closed herd, fair prices. Contact Phillip Cutting, netos75@comcast.net and leave a message at this number 802-254-6982 or a text at this number: 802-380-4783

Location: Guilford, VT

FOR SALE: Jersey & Jersey/Holstein cross dairy cows, including A2A2 and A1, very calm, in NW Vermont, farm certified organic & grass-only. Farmer needs to stop milking due to medical reasons Vaccinated with Triangle 10, and for brucellosis & pinkeye; negative for Johnes. No milk fever, DA, miscarriage, or feet issues. Contact Edward Choiniere, jyoust87@vt.edu, 802-370-1051.

Location: Highgate Center, VT

WANTED: Stone Barns Center is experimenting with finishing retired dairy cattle on pasture. We are looking for approx. 10 dried off grass-fed dairy cows between 5-10 years of age in April or early May. Ideally these are dual-purpose breeds, but we are open to cattle that have been thriving in 100% grass-fed systems for some time. We can compensate between \$1,200-\$1,500 per head and will organize the transport. Please reach out to Ryan Martens at 201-414-4079 if you are interested. Or ryanm@stonebarnscenter.org

Location: Tarrytown, NY

FEED, GRAIN, HAY FOR SALE/WANT TO BUY

FOR SALE: Customer just cancelled an order for **80 bales of 1st cutting baleage** so it is available for sale. Asking \$50/bale or \$3500 if you take it all. Contact Leon Corse, 802-368-7192 or llcorse6@gmail.com

Location: Southern VT

FOR SALE: 2022 Baleage for sale (4x4 round bales): Winter Rye & Triticale Mix: \$65. Alfalfa: \$65. 2nd & 3rd Cutting: \$45. Contact Nathan Seamon, nate@precisionsportsgrp.com, 315-868-7981.

Location: Richfield Springs, NY

FOR SALE: NOFA-NY Certified Organic BALEAGE. 2021 Crop. 2nd Cut Grass, 1st Cut Alfalfa/grass, 1st Cut Orchard grass/Timothy, 1st Cut Grass. All 4x4 individually wrapped Round bales. Priced to sell. Contact Jeff at Mitchellorganic@Hotmail.com or call 607-566-8477.

Location: Avoca, NY (Steuben County)

EQUIPMENT

FOR SALE: Portable milking machine, complete, little use, \$2000. Contact Phillip Cutting, netos75@comcast.net and leave a message at this number 802-254-6982 or a text at this number: 802-380-4783

Location: Guilford, VT

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July 2023 issue is June 15, 2023.

Full Page Ad (7.5" W x 9.75" H) = \$660

1/2 Page Ad (7.5" W x 4.75" H) = \$340

1/4 Page Ad (3.625" W x 4.75" H) = \$190

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

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