

# NODPA News

## Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

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Left to right, Greg, Kari, Timmy and Paul Aubertine. Hannah, Genevieve, Tim and Maggy Aubertine. Darrel, Josie and Margaret Aubertine. Jane, Erin, Drew, Sully and Grace Churchill. The families of Evening Star Ranch.

## FEATURED FARM: EVENING STAR RANCH - CAPE VINCENT, NY Owned and operated by the Aubertine and Churchill Families

### Dairy Rewind: Path to Grass-fed Milk

By Tamara Scully, NODPA News Contributing Writer

**A**t Evening Star Ranch, milk from the certified organic, 100 percent grass-fed herd began flowing in 2017. The farm is a part of the 150-plus family farms which ship milk from 100 percent grass-fed cows to Maple Hill Creamery. The

Cape Vincent, New York farm is owned and operated by Paul Aubertine, his father and mother Darrel and Margaret Aubertine, and their son-in law and daughter Drew and Erin Churchill.

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## New Organic Animal Welfare Rules are Now Final

Compiled and written by Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

This article used the National Organic Coalition (NOC) blog post by Harriet Behar as source material.

**N**ODPA, the organic community and other organizations have advocated for almost two decades for clear animal welfare standards to be incorporated into the organic regulations. When the Pasture Rule was published in 2010, then-Deputy

Secretary of Agriculture, Kathleen Merrigan, said that a regulation on Animal Welfare would be published 'soon' followed by the Origin of Livestock Rule. Moving forward to 2023, the Organic Livestock and Poultry

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Message from NODPA Co-President

### Keep a Learning Edge.

Two kinds of farmers: the one who sticks to his/her guns, and is always at home working hard with his/her nose to the grindstone. The other one takes time off to pursue other interests and more especially pursue learning opportunities about his/her chosen vocation. Never was it more important to keep a learning edge than now. Keep the knife sharp. That way it takes less energy to cut practices that should be cut. And divide the riff-raff that you cut through to decide if what you're learning makes sense/cents for your operation. They say the worse compaction on our farms is between our ears. This I believe. So we should find better ways to un-compact our thinking ability.

I think it's important to sit together as a group and think about how we can hone our markets and our marketing skills. But I think it's much more important to hone our farming skills. This is what we all want to do--farm. And do it better.

Enter learning new ways to skin a cat. This is best done off the farm on someone else's farm. NODPA Field Days are a good example of this opportunity to learn from other farmers. Go to grazing conferences through the winter and pasture walks through the summer. Read books like Gabe Brown's *Dirt to Soil*. Get on several people's farms. Take a day off and find a farmer to visit. Read *Graze* magazine. Read the *NODPA News*. Get in a farmer's face and ask them why they do what they do, and try to discover what makes them tick. Take your shovel and maybe dig in their pasture or field. Consequently, you'll learn what makes you tick and you'll learn what skills you are good at. And that way you will make your farm into a profitable and fun place to work. Make 2024 the best year yet. Stay curious.

*Roman Stoltzfoos farms with son Dwight and children, as a minority partner, in Lancaster PA. They milk 240 cows and farm and graze 700 acres. The farm has been organic and grazing since 1988, and 100% grass-fed since 2012.*

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Representatives Pingree and Molinaro Introduce the Bipartisan Organic Dairy Data Collection Act to Bring Parity to Organic Dairy Producers and Allow Them to Make Good Business Decisions

Compiled by Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

In a rare bipartisan move, Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, a longtime organic farmer and member of the House Agriculture Committee, and Congressman Marc Molinaro (R-N.Y.) introduced legislation to support organic dairy farmers across the country on January 10, 2024. The Organic Dairy Data Collection Act would enhance data collection at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to better understand the costs associated with producing organic milk. It will essentially provide organic dairy producers with the same data that conventional dairy producers have had for decades. It is a companion bill to the ODAIRY Act introduced into the Senate, in October 2023, by Senators Welch, Gillibrand, Sanders and Booker. Having a piece of legislation in both the House and Senate will dramatically increase the chances of the provisions being included in the Farm Bill or Appropriations. There is

little or no extra cost involved with publishing this data which is already collected by different agencies within the USDA and through the Organic Data Initiative.

In comments on the legislation the Congresswoman said: "My and Congressman Molinaro's bipartisan Organic Dairy Data Collection Act will ensure USDA can better understand and address the challenges organic dairies face. As the Agriculture Committee and I continue our work on the upcoming Farm Bill, I am hopeful we can include this targeted solution to support the organic dairy sector and strengthen the role of organics in the marketplace for years to come."

*Continued on page 33*



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## New Organic Animal Welfare Rules are Now Final

*continued from page 1*

Standards (OLPS) Final Rule (the Rule) amending 7 CFR part 205, was published on November 2, 2023, and will become effective on January 12, 2024. It will be enforced on **January 2, 2025**, with a few exceptions. The implementation of the soil, vegetation, exit door and outdoor stocking density for laying hens and broilers requirement and the indoor stocking density for broilers is delayed until **January 2, 2029**.

The new regulations were published to provide certifiers and National Organic Program certifier accreditation auditors with detailed requirements in many areas of livestock health and welfare, removing some of the current subjective language that has caused varied implementation and enforcement difficulties. USDA AMS hopes that this Rule will help in leveling the playing field for all organic producers and provide more integrity to the organic label. As with any regulation, there are compromises, especially when USDA must follow federal requirements that require any regulation to have an analysis of the effect on markets and supply of product to consumers. Allowing for the effect of regulation on a changing market can undermine the basis of organic certification,

which is process and science based, not decided by the economic effect on those operations that have disregarded the intent of the regulations and profited by having an unfair marketing advantage. For example, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) states that “AMS estimates that approximately 30% of organic egg production comes from hens with access to outdoor areas that include soil or pasture, while approximately 70% of organic egg production only has access to the outdoors through enclosed porches with no soil or pasture.” Notice they say production not operations or producers as most poultry producers do follow the letter and intent of the organic regulations. The Rule corrects this imbalance, if somewhat inadequately, by defining the square footage of land required (about two square feet for laying hens and one square foot for broilers) and that it must be at least 75% soil with vegetation.

While an improvement, the Rule does not meet industry standards. In comparison, Organic Valley currently requires five square feet of pasture for laying hens. To qualify as organic in the European Union, organic farmers need to provide 43 square feet and highly regarded animal welfare labels in the US (qualifying farms as “pastured poultry”) require 108 square feet. Unfortunately, the USDA permits that the first 25% adjacent to their housing can be concrete or gravel requiring birds be determined enough to



## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

move away from their pelleted feed, water and shelter to reach the pasture, which, as defined currently, may not have much nutrition. Similarly, the compromise reached within the rule does require the exit doors for poultry houses, rather than being “sufficient” to allow outdoor access, must have no less than 1 linear foot of exit area for 360 birds. While this gives inspectors and certifiers the clear language they need, it does not reflect the language recommended by the organic community to require the birds have enough exits to encourage true access to the outdoors.

The organic regulations always had language promoting animal welfare, since lessening stress results in fewer health problems and inputs. However, the new rule spells out some of the required management needed to lessen that stress. Many of the new requirements are in line with other animal welfare requirements, but there are some significant differences that may mean producers still need to carry other welfare certifications to satisfy market requirements.

The decision to allow existing operations to continue with limited or no outside access for 5 years does compromise every aspect of the new regulations. Given the NOP’s history of implementation and enforcement of new regulations which is demonstrated by USDA’s need to reiterate provisions within the Pasture Rule from 2010 in this regulation, the probable time that these operations

will continue without change or provide small attempts at change to partially satisfy non-compliances will most likely be in the region of 10 years rather than 5.

### Final Rule Provisions for Livestock

While the new rule has significant details for humane avian treatment, there are some improvements for mammals as well, including dealing with injuries, lameness, and improved transport to slaughter requirements, plus clear language for animal welfare at slaughter.

On tie-stall and stanchion barns the Rule states: *“Because tie-stall and stanchion barns do not allow an animal to turn around, an operation cannot leave an animal tied up in this type of indoor space for more than 24 hours. Operations must describe their practices in their OSP and demonstrate to an accredited certifying agent that their use of these structures complies with other applicable organic regulations.”*

NODPA has been strongly recommending that referring to body condition when evaluating ruminants that was in the Proposed Rule be removed from the regulations and it’s not in the Final Rule. The addition of *“resulting in appropriate body condition”* in

*continued on page 6*

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## New Organic Animal Welfare Rules are Now Final

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the Proposed Rule was unnecessary. Section 201.237(d) requires documentation of the animal's total feed ration, the amount of each type of feed actually fed, and all changes made to all rations

throughout the year. Further, § 205.238(a)(2) already requires a feed ration sufficient to meet the animal's nutritional needs. Failure to do either is an enforceable event. Finally, "appropriate body condition" is a subjective determination influenced by species, breed, stage of life, age, gender, and time of year, not to mention inspector qualification and experience.

The new Rule states that organic milk from organic milking cows that are being treated with allowed synthetic substances that have a "withholding time" cannot be sold as organic but may be fed to organic calves during the withholding time.

(1) Sell, label, or represent as organic any animal or product derived from any animal treated with antibiotics, any substance that contains a synthetic substance not allowed under § 205.603 of this part, or any substance that contains a non-synthetic substance prohibited in § 205.604 of this part. Milk from animals undergoing treatment with synthetic substances that are allowed under § 205.603 of this part but have associated withdrawal periods cannot be sold, labeled, or represented as organic during the withdrawal period but may be fed to calves on the same operation. Milk from animals undergoing treatment with prohibited substances cannot be sold, labeled, or represented as organic or fed to organic livestock.

Below is the wording of the Final Rule on transporting animals as it's important to know exactly what is required because all of us will transport animals at some point. All of our work on this Rule, over the last 10 years, has been to ensure that regulation is practical and reflects common sense. We failed in some places, particularly on having the word 'clean' removed for when animals are in transport, especially taking animals to slaughter from good pasture where their manure could be very loose.

### § 205.242 Transport and slaughter.

#### (a) Transportation.

(1) Certified organic livestock must be clearly identified as organic, and this identity must be traceable for the duration of transport.

(2) All livestock must be fit for transport to buyers, auction or slaughter facilities.



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

(i) Calves must have a dry navel cord and be able to stand and walk without human assistance.

(ii) Seriously crippled and non-ambulatory animals must not be transported for sale or slaughter. Such animals may be medically treated or euthanized.

(3) *Adequate and season-appropriate ventilation is required for all livestock trailers, shipping containers, and any other mode of transportation used to protect animals against cold and heat stresses.*

(4) *During any transport and prior to slaughter, bedding must be provided on trailer floors and in holding pens, as needed, to keep livestock clean, dry, and comfortable. Use of bedding must be appropriate to the species and type of transport. Bedding is not required in poultry crates. When roughages are used for bedding, they must be certified organic.*

(5) *For transport that exceeds eight hours, measured from the time all animals are loaded onto a vehicle until the vehicle arrives at its final destination, the operation must describe how organic management and animal welfare will be maintained.*

(i) *The producer or handler of an organic livestock operation, who is responsible for overseeing the transport of organic livestock, must provide records to certifying agents during inspections or upon request that demonstrate that transport times for organic livestock are not detrimental to the welfare of the animals and meet the requirements of paragraph (a)(5) of this section.*

(ii) [Reserved]

(6) *Organic producers and handlers, who are responsible for overseeing the transport of organic livestock, must have emergency plans in place that adequately address possible animal welfare problems that might occur during transport.*

The slaughter regulations are now more closely tied to the inspection work of USDA FSIS which may level the playing field for all producers as the domestic organic meat market suffers from the availability of cheaper imported meats, especially ground meat. The Rule mandates that USDA FSIS' humane slaughter standards must be followed. This will be difficult to enforce in other countries that lack the same stringent enforcement that is legally required by USDA at domestic slaughterhouses, specifically the inspection of all animals prior to

slaughter and while being slaughtered. In the United States, there are large discrepancies in enforcing animal welfare standards at slaughterhouses, so the problem will be magnified when ensuring implementation, internationally. For producers who use custom slaughterhouses to slaughter their organic livestock, that may also be a problem.

### OLPS Will Result in Significant Changes

We have been waiting for the Rule for too long. It has been a victim of a consolidation in the organic poultry industry that has protected its type of production that denies poultry true outside access but receives the organic premium. With the Rule, porches cannot be considered part of the indoor stocking density requirement if the birds do not have access to this area, year-round. Porches cannot be considered part of the outdoor access unless the poultry always have access to the rest of the outdoor access area, nor can these outdoor porches have any type of "walls", including screens. Producers are now required to have livestock health records that many certifiers have not required, including parasite control plans, and written plans for euthanasia for livestock suffering from irreversible injury. If transport to slaughter exceeds eight hours, there must be a written plan on how to maintain organic management and animal welfare.

### The Proposed Rule Was Weakened in Some Areas for Poultry, and Organic Swine Requirements are Largely Absent

Some disappointments between the proposed and final rule were in the target ammonia levels in poultry houses, raised

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## New Organic Animal Welfare Rules are Now Final

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from 10 to 20 PPM (25 PPM is prohibited), and the amount of floor scratching area required in slatted/mesh floor housing was lowered from 30 percent to 15 per cent. Unfortunately, the definition of soil was removed entirely from the rule, and any definition of maximal vegetative cover was not incorporated into the rule. The recommendation that gravel not be considered as soil and a definition of “maximal vegetative cover” were not incorporated either.

While gestation and farrowing crates are now specifically prohibited for organic swine (and conventional swine in many states), there are many other aspects where other animal welfare rules address swine physical alterations and living conditions, that are not covered under the organic rule. This is an area that will need further development.

AMS agrees in the Rule that a regulatory definition of “soil should take the entire organic standard into consideration and that

defining the term only for use in the livestock area of operation may affect other areas of organic production. Because soil is generally a well-understood term, a regulatory definition is not necessary for the successful implementation of this rule.” We will see how that works! It’s definitely not a definition that encourages a uniform and transparent interpretation of the Rule.

The next steps are to continue to hold USDA AMS and the NOP program’s feet to the fire. No use in giving them 3-5 years to see how they implement the new regulations. Advocates and their organizations need to require yearly updates to Congress on progress in educating certifiers, inspectors, and producers about what they need to do to enforce the regulation. The excuses that they fear a lawsuit or do not have specific enough regulatory language in place no longer hold any water. Years down the road, we do not want to see business as usual while the large operations continue to operate as usual behind a façade of compliance while the USDA says they have inadequate tools to do the work. By that time, we will have lost smaller compliant poultry operations as we have with organic dairy in the time it’s taken to enforce regulations and organic produce growers who cannot compete with hydroponic mega farms. ♦



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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

## Pay and Feed Prices January 2024

By Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

***Increase in Maple Hill Pay Price in July 2024; increase in packaged organic product sales nationally and regionally; producers moving away from CROPP Cooperative as supply tightens in the northeast and Horizon and Wallaby businesses sold.***

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) reports of estimated organic fluid product sales nationally for September and October 2023 show a continued increase in the sale of Whole Milk packaged fluid products of 4% percent over 2022 year-to-date, with a 5% reduction in Reduced Fat Milk over the same period. US sales of organic fluid milk products in September 2023 were 228 million pounds, effectively level sales from September 2022, and in October 2023 they were 242 million pounds, down 1.10 percent from October 2022. In September 2023, fluid organic Whole Milk sales of 113 million pounds were up 3.6 percent compared to a year earlier. Reduced Fat milk sales were 114 million pounds, down 5.6 percent from the previous year. October 2023 organic Whole Milk fluid sales were 124 million pounds, up 4.0 percent from October 2022. Organic Reduced Fat milk fluid sales in September 2023 were 116 million pounds, down 5.3 percent from August 2022. The average retail price for organic milk in September and October 2023 was \$4.88 per half gallon; in November 2023 it was \$4.86 per half gallon and \$4.81 per half gallon in December 2023. In the same period in 2022 it was \$4.75 per half gallon. The average retail price nationwide for a half gallon of organic was \$4.83 in 2023, \$4.58 in 2022, \$4.13 in 2021 and around the \$4 mark for 2019, 2018 and 2017, when there was a surplus of organic milk. Anecdotal reports suggest that supply of

organic milk is short in the Northeast and Pennsylvania, and that spot milk is equally short.

Federal Milk Market Order 1, in the Northeast, reports utilization of types of organic milk by pool plants but is only authorized by Congress to separate organic fluid milk (Class 1) data into organic and non-organic. Data on milk in the other classes are not separated by production practice; for example, there is no record of how much organic milk is used by Stonyfield, a Lactalis US Yogurt brand as yogurt is Class 2, and the New Hampshire

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	Sep-23	2023 Year to date	Sep-22	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	113	1044	0.2%	3.6%
Flavored Whole milk	1	7	82.2%	-46.4%
Organic Reduced-Fat Milk (2%)	77	692	-2.4%	-3.3%
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	21	204	-16.0%	-8.0%
Organic Fat-Free Milk Skim	10	111	-23.2%	-12.9%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	6	58	-21.3%	-8.9%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	0	3	112.9%	154.1%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	114	1064	-8.5%	-5.6%
<b>Total Organic Milk Products</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>2118</b>	<b>-4.0%</b>	<b>-1.5%</b>

Product Name	Sales of Organic Fluid Milk		Change from	
	Oct-23	2023 Year to date	Oct-23	Year to date
	Million pounds		Percent	
Organic Whole Milk	124	1168	7.00%	4.0%
Flavored Whole milk	1	8	100.30%	-41.10%
Organic Reduced-Fat Milk (2%)	75	766	-5.80%	-3.5%
Organic Low-Fat Milk (1%)	22	226	8.30%	-6.6%
Organic Fat-Free Milk Skim	12	123	-7.80%	-12.4%
Organic Flavored Fat-Reduced Milk	7	65	7.90%	-7.3%
Other Fluid Organic Milk Products	0	3	-31%	100.5%
Total Fat Reduced Milk	116	1,180	-2.80%	-5.3%
<b>Total Organic Milk Products</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>2359</b>	<b>2.10%</b>	<b>-1.10%</b>

plant is classified as a NonPool/Unregulated Supply Plant. We still have no movement from USDA Dairy Program on separate data on the *Class I out of Marketing Area* category into organic or conventional, which means we have no accurate data on how much package fluid milk is sold in the Northeast; they already have that data separated by what they call "Organic Production



## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

Practice.” We also cannot report any updates on the increase in the number of Federal Orders that report separated data on organic and non-organic, with only 3 out of 11 currently doing so.

FMMO 1 reports that in October 2023, fluid organic Whole Milk utilization totaled 18.10 million pounds, up from 18.09 million pounds the previous year. In October 2023, the utilization of fluid organic Reduced Fat milk, 15.44 million pounds, decreased from 16.74 million pounds a year ago. In November 2023, the fluid Whole Milk utilization totaled 16.90 million pounds, an increase from the 15.31 million pounds in November 2022. For fluid organic Reduced Fat milk, the 14.30 million pounds in fluid utilization in November 2023 was a decrease from the 15.82 million in November 2022. Year-to-date, January to November 2023 compared with 2022 for organic fluid milk in FMMO 1, shows 2023 at 365.91 million pounds and 2022 at 352.12 million pounds, an increase of approximately 4% year-over-year. This increase is driven by a 9% increase in Whole Milk against a 2% decrease in Reduced Fat utilization. Organic fluid milk utilization is approximately 5.00% of the total fluid milk processed and utilized within FMMO 1 for November 2023, not including the packaged Class 1 milk coming into the area.

Approximately 19% of Class 1 milk utilized in FMMO is from packaged milk outside the area. Assuming that organic is the same percentage of the packaged milk coming into the order that

is processed in the order would add another 7.3 million pounds to the organic number. In all likelihood, the amount of organic milk coming into the order in Extended Shelf-Life packaging would be a higher percentage than conventional milk. Why is this important? If we want to attract some competition into the region, whether as a processor or a milk aggregator/buyer, they need to know more clearly what the potential is. The mission of the FMMO is 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*.” (Federal Milk Marketing Orders: An Overview—Congressional Research Service, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/R45044>) Surely, regular publication of organic data that is already collected fits into their mission designated by Congress, especially considering that organic dairy farmers have individual contract/agreements with milk buyers and very little information on which to base decisions.

Central Federal Order (FO) 32 is the only order that reports the breakdown as to the volume of Class 1 organic milk that is used in the Order and what is used outside the Order. FO 32 includes reporting from both Aurora plants in Colorado and Missouri which sell packaged products in many parts of the country

*continued on page 12*

UTILIZATION OF ORGANIC FLUID MILK PRODUCTS AND CREAM BY POOL PLANTS (Million pounds) in FMMO 1 (Northeast)							
	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	Increase/Decrease of 2021 over 2020
JANUARY	37.00	29.14	31.32	23.93	26.97%	-7%	31%
FEBRUARY	31.65	33.65	31.56	26.69	-5.94%	7%	18%
MARCH	37.37	31.56	31.87	27.90	18.41%	-1%	14%
APRIL	31.51	33.23	28.97	29.35	-5.18%	15%	-1%
MAY	36.24	30.49	29.72	28.25	18.86%	3%	5%
JUNE	34.59	31.53	28.41	26.90	9.71%	11%	6%
JULY	30.75	29.44	25.50	26.70	4.45%	15%	-4%
AUGUST	33.75	32.12	27.18	24.70	5.06%	18%	10%
SEPTEMBER	28.32	35.00	30.26	29.70	-19.09%	16%	2%
OCTOBER	33.54	34.83	29.47	25.78	-3.69%	18%	14%
NOVEMBER	31.19	31.13	31.07	24.47	0.22%	0.18%	27%
DECEMBER	0.00	33.78	31.36	28.13		8%	11%
ANNUAL	365.91	385.90	356.68	322.50		8%	11%

## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Pay and Feed Prices

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including the Northeast and California. The chart below shows a consistent volume of organic packaged milk marketed out of the Order, although there is less sold as Class 1 in 2023 than there was in 2022. As usual, we are asking for greater detail to define how much Class 1 organic milk is brought into any individual FO, especially FMMO 1 and 51.

UTILIZATION OF ORGANIC FLUID MILK PRODUCTS AND CREAM BY POOL PLANTS (Million pounds) in FMMO 32 (Central)						
Month	2023	2023 in order	2023 out of order	2022	2022 used in order	2022 used out of order
March	52.73					
April	49.18	5.64	43.53	51.93	5.54	46.39
May	48.21	5.40	42.78	51.13	5.84	45.29
June	45.20	5.57	39.63	51.58	5.62	45.96
July	48.45	5.70	43.64	49.67	6.04	43.64
August	48.47	5.63	42.85	52.16	6.20	45.96
September	48.75	5.58	43.18	51.04	6.31	44.73
October	49.73	5.48	42.48	52.06	5.86	44.53
November	49.60	5.48	42.48	52.31	5.96	46.35

In recent reports from NOFA-New York certified livestock auctions in New York, organic cull cows traded, on average, above conventional cows in November and December 2023 and January 2024. The average price for conventional cull cows ranged from a low of \$73 per cwt to a high of \$82 per cwt. The average price for organic cull cows ranged from a low of \$82/cwt in October 2023 to a high of \$118/cwt in December. Organic milking cows were selling well at an average of \$1,500-\$1,700 each in January 2024. The auctions that are reporting on organic sales are Empire Livestock Auctions at Vernon, Pavilion and Dryden, and Hoskins Sales.

### Update on DMC

Signed into law in November 2023, the “Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024” provided continuing fiscal year (FY) 2024 appropriations for the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program through the end of 2024. USDA has not announced a date for sign-up for the 2024 year, yet. A USDA spokesperson said implementation of the DMC program for 2024 requires a program rule amendment and FSA staff was working on the amendment. There will not need to be any determination of any payments from the program until February 29th when they announce the margin for January 2024.

With a margin of \$9.44 in October 2023, there was a \$0.60 DMC payment. In November, there was no payment, and it is estimated that there will be a payment of \$0.75 in December 2023. The All-Milk price for October and November 2023 stayed at \$21.70 and \$20.37 respectively and in December it dropped slightly to \$20.37. Premium Alfalfa dropped from \$278/ ton in October 2023 to \$247 in December 2023/ton. Corn dropped in price in October 2023 to \$4.93/bushel and \$4.66/bushel in November and December 2023. Soybean meal saw the most variation rising by \$52/bushel to \$464/bushel in November 2023 from an October 2023 price of \$416/bushel. In December 2023 the price dropped to \$440.60/bushel.

The DMC kept many organic dairy producers in business in 2023. The situation without that subsidy, or for those that don't apply for federal insurance programs, is dire. NOFA VT spokesperson was quoted in an *American Agriculturist* article on 12/20/2023 giving a preview of their 2022 cost of production survey,

“A 2022 survey of 19 organic dairy farms by Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont showed an average pay price of \$33.27 per cwt but expenses at \$29.25 per cwt equivalent.” It is no surprise that New England is losing producers with these figures and only CROPP as a buyer, with Stonyfield, a Lactalis U.S. Yogurt brand, having limited capacity to take raw milk direct from the farm at their New Hampshire plant.

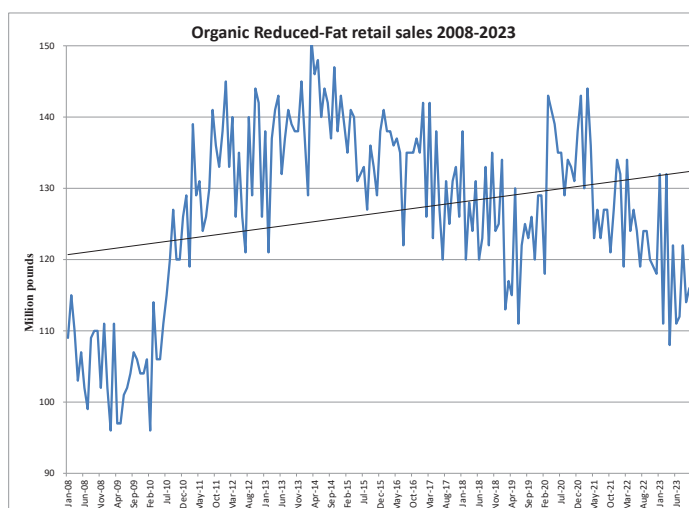
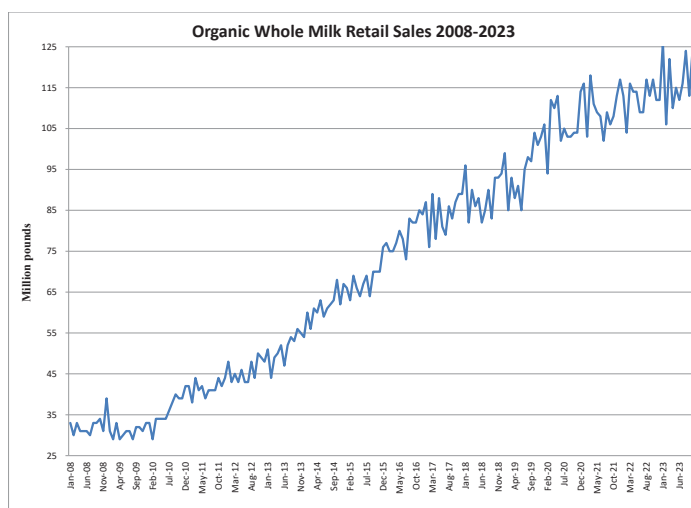
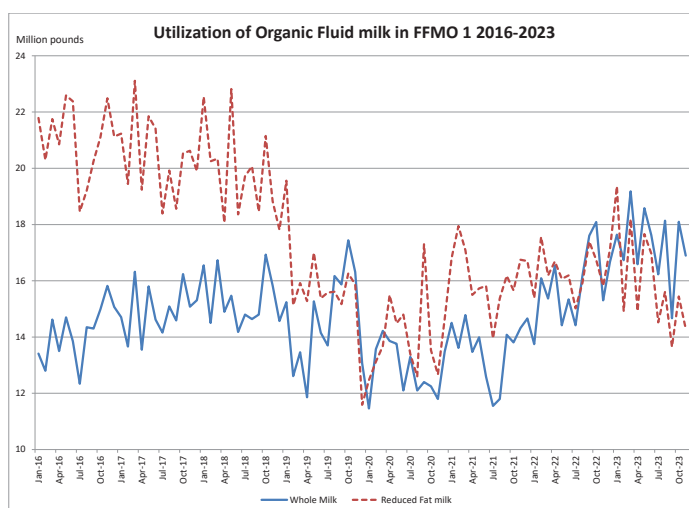
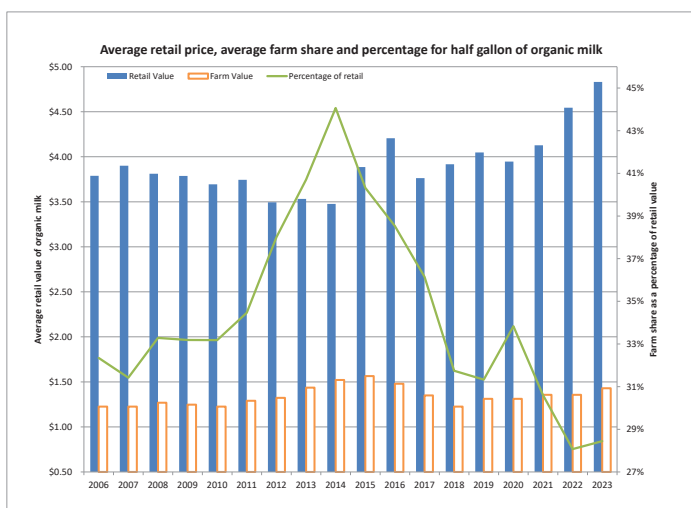
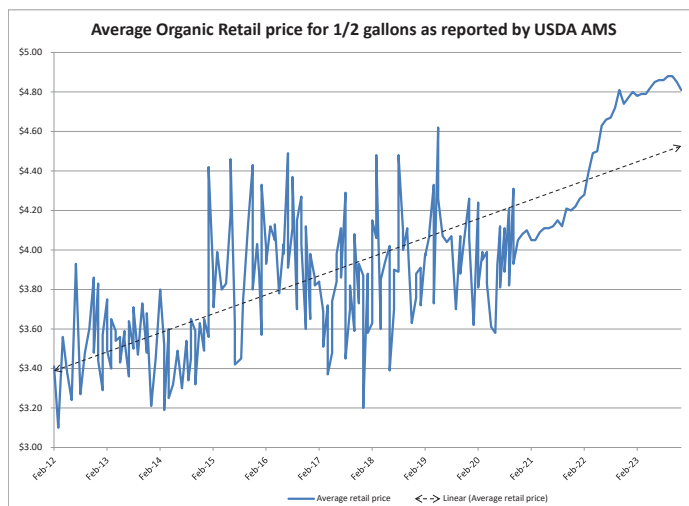
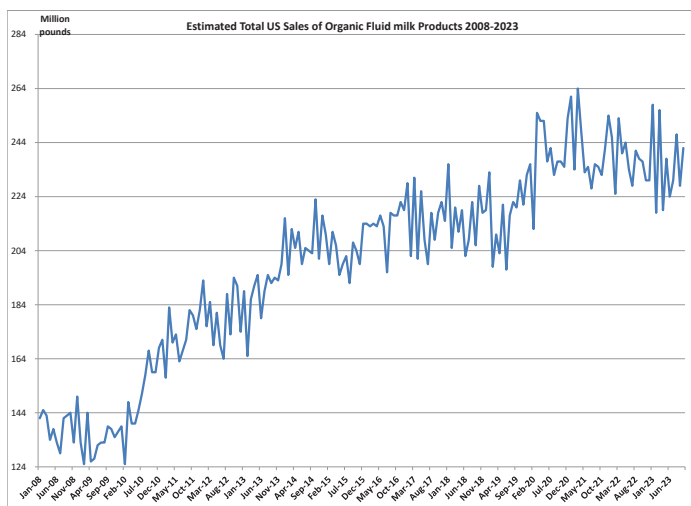
**Organic Milk Exports:** The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) releases monthly export data which includes export volumes and values for organic milk categorized as HS-10 code 0401201000. Recently released data for November 2023 indicated organic milk exports were 164,032 liters, down 34.64 percent from the month prior, but up 3.98 percent from 2022. Year to date exports of organic milk were reported as 42.32 percent higher than during the same timeframe a year ago.

### CROPP Cooperative and Maple Hill Pay Price increase

As the major buyer in the Northeast and the only buyer in some areas, producers welcomed CROPP Cooperative informing them there has been a change in the pay price. The letter to member/owners of the dairy pool states that the CROPP Board has been carefully “watching the impact that competitive pricing in certain regions has had on members and the cooperative.” The letter further states the obvious that: “These challenges have been particularly impactful in the West and New England regions, resulting in



## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS



significant attrition in those areas and putting our ability to fulfill future demand at serious risk.” The letter states that:

1. The following line-item MAPs will go into effect as of November 2023 milk until the board decides to remove or change them:

a. New England: \$1.50/cwt.

b. West Division (Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Utah, Colorado): \$1.00/cwt.

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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Pay and Feed Prices

*continued from page 13*

c. Northeast and Southeast: \$0.50/cwt.

2. The following **base pay price** increases will go into effect January 1, 2024, and will be applied equally across butterfat, protein, and other solids, based on a cooperative-wide total solids average of 13.07%:

a. Midwest, Mideast, Northeast, Southeast, and New England: \$0.50/cwt (this is equal to an increase of \$0.0383/lb. on Butterfat, Protein and Other Solids).

b. West Division (Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Utah, Colorado): \$1.00/cwt (this is equal to an increase of \$0.0765/lb. on Butterfat, Protein and Other Solids).

The increase in the CROPP pay price, which is shown in the table below starts to bring their pay price into line with other milk buyers in the area who have already increased pay price, for example, Upstate Niagara and Lactalis/Stonyfield:

The letter from Board President Dave Hardy states that “Lastly, I want to restate our commitment to engaging members to create farmer-determined pay price guiding principles in 2024. We’re in the middle of transitioning into a new phase of how we operate, and these discussions will be so important for guiding when and how we make pay price changes in the future. You’ve been asking for action for many months, and we’re glad to put this in place now. If you have questions about this decision, please contact any member of the board.” Note to CROPP – please publish the names and contact details for your Board.

	Nov-Dec 2023 Total MAP's	2024 base pay increase	2024 MAP's	2024 Total Pay Price Increase
West Division	\$ 1.50	\$ 1.00	\$ 1.00	\$ 2.00
Midwest		\$ 0.50		\$ 0.50
Mideast		\$ 0.50		\$ 0.50
Northeast & Southeast	\$ 0.50	\$ 0.50	\$ 0.50	\$ 1.00
New England	\$ 1.50	\$ 0.50	\$ 1.50	\$ 2.00

*There is currently a \$0.50/cwt MAP in place for the West region through December 2023.*

*This new decision increases the West MAP to \$1.50/cwt for November and December 2023*

In a highly publicized announcement, CROPP Cooperative announced that it “has brought 84 family farms into its fold in 2023, demonstrating a robust response to the trend of farm loss and agricultural consolidation. In 2023, Organic Valley built a stable market for another 84 organic family farms.” Of the 84 farms that joined in 2023, 26 were from Pennsylvania, 22 in

New York, a dozen from Wisconsin, six from Ohio, and others came from Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota and Vermont. About 43% of all members are part of the Plain Sect community. “We are looking to add approximately 1% of milk supply, overall, to our cooperative because of what we’re seeing from growth within our markets,” said Shawna Nelson, executive vice president of membership in a Lancaster Farming article. Organic Valley is supplied by farms in 31 states, including 270 in Pennsylvania. Reports from producers are that these are smaller operations with under 50 milking cows. This announcement was followed by CROPP launching a new brand in a press release which stated: “the expansion of its fluid milk portfolio with Organic Valley® Family First™. New Organic Valley Family First milk has all the goodness of the standard 12 essential nutrients in Organic Valley milks, with added DHA Omega 3 to support brain health. This new milk is meant to be enjoyed by milk lovers of all ages and comes from pasture-raised cows on Organic Valley’s small family farms.”

In a letter to their producers, Maple Hill informed them of a \$1.00 pay increase beginning in July, 2024; the increase will be split – \$.50 on the base, and \$.50 as a market adjustment premium.

There are different views about the current market for organic raw milk. Some producers view the current pay price as the limit of what buyers will pay and see the need to lower costs and expectation to maintain the market in the northeast. Others cannot survive on the current pay price and are looking for a greater share of the retail dollar. Producers and their families have many different cultural and financial needs and have to define their own goals, but all agree on the need for more information and competition. The reality is that more producers are moving to different milk

buyers as the supply market is tightening. Reports from producers in New England, New York and Pennsylvania are that there is a lack of confidence in CROPP, and they are moving to other buyers or retiring. Existing buyers who have historically responded more quickly to changes in costs of production with dollar increases in Pay Price rather

than cents have attracted both transitioning and established operations away from CROPP. Producers have also been attracted to other buyers who have programs that are paying producers incentives for their environmentally beneficial practices and have a less restrictive attitude to any prohibition of selling dairy products off the farm.



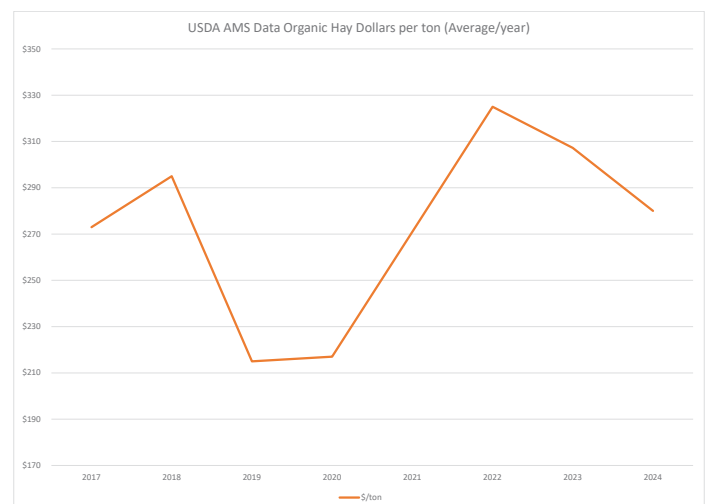
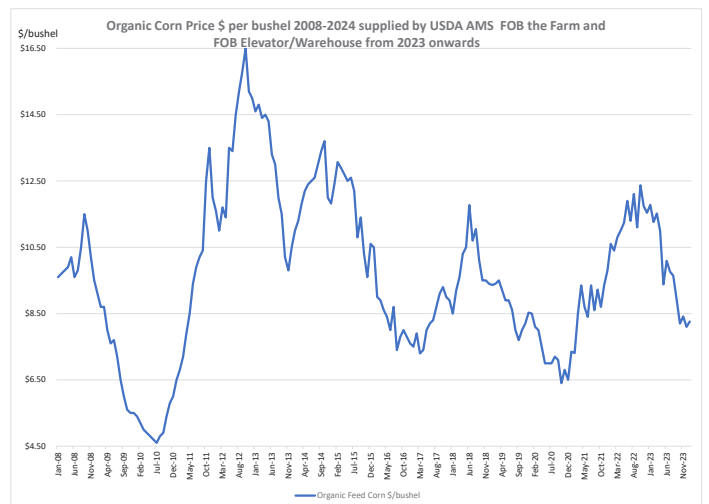
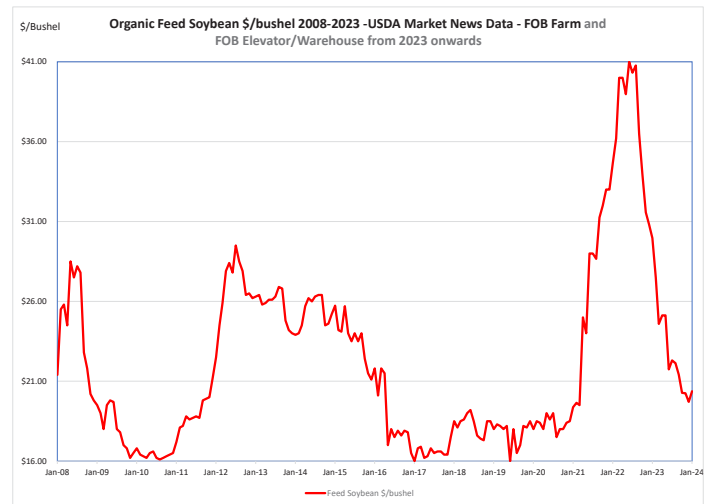
## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

In the Northeast, cooperatives are generally getting a bad name due to the actions of AgriMark, which is using large deductions from conventional producers' milk checks to sustain the business. Similarly, is CROPP's priority its business or its producer owners? The question of the future of CROPP being able to continue to supply Stonyfield with a regional supply is just one of the concerns that producers have, along with very limited alternatives to selling their milk at a price they can survive on. Stonyfield is a Lactalis U.S. Yogurt brand, and producers are questioning their commitment to continue manufacturing in NH or whether they will move to their other plants in Buffalo, NY, WI, or even to Canada where their Siggis yogurt is made. Expensive milk and limited manufacturing make growth more difficult, as well as having to satisfy the requirements of their parent company to return a substantial profit.

### Feed

National data from USDA has organic feed corn delivered to the elevator prices averaging \$8.10/bu. in December 2023 and \$8.26 in January 2024, down approximately \$2.00/bu. from 12 months prior. Organic feed soybean delivered prices averaged \$19.71/bu. in December and \$20.37/bu. in January 2024, down approximately \$10.00/bu. from 12 months prior. Soybean meal is currently trading at \$943/ton, about \$516/cwt. lower than 2022. These take no account for the cost of transport.

Mercaris reports that organic whole and cracked corn imports totaled about 40,000 MT in December, up 13% y/y. Turkey supplied 36,000 MT of organic cracked corn and Canada supplied 3,000 MT of organic whole corn. Organic whole and cracked corn imports for the 2023/24 marketing year (MY) through December totaled 140,000 MT, which is 35% above 2022/2023. Organic soybean imports in December 2023 are estimated at 11,000 MT, down 63% y/y. Turkey was the majority supplier with 8,000 MT, followed by Paraguay supplying 1,000 MT. Organic imports through December of the 2023/24 MY are estimated at 79,000 MT, which is down 22% y/y. Organic soybean meal maritime imports in December totaled 32,000 MT, up 225% y/y. Turkey was the largest single supplier with 13,000 MT. As a whole, Africa sent nearly 16,000 MT, with 5,000 MT from Togo, 4,000 MT from Nigeria, 3,000 MT from Ethiopia, and 2,000 MT from Kenya. India also sent 3,000 MT. Total organic soybean meal imports through December of the 2023/24 MY were 80,000 MT, which is up 27% compared to the prior marketing year. New sources of trade disruption have emerged in the Red Sea and Panama Canal, both of which could impact the import of organic commodities. In recent months, the cost of organic soybean meal imports has moved closer to domestic organic soybean meal, so increases in shipping costs could further eat into the discount for imports. This may increase domestic consumption over imports and reduce the current long position in the market. ♦



## ORGANIC PRODUCTION



## Ask the Vet

### *Have You Heard of the Asian Longhorn Tick? What You Should Know About Ticks and Cattle*

I saw my first tick 13 years ago in upstate New York. Now I routinely find them on myself after hikes and I keep up with flea and tick prevention on my dogs because Lyme and Anaplasma spread by ticks are found all too frequently sickening people's pets these days. With a changing environment, most people have noticed ticks in quantities and places like never before. What does this mean for our cattle herds?

The good news is, Lyme disease is very unlikely to affect ruminants. So far, there has never been a case reported in cattle, sheep or goats and it appears that they are not susceptible to the bacteria.

There are several other diseases spread to cattle by ticks that we should be watching out for. *Mycoplasma wenyonii*, *Anaplasma marginale* and *Theileria orientalis* are all present and becoming more common in the Northeast every year. **Look out for cattle with unexplained fever, lethargy, drop in milk production, anemia and jaundice** (white to yellow mucus membranes – seen at the vulva, gums and conjunctiva).

These are blood borne diseases. Once an animal is infected and recovers, they remain a carrier and source of infection for other animals. This is important to keep in mind in terms of managing affected animals. It's also a good reason to test sick animals for these diseases even if they look like they are going to recover on their own. A simple blood test can be done by most state veterinary laboratories and your veterinarian can advise on how to take and submit those samples. Anyone bringing cattle onto their property that have been south of Pennsylvania should inspect them for ticks and have them tested and quarantined before mixing with your herd.

*Anaplasma* and *Theileria* are rare enough that certain states will want any positive cases reported by your veterinarian. This record keeping won't affect the farm at all, but is valuable for everyone to know how common the disease is by region and how quickly it is spreading. We should be watching for cases reported locally to decide about testing recommendation for farmers.

*Anaplasma marginale* is the most common tick transmitted disease in cattle worldwide and is no longer particularly rare in the Northeast. It is spread by ticks as well as biting flies, dirty needles, bloody castration and dehorning equipment and any other way of transmitting blood between animals. As always, clean needles should be used between animals, dehorning should be done as early as possible, and fly control should be a priority.



Dr. Elizabeth Martens, DVM  
Valleywide Veterinary Services, Bridport, VT

Most herds in the southern US are learning to manage cattle to live with Anaplasmosis. Exposure at an early age usually doesn't cause severe disease and provides some immunity for life, while mature animals exposed for the first time and stressed animals can get very weak and die. A study of a dairy farm in Iowa showed that cattle testing positive for anaplasma produced significantly less milk than their negative herd mates – a loss of 5000 lbs of milk or more per cow per year.

*Mycoplasma wenyonii* has a really unique symptom of hindleg and udder or scrotal swelling, in addition to the more general fever, decreased milk production, swollen lymph nodes and anemia that lasts 2-5 days before the animal gets better. A recent study of farms in Wisconsin and Michigan showed that it is extremely common – in fact each of the 82 farms in their study had at least one cow that tested positive and on average about 72% of cows in the herds were positive. The economic and production level impacts of this bacteria are unknown.

In 2017, the Asian Longhorn Tick was first reported in New Jersey and has since been confirmed as far north as New York State, though it is reasonable to believe that it exists throughout New England. The Asian Longhorn tick is unique in that a single female can reproduce without a male present and create thousands of baby ticks very quickly. This tick often carries a new disease, known as *Theileria orientalis* genotype Ikeda. *Theileria* (pronounced tie-lehr-ee-uh) causes disease in cattle very similar to *Anaplasma*. Research out of New Zealand has shown that *Theileria orientalis* Ikeda causes significant economic losses to beef and dairy farmers – estimated at over \$400 per cow.

Treatment options for these diseases are often unrewarding. Antibiotics and other supportive care will help sick animals survive, but there is no approved product that will clear an animal from being a carrier. Our best option is to prevent these diseases from being spread to this region and our farms for as long as possible.

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## ORGANIC PRODUCTION

## Understanding the Role of Laboratory Pasteurization Count in Organic Dairy Practices

By Renee T. Lee and Nicole H. Martin; Milk Quality Improvement Program, Department of Food Science, Cornell University

The Laboratory Pasteurization Count (LPC) is one raw milk quality test that is often used to determine premium payments for organic dairy producers. LPC is a measure of the number of thermophilic bacteria, or bacteria that can survive heat treatments considerably higher than their growth temperatures. The LPC method mimics batch/vat pasteurization by heating the raw milk to 143°F/62.8°C for 30 minutes then counting how many bacteria survived the heat treatment. There is no standard limit for LPC in organic raw milk, however, typical recommendations are to keep it below 200 cfu/mL. Levels above this threshold may indicate that cleaning and sanitation of the milking equipment on the farm has not been adequate.

Past studies have identified the types of thermophilic bacteria found in raw milk, and they can be categorized into two main groups: those able to survive heat treatments because they form a dormant, heat-resistant structure called a spore, and those that survive the heat treatment without forming a spore. Spores are produced only by a certain group of bacteria, called sporeforming bacteria. Spores remain in this dormant state, meaning they do not grow or change, even over a long period of time. They are found all over the globe in natural environments like soil, plant material, and water until conditions are favorable and then they can start to grow again. In the dairy industry, this causes problems because spores are found in the raw milk, they can survive pasteurization in their dormant spore, then they can grow again in the product during shelf-life causing spoilage. High levels of spores in conventional raw milk have been linked to certain farm practices, including which type of bedding is used and how it is managed, udder and teat hygiene, and even what type of feed is fed to lactating cows. Our group at Cornell, the Milk Quality Improvement Program, is currently studying what farm practices are important to spore levels in the organic dairy system.

Unlike sporeforming bacteria, non-sporeforming bacteria do not have a special structure to survive heat treatments, and because of this, they are often not able to survive temperatures as high as those that spores can. This means that while they survive the LPC heat treatment, most don't survive the typical pasteurization process used in the US, high-temperature, short-time pasteurization (161°F/72°C for 15 seconds), but there are some exceptions. Examples of non-sporeforming thermophilic bacteria are *Brachybacterium*, *Kocuria*, and *Microbacterium*. These bacteria are known to cause biofilms,

which is when a group of bacteria sticks to a surface and become very hard to remove, in milking equipment. From this biofilm, they contaminate raw milk as it flows through the equipment. Some areas that non-sporeforming thermophilic biofilms have been found are in milk hoses, leaky pipes, and milkstone deposits.

While we know some things about thermophilic bacteria and where they come from, a lot of the research that has been done on thermophilic bacteria and the LPC test is decades old and there are still a lot of unanswered questions. For example, does freezing raw milk impact the outcome of the LPC test? Can LPC be used to determine how many spores are in the milk? Can tools that are used to identify mastitis organisms be used to identify thermophilic bacteria when it would be useful to know the specific type of organism that is causing a high LPC result? To answer these questions, we recently

*Continued on page 18*

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## ORGANIC PRODUCTION

## Understanding the Role of Laboratory Pasteurization Count in Organic Dairy Practices

*continued from page 17*

conducted a study on raw milk from certified organic dairy farms across the country.

### **Temporary freezing does not change the LPC or the types of thermophilic bacteria that survive the LPC heat treatment**

We are often asked if a producer can take their own bulk tank sample when their official sample is collected and freeze it in case they need to have a second LPC test run. In our study, we collected 15 raw milk samples, and each sample was split into two vials with one sample stored at 39°F/4°C for less than 24 hours before LPC testing, and the other sample stored at -4°F/-20°C for up to 7 days before LPC testing. When we compared each paired sample, we found no difference between the LPC of the fresh and frozen raw milk samples which means that raw milk samples can be frozen for a short time without changing the thermophilic bacteria count.


We also found that temporary freezing had no impact on the types of thermophilic bacteria in the raw milk. In both sample types, the largest proportion of bacteria were *Bacillus*, *Microbacterium*, and *Brachybacterium*. These results are good news for organic producers who want to be able to freeze a split sample of raw milk for a short period of time without affecting the level or types of thermophilic bacteria.

### **The LPC test cannot be substituted as a measure of spores in organic raw milk**

The next questions we wanted to answer were what are the levels and types of thermophilic bacteria in current organic raw milk supplies and can the LPC result be used to make inferences about the level of spores in a given raw milk sample. To answer these questions, we collected and tested 94 organic raw milk samples from 11 states across the country for LPC. We then collected individual bacterial isolates from the LPC tests for identification using a gold standard DNA sequencing method.

Overall, we found that the LPC results from our study ranged from less than 5 cfu/mL to ~11,800 cfu/mL, with an average of ~30 cfu/mL indicating that few producers had elevated thermophilic levels. In fact, only 10 samples exceeded the recommended 200 cfu/mL limit for LPC. From the samples, we collected 380 bacterial isolates that we identified as sporeformers (~53% of the isolates) and non-sporeformers (~47% of the isolates), which was consistent with what historical studies have found. The major types of thermophilic bacteria were identified as *Bacillus* (~44%), *Brachybacterium* (~15%), *Kocuria* (~12%), and *Streptococcus* (~8%).

In order to determine if the LPC result indicates how many spores are in the raw milk supply, we compared the level of LPC for each sample with the proportion of sporeforming bacteria found in the sample. Our results show that there was a trend for lower proportion of spores in samples with higher LPC (i.e., LPC greater than 200 cfu/mL) but there was not a statistical relationship between the LPC level and the presence of spores in the raw milk. This tells us that LPC cannot be used as a proxy test for sporeformers, and if a producer has a high LPC result that they aren't able to resolve, it can't be assumed that there is a spore problem. In fact, because sporeforming and non-sporeforming thermophilic bacteria originate from different sources on the farm, in order to successfully



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## ORGANIC PRODUCTION

troubleshoot, it may be necessary to further identify the main groups of thermotolerant bacteria causing an elevated LPC.

**Matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time of flight mass spectrometry (MALDI-TOF MS) can be used to identify thermotolerant bacteria in organic raw milk**

MALDI-TOF MS is a rapid microbial identification tool that is commonly used for identifying mastitis causing bacteria in raw milk. We compared MALDI-TOF MS to the gold standard DNA sequencing method, to evaluate the ability of MALDI-TOF MS to accurately identify thermotolerant bacteria in organic raw milk. Our results showed that ~67% of isolates were correctly identified by MALDI-TOF MS compared to DNA sequencing, while the remaining ~33% of the bacterial isolates were either not correctly identified by MALDI-TOF MS compared to DNA sequencing or were not able to be identified at all. Nearly a quarter of the isolates (~24%) could not be reliably identified using MALDI-TOF MS and the other ~9% of isolates were incorrectly identified using MALDI-TOF MS.

The number of differences in bacterial identification between the gold standard DNA sequencing method and MALDI-TOF MS is likely in part due to the types of bacteria that are in the MALDI-TOF MS database. Currently, MALDI-TOF MS is mostly used as a mastitis diagnostic tool, meaning the database mostly consists of mastitis causing bacteria. Successfully using MALDI-TOF MS as an identification tool for thermotolerant bacteria would require an expansion and update of the databases to include a diverse group of thermotolerant bacteria.

Our study provides an important update to the current understanding of thermotolerant bacteria in organic raw milk. Producers and other industry members who use LPC as a part of a quality premium program can use these results to improve interpretation of LPC results and inform troubleshooting efforts when there is a need. More details on this study will be available in an upcoming issue of the Journal of Dairy Science. ♦

### Acknowledgements

*This study was funded by United States Department of Agriculture Organic Research and Extension Initiative (USDA OREI) grant.*

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## FEATURED FARM

**EVENING STAR RANCH  
CAPE VINCENT, NY***continued from page 1*

The milking herd consists of between 85 - 115 head of Holstein, Jersey, and Jersey crosses. Holsteins make up about 50 percent of the herd, while the other 50 percent is Jersey genetics. Recently, the Jersey crosses have been bred to Montbeliarde, in order to capitalize on that breed's grass merits, hardiness and longevity.

While they are using genetics suited to grass, Paul and Drew don't feel that one breed of cow is better than another at making milk from a 100 percent grass diet. Drew hasn't seen much difference in performance on an all grass diet based on breed alone. Instead, "it all depends on the cow."

"We certainly put some stock into particular breeds but judging each cow individually has proven to be more fruitful," Paul said. "It's a cow by cow basis."

Based on the 365 day rolling herd average, the cows produce 13,500 - 14,000 pounds of milk per cow annually. Protein is about 3.5 percent, while butterfat percentage is 4.5 or more. The somatic cell count ranges from 130,000 - 160,000. Recently, a slight uptick

in SCC has been perplexing, as the cows are healthy and there hasn't been any unusual events.

They've "attributed that to an aging herd," Paul said of the slight increase in SCC.

**Grass Diet**

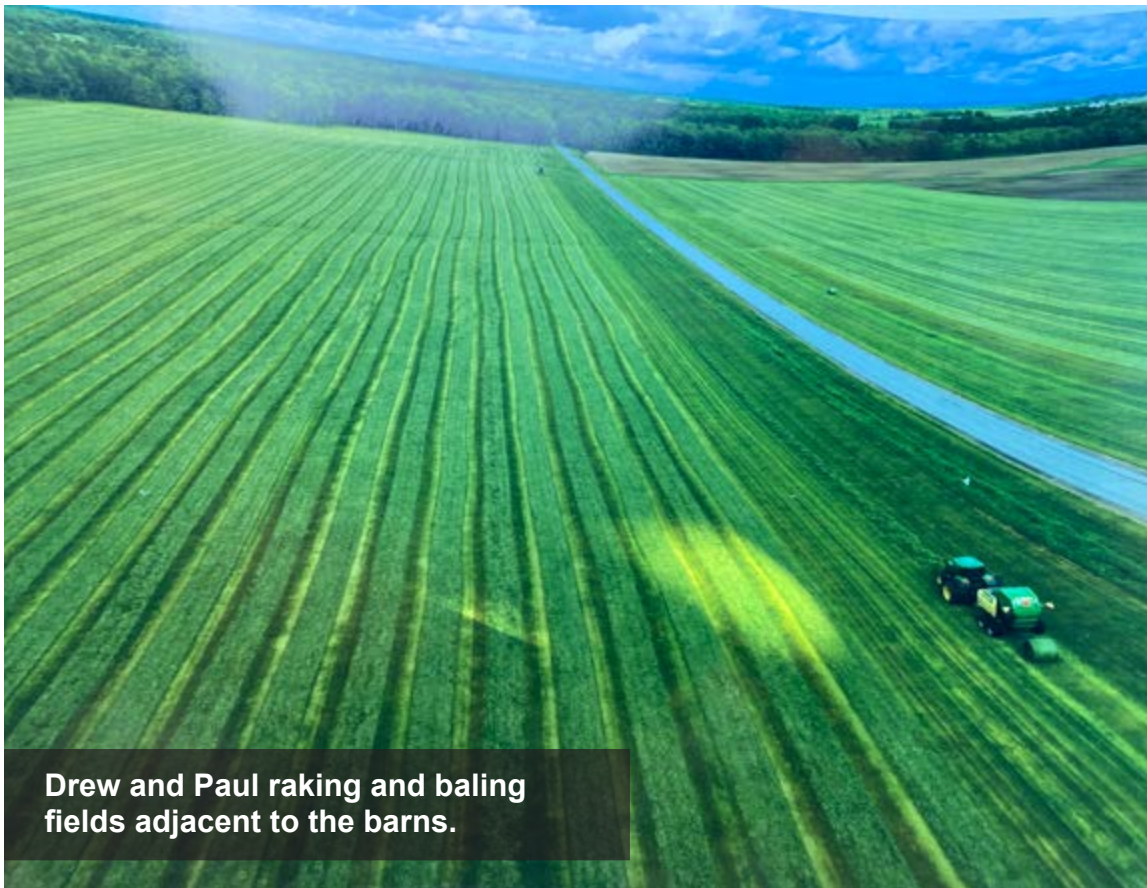
With 1,000 acres of owned land - not all of which is productive farmland - that includes 600 acres of hay and 200 of pasture, and an additional 150 acres of rented farmland, the cows receive all of their diet directly from the farm.

"For the most part, the pasture is permanent pasture and hay ground is also strictly hay ground," Paul said, although they may convert some hay ground to pasture in the near future.

With the cows receiving at least 60 percent of their dry matter intake, on average, from pasture grazing, and grazing for a minimum of 150 days per year, what is growing on that pasture is important. But they haven't found much need to mess with what has been growing there naturally.

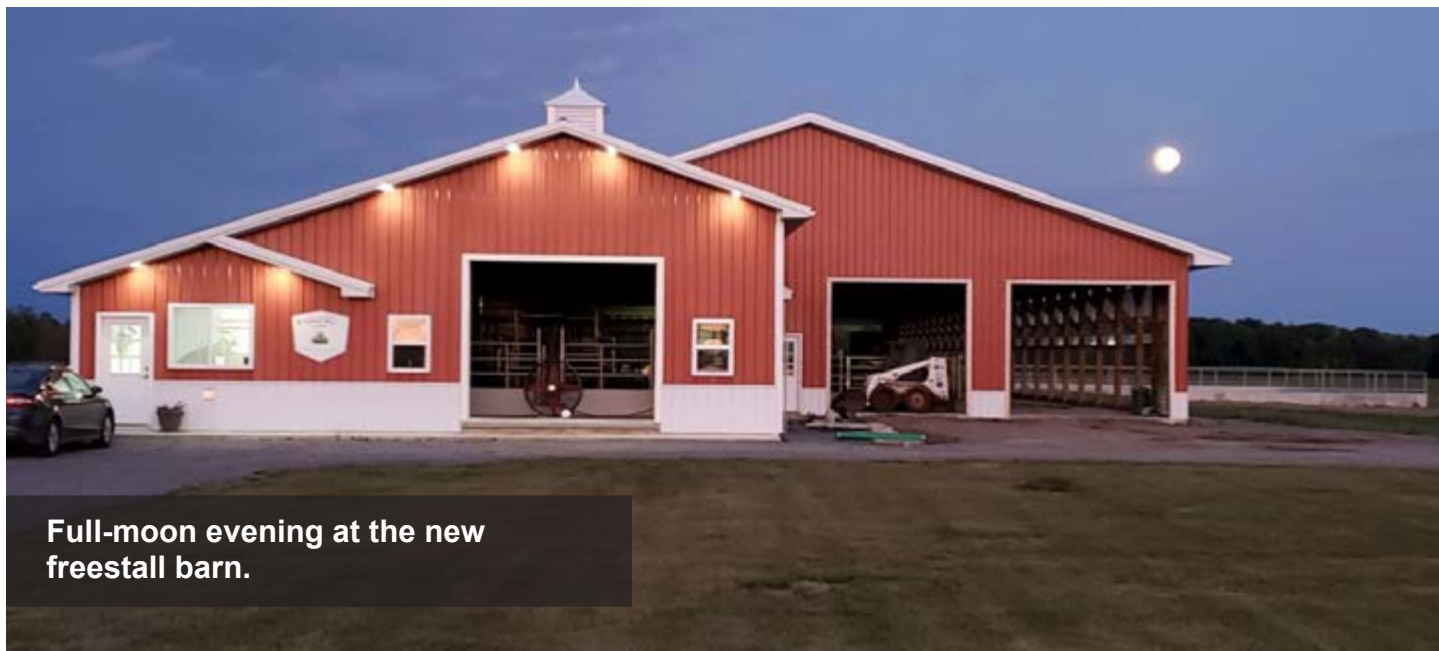
They feel the native seed base produces the varieties of grass and legumes best suited to the environment, and aside from some frost seeding of pasture grasses over the past few seasons

- primarily seeding red and white clover and trefoil - they have no plans to plant annual forages, or to grow any particular grass species. They experimented with a field of sorghum-Sudangrass one year, but didn't see any benefit to it, as opposed to keeping the land a perennial hay field. They add lime if testing shows it is needed, and apply both liquid and bedded pack manure to the pastures and hay fields, although they have so much land that it doesn't all get manure added each year.



**Drew and Paul raking and baling fields adjacent to the barns.**

## FEATURED FARM



**Full-moon evening at the new freestall barn.**

“The native grasses that we have had growing here forever have grown the best,” Paul said, and they don’t feel the need to change that, with predominantly clover and timothy in the fields naturally. Many fields “are just old meadows.”

Located at the northernmost reaches of New York State, where the St. Lawrence River flows into Lake Ontario, the grazing season here isn’t an overly long one. The cows are grazing from May 1st to October 31st, and are housed in a recently built freestall barn for the winter. They don’t use any supplements for the herd, either, so the farm’s pastures provide all of the nutrition needed to keep the herd healthy and productive.

“We try to be as minimalist as possible,” Paul said.

They do utilize a mixer to chop hay and insure that the first cutting hay is mixed well with second or third cutting. The milking herd is fed baleage during the non-grazing season, while the bred heifers and dry cows get dry hay and a bit of baleage when not grazing. They don’t have the need for a nutritionist.

## Back to Basics

Paul grew up on the farm, where his father operated a conventional small family dairy. The dairy herd was sold in the early 2000s. Drew demolished the old dairy barn, rebuilding a new barn in 2011, and began raising Holstein steers for beef. He certified the land as organic in 2014, which was easy to do as it had not had any chemicals applied for many years.

Soon, the steers were sold off, and the dairy was reborn. The steer barn became a bedded pack heifer barn, with a separate calf barn attached. The partners began by purchasing 80 conventional

heifer calves, but raised them organically. By 2016, the herd was completely certified organic by NOFA-NY. At that time, they also purchased a used double-eight stainless steel swing parlor from a dairy farm in Dansville, NY, and rebuilt it piece-by-piece, creating a brand new pit parlor, which is working extremely well, and which Paul highly recommends.

Paul and his father had milked the conventional herd in the now-demolished tie-stall barn, and “had no idea” what type of parlor they wanted, or what would work best. But the stainless steel was a bonus from a cleanliness perspective, and it was too good of an opportunity to hesitate, and they made the purchase without knowing much about it.

In 2017, Drew and Paul both quit their day jobs, and began full-time barn building. Darrell was still working for the New York State Comptroller’s Office at the time, retiring in 2023 – but is continuing to work on the farm.

The pit parlor is attached to their newly built freestall barn, which houses the milking herd. The barn is a standard three row arrangement with a feed alley down the side. The stalls are bedded with pasture mats and wood shavings. The alley manure scrapers push the manure to the end of the barn where it falls into an eight feet deep by three feet wide trench that runs the width of the barn. From there, the manure runs out to the concrete manure pit using only gravity

The cows are only in the barn during the non-grazing season. Otherwise, they are pastured 24/7, except when in the parlor for the twice per day milking. When housed, the cows have open-

*continued on page 22*



## FEATURED FARM



Cow and new calf.

## EVENING STAR RANCH CAPE VINCENT, NY

*continued from page 21*

door, unimpeded, free choice access to the outdoor area, and have “the entire laneway for exercise,” Paul said.

The milking herd is a closed herd. They raise all of their own replacement heifers, and sell the rest. They keep roughly the top third of the heifers each year, freshening about 110 and keeping approximately thirty. The rest, along with the bull calves, are sold at the auction barn or sold to a nearby farmer as soon as they are weaned.

The milking herd size increases by about 30 cows in the winter to about 115 head. The reason is twofold, Drew said. Maple Hill Creamery pays farmers a premium for milk in the winter season, in order to keep a steady supply available. And, in the winter, when haymaking is not a concern, there is more time to milk cows. It’s a win-win for the farm, and for their processor.

“We’ve got more time in the winter to milk, and it helps Maple Hill to level out the supply,” Drew said. Come spring, the herd is culled of older, less productive cows.

They also try to time their breeding so cows are not calving in the spring, preferring fall calving and winter calf-raising, to more evenly distribute the farm labor needs. First calf heifers are bred to a bull, which is selected primarily for calving ease. Artificial insemination is used on the milking herd, with “good legs and feet” being very important, as the herd is moving around frequently, Paul said. They do some of their own breeding, and hire out for the rest.

Their vet is a neighbor, and primarily is used as a sounding-board. The herd is healthy, and they do not regularly use veterinary services. They haven’t had issues with pregnancy or breeding, and a rare injury is the most likely reason they would need veterinarian services for the herd.

“We’re still milking many of the ones we’d started with in 2017,” Drew said, reflecting on how the cows really are very healthy. And, when it is confirmed that a cow has mastitis, they are quick



## FEATURED FARM



to cull, believing that preventing the spread of pathogens is key to herd health.

The healthy herd is due to a “good clean barn, clean water, clean bedding, good air flow,” Paul said. “I’m blown away by the success” of grazing cows organically, and feeding only grass. “I’m a true believer in the methodology, the practices, and the benefits of being grass-only.”

Cows are vaccinated once per year, while heifers are vaccinated at 12 -14 weeks, both with Pilliguard, used to prevent eye infections prior to spring pasturing. They do not vaccinate calves at birth. They haven’t had any calf health issues, so don’t feel a need to vaccinate.

When Paul was young, and his father raised the calves conventionally, milk replacer and starter grains were used. The farm had “three times the amount of issues” with calf health as they do now. He credits that to the better environment in the new calf barn, time with their mother, the healthy milk they are fed, and an all grass diet. Erin, who is the primary caretakers for

the calves and the youngstock, has also been a major factor in keeping the calves healthy.

The calves are raised simply. Initially housed in a large feeding pen in the cow barn, the calves are nursed by their mother for two weeks. The cow is milked in the morning with the herd, but is left with the calf and not milked during the second milking.

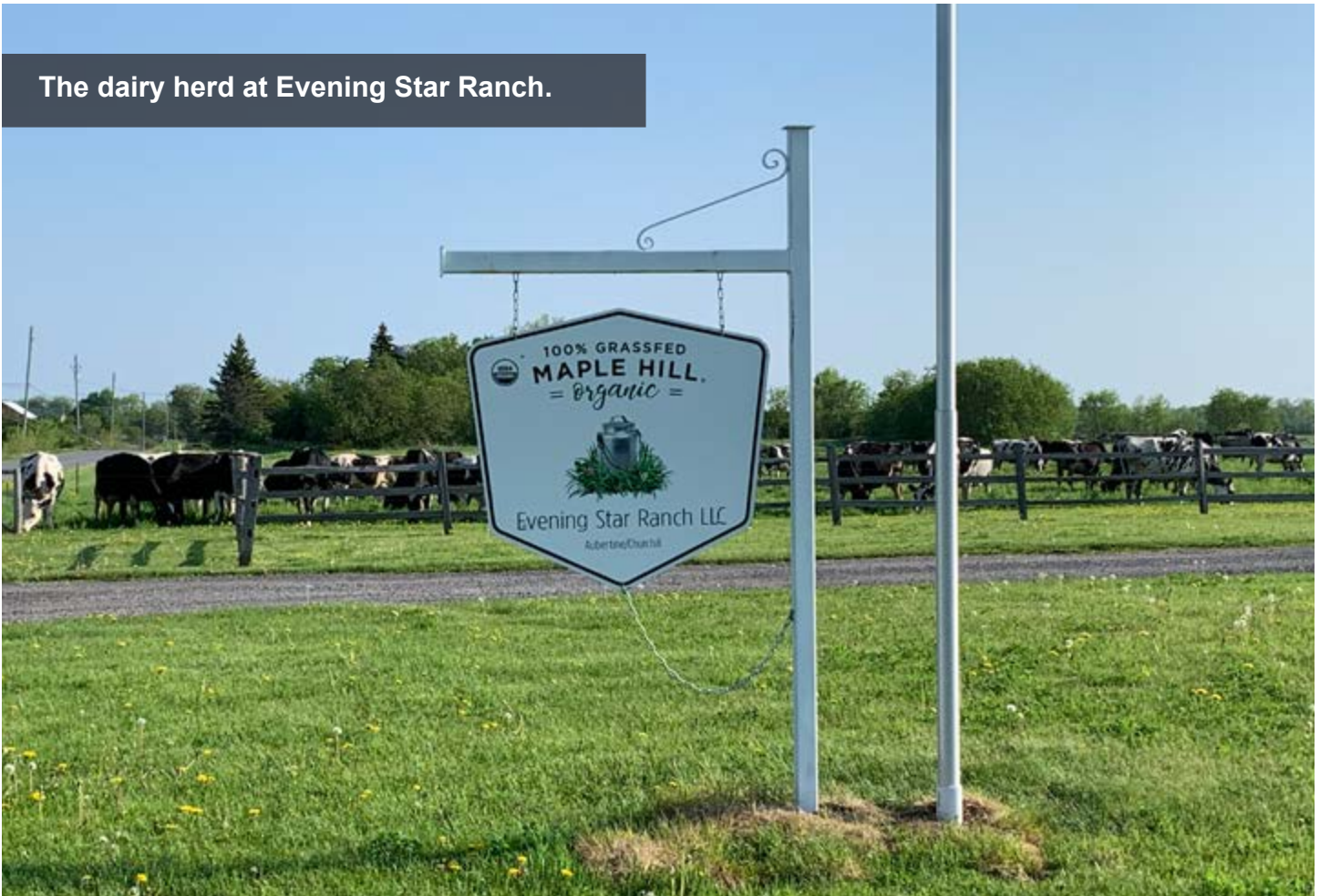
Once weaned from their mother, the calves receive unpasteurized milk from the herd, and are housed in two large pens, with four or five calves per pen. Calves also receive second or third cutting dry hay immediately upon being transferred to the calf barn. The calf pens are located in an insulated, tube-ventilated barn, and are bedded with chopped hay and wood shavings. This barn is a separate facility, but is attached to the dry bedded pack barn heifer barn. The heifer barn was the former steer barn, built by Drew in 2011, when he was raising beef. The calves will graduate to the heifer barn before they are turned outside to graze.

*continued on page 24*



## FEATURED FARM

The dairy herd at Evening Star Ranch.



## EVENING STAR RANCH CAPE VINCENT, NY

*continued from page 23*

The bedded pack barn is cleaned out weekly. The used manure and bedding is stored on a three-sided concrete manure bunk adjacent to the barn, until it is spread onto hay fields and pastures at opportune times, and is “pretty easy to clean,” Paul said.

### Grass-fed Goodness

At six to eight months of age, calves are turned onto pasture for the duration of the grazing season. The calves graze with the other young stock and the bred heifers, in different paddocks than the milking herd or dry cow group. The bred heifers are across the road, in smaller paddocks than the milking cows, and are rotated once every one to two days. If the grass gets ahead of the group, it is clipped. While the rotations mimic those of the milking herd, its ‘not as intense on our end,’ Paul said.

Dry cows are in their own close-up paddocks adjacent to the milking barn, for ease of observation.

The milking herd is rotated to fresh pastures daily, or sometimes twice daily if necessary, and graze night and day during the grazing season, only entering the parlor to milk, and returning immediately back outside to graze. They will either rotate into a new paddock, or a temporary fence will be used to re-size an existing paddock.

In the spring, they move the cows as fast as they can around all of the paddocks, to keep up with the spring flush. During August, when it is dry and less grass is available, they will sometimes need to supplement with hay. This past summer, grass was lush, and they did not supplement at all. Cow pastures are also clipped with a brush hog if they get too mature.

They graze by sight, allowing the cows to graze down to about four or five inches, then moving them to fresh grass. In general, the rest period is 30 to 40 days prior to re-entry. If the grass heads out, they will clip rather than try to graze it. In the spring they clip the pastures for uniformity among the different grasses and

## FEATURED FARM

to stimulate growth. Later in the summer and early fall it's more to prevent weeds from going to seed, Paul said.

"Dad is a stickler about clipping," Paul said.

### Simple Wisdom

Paul and Drew have felt extremely supported by Maple Hill Creamery, naming Mitch Clark, senior vice president of supply chain at Maple Hill Creamery; Kristina Reginelli at Maple Hill Creamery, who always answers the phone and keeps them up to date with any changes that will affect the farm; Phyllis Van Amburgh, of Dharma Lea Farms and a consultant to Maple Hill Creamery; and Jim Young, another Maple Hill Farmer, as four of the resources they've come to rely on for practical advice and support. They can call any of these people and know that they are in good hands.

"We couldn't possibly say enough good things about Maple Hill Creamery as a whole," Paul said.

Maple Hill Creamery has earned their respect for the fair treatment and innovative programming tools they make available to their dairy farmers. It's not only the payment structure, the investment in their farmers, the educational tools provided to

help farmers succeed, but the accessibility and knowledge of the other grass-fed farmers, which speaks to the brand's integrity. It's also the Maple Hill Creamery philosophy of grass-fed milk, and belief in small family-sized farms, that Paul and Drew value.

"The last thing we need is a 1,000-plus cow grass-fed dairy," Drew said, referring to larger sized enterprises which exist in other regions of the country, and the lowering or lack of enforcement of organic standards that has been plaguing the organic dairy industry in recent years.

Paul believes that well-enforced organic dairy industry standards are needed to insure that organic dairy farming remains true to its roots. Loopholes in organic dairy standards must be patched. As more people are "realizing the benefits of good, clean, wholesome food," there is opportunity for exploitation. "You just can't do what we do with 1000 cows," Paul said. "Organic and grass-fed is really the key to family farm survival."

When Paul, his father, and Drew teamed together to return to dairy farming, organic dairy presented the only opportunity. But in 2017, there was no organic milk market available to them.

*continued on page 26*



**View of the freestyle barn.**



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## FEATURED FARM



**Timmy, Josie, Paul, Kari and Greg Aubertine**

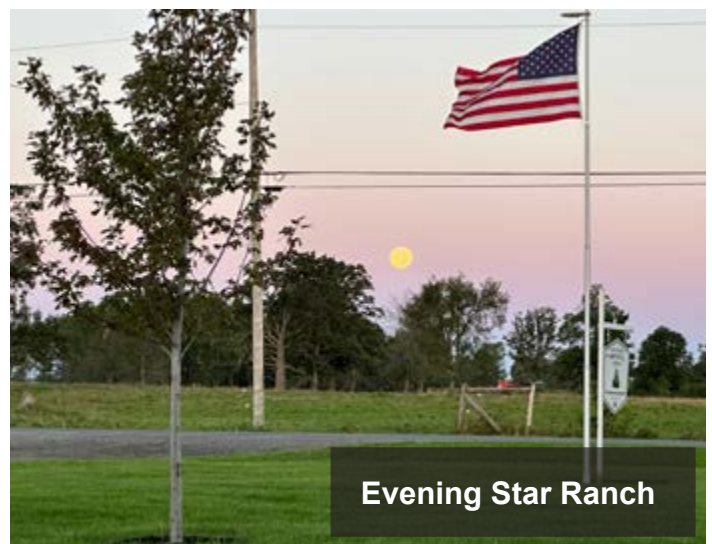
## EVENING STAR RANCH CAPE VINCENT, NY

*continued from page 25*

"If you wanted to be a small, family dairy, it was your only option," to be organic, Paul said. The only market they could find, however, was Maple Hill Creamery. "Go grass-fed or stay out," was the decision they had to make.

Despite being unsure that grass-fed would work, and feeling intimidated by it, they jumped into production. Today, they know undoubtedly that they made the correct decision, Paul said. "You couldn't force me to leave the grass-fed world." ♦

*Paul Aubertine can be reached at (315)777-1973, and Drew Churchill can be reached at (315)767-2607. Evening Star Ranch is located at 3225 Hell St, Cape Vincent, NY 13618*



**Evening Star Ranch**

## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

# Danone Sells Horizon to Equity Firm Platinum Equity

Compiled and written by Ed Maltby, NODPA Executive Director

On January 2nd, 2024, French food group Danone announced that it had signed an agreement to sell its Horizon Organic and Wallaby companies and brands to investment firm Platinum Equity but still retain a minority share in the business. The sale of the Horizon Organic and Wallaby businesses is part of the company's portfolio review and asset rotation program the company announced in March 2022. Danone did not disclose the financial details of the deal. It's taken Danone nearly a year to find a buyer.

"This sale, once completed, will allow us to concentrate further on our current portfolio of strong, health-focused brands and reinvest in our growth priorities," said Danone CEO Antoine de Saint-Affrique, reported by Reuters News agency.

Whether Horizon is the "largest organic dairy brand in North America, with a portfolio of milk,

creamers and whiteners, yogurt, cheese, and butter" as the press have reported, cannot be substantiated from independent data. They certainly are not the leading sellers of fluid milk products which, currently, are store and private label brands. Wallaby is an Australian-inspired brand of organic yogurt.

Who or what is Platinum Equity? An internet search showed that the California-headquartered Platinum Equity has a portfolio of around 50 companies across 9 industries, from

consumer and retail to technology and healthcare. The firm recently announced the pending acquisition of Kohler Energy from Kohler Co., and has also acquired businesses from firms like Ball Corporation, Caterpillar, ConAgra, Emerson Electric, Ingersoll Rand and Johnson & Johnson. "Tom Gores founded Platinum Equity in 1995 and his guidance, core philosophies, and strong principles drive the strategic development and direction of both the firm and its portfolio. We employ a highly specialized strategy called M&A&O® that integrates investment expertise with deep operational capability and resources, including a large team of in-house operations professionals with hands-on experience from the boardroom to the factory floor. We believe our commitment to the "O" sets us apart from other firms and helps us build strong, healthy companies and create meaningful long-term value."

Platinum Equity's co-president, Louis Samson, commented to Teodora Lyubomirova of Dairy Reporter: "Horizon Organic is an iconic name in dairy that is well recognized and beloved by consumers. The brand has earned a reputation for quality and innovation that is unmatched in the industry. We appreciate Danone's confidence in our ability to build on that legacy, and support Horizon Organic's growth as a standalone company." Perhaps Mr Samson needs to do a complete internet search or give me a call to get a more realistic view of Horizon's reputation. Platinum Equity did not return a call or reply to an email requesting comment from NODPA.

Company MD Adam Cooper is also reported in the Dairy Reporter as saying that premium offerings, including organic products, were driving the growth in the dairy milk segment, adding: "Horizon Organic is a pioneer of that segment and is in position to continue capitalizing on and accelerating the trend." Not sure where they get their information from but the growth in organic sales is marginal even though it is one of the only growth areas in dairy. Looking at the company's portfolio, they lack experience in food processing and Horizon existing management has been struggling for the last few years. When we learn more we will share the information publicly. Horizon producers may want to ask questions of their buyer about their future. ♦



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Cultivating an Expanding Organic Farming Community with Mentorship, NOFA-NH's Winter Conference and Annual Bulk Order

By Teresa Downey, NOFA-NH's TOPP Coordinator

**T**he Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is concluding its first year of five with a bang! Eighteen transitioning producers have been matched with certified organic farmer mentors in the first round of matching for the TOPP program in New Hampshire. Mentors will work together with transitioning farmers over the next year to help develop organic practices, support the transition process, set goals, and form a strong network of support for organic farmers.

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH) is a TOPP Core Partner in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic Region, partnering with the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance and 11 other NH TOPP Cohort partners to support farmers and the success of the TOPP program including: Cheshire County Conservation District, Granite State Graziers, Kearsarge

Food Hub, National Center for Appropriate Technology, New England Farmers Union, NH Farm Bureau, NH Food Alliance and NH Food Hub Network, NH Queer Farmers Network, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Seacoast Eat Local, UNH Cooperative Extension, and Vital Communities.

The TOPP program is free for farmers who would like support to transition to certified organic production. Mentors, along with NOFA-NH and the TOPP Cohort Partners will help mentees along the way by providing technical assistance, community support and networking.

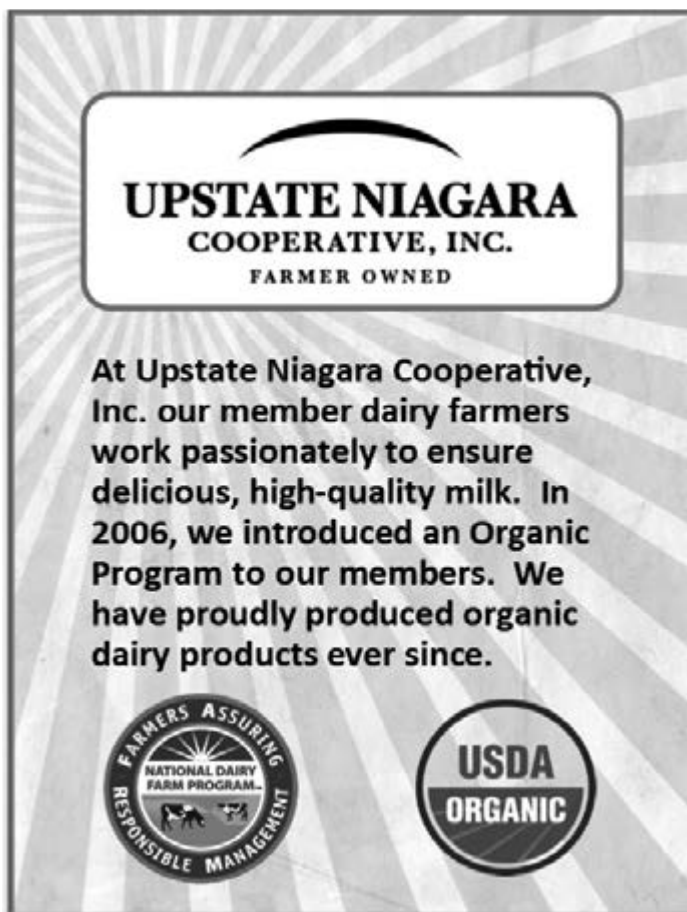
The organic community in New Hampshire will be growing with farmers and food hubs. The USDA's new Strengthening Organic Enforcement rules require food hubs that handle organic products to be certified starting in 2024. The TOPP program is supporting these food hubs through the organic certification process so that the organic food chain can continue without issue in New Hampshire.

The TOPP program has been well received throughout our region, so much so that there will be another mentor/mentee matching session later this winter.

Applications are always open for farmers who want to transition to organic and already certified organic farmers who would like to add a scope, add more acreage, or become a paid mentor.

To learn more about upcoming TOPP events, technical assistance opportunities, and to apply as a TOPP Mentor or Mentee, please visit [www.nofanh.org/topp](http://www.nofanh.org/topp).

Programming for transitioning to organic production and many other agricultural topics will be available at NOFA-NH's 22nd Annual Winter Conference, A Holistic Food System Future: Farms, Community, & Environment on February 10, 2024, at Southern NH University. The conference will explore the ecosystem of food and invite participants to build skills that cultivate abundant businesses, communities, homes, and systems. Register at [www.nofanh.org/winterconference](http://www.nofanh.org/winterconference).



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

NOFA-NH is excited to announce a new monthly Farmers Organic Roundtable virtual meeting to be held on the third Thursday of each month at 6:30 PM from January-October. Please find more information on the NOFA-NH website: [www.nofanh.org](http://www.nofanh.org).

As the winter deepens and we begin to dream again of spring, please mark your calendar for NOFA-NH's annual Bulk

Order sale, offering discounts on farming and gardening supplies for producers at all scales. Visit [www.nofanh.org/bulk-order](http://www.nofanh.org/bulk-order) for details. The store opens in late December/early January for orders. ♦

For questions, please contact Teresa Downey, NOFA-NH's TOPP Coordinator at [teresa@nofanh.org](mailto:teresa@nofanh.org). Read more about TOPP at: [organictransition.org](http://organictransition.org)

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## ORGANIC PRODUCTION

## Challenges and Take-Aways From Summer Cocktails for Pasture

By Doug Hartkopf, Hart-to-Hart Farm with contributions from Carissa Stein and Sarah Flack

The Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center awarded us, Hart-to-Hart Farm, an Innovation & Alternative Management grant for the 2023 growing season. This grant was a way to buffer the financial risk of implementing what can be quite costly during such high inflation and climatic swings that we and the local farming community have been enduring. Just so happens climate change was a factor that overshadowed our entire planting season. The practices that were included in the grant were intended to build resiliency and meet the soil health principle of diversity. Soil amendments were applied to ensure persistence of the high-quality seed and for assistance in retaining nutrients in our fields. The focus of soil health and forage quality is imperative to our grazing season. The overall effort to improve feed quality and renovate the pastures is how we plan to be resilient in these economic gaps and ensure the health of our herd is robust.

Our grant can be whittled down to 3 basic parts:

1. Soil amendments to pastures and hay fields based on recent soil tests. This was high calcium lime (110 tons) and about six tons of pelletized gypsum/boron on all the pastures (250-300lbs/ac).
2. Creating comparisons of a new seeding with conventional tillage vs no-till. The field was sorghum sudangrass/Italian ryegrass last year.
3. Plowing up some pasture and adding summer cocktails (warm season plants) into our grazing rotation, while also comparing yield and growth through analyzing new satellite data from Organic Valley (OV) as well as daily milk production differences when on these pastures.



*Figure 1: Pasture seeding August 17th, 2023*

Excess rain was the major factor that we had to deal with for this 2023 growing season and grant period. In our part of Maine, we had a cool, dry spring but from May 1st through the middle of September our farm received 42" of rain and we stopped counting after that. Timing of when to apply fertility inputs had to be modified due to weather and wet field conditions, so we applied gypsum in August and the lime throughout the summer in seven-ton increments. In 2022, we did not have enough rain, recognizing the rain probably assisted with the incorporation of the amendments into the soil profile. The grant award was announced in the spring, it would have been ideal to have the amendments spread the prior fall to allow time for the soil to take in the amendment on any area we were not going to till.

For the conventionally planted new seeding we did all our manure hauling and tillage at the end of May. We were all set to seed down on June 2nd, but then the rain started. Our window was a narrow three-day window on June 22nd, so we re-harrowed the field even though the soil was not completely dry, leaving about one acre out of the sixteen-acre field too wet to harrow. The seed was a high by Tank Transport · January 5, 2024 quality alfalfa, grass, and clover mix at 25lbs/acre with a nurse crop of peas/oats at 50lbs/acre. The field germinated in about 4 days but had poor take of the nurse crop. We harvested



## ORGANIC PRODUCTION



*Figure 2: Conventionally seeded field on July 19th*

the field 2x over the summer getting 50x 1400lb bales at 50% dry mater (DM) each time. Perhaps the yields were low due to lack of heat and sun and some soil compaction. Forage tests were only 16% crude protein and .50 net energy for lactation. For the no-till site, we were unable to harvest the volunteer grasses and Italian ryegrass until the middle of September

due to saturated field conditions, pushing the no-till planting back to October 1st. In Maine this can be late for seed establishment, but we did observe some clover germination. Next spring will be the real feedback for the planting; seed was a mix of meadow fescue, timothy, red clover and ladino clover. We plowed up a total of sixteen acres of pasture for summer cocktail mixtures. The original intent was to stagger the plantings so we could keep up with the growth; given the weather conditions we pivoted to planting everything at once. Ultimately, we planted eleven acres of Yield Max,

a mix of: several sorghum sudan grasses, two varieties Italian ryegrasses, hairy vetch, medium red clover and berseem clover, plus we managed to add Barkant turnips at 2 lbs./acre on six

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# THIS MARK MATTERS.

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## ORGANIC PRODUCTION

## Challenges and Take-Aways From Summer Cocktails for Pasture

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acres. An additional five acres were planted to a mix of forage oats and winter triticale. The lack of heat really affected our plan to suppress the weed pressure with sorghum-sudan grass. Since it is a warm-season grass, it was very slow to grow and didn't totally out-compete the lambsquarter and pigweed. Out of the eleven acres we were able to graze six acres 3x over the summer and fall. The other five acres were round baled to get rid of the weed competition. Afterward, we rotationally grazed it twice. The oats and winter triticale were impacted by the 65 mph winds and 4.5" of rain that we received from a hurricane in September; we observed a lot of lodging. We were able to salvage twenty-eight bales from the five acres. The field remained saturated with very little regrowth of oats or winter triticale. We tried to use the OV satellite IR imagery to gauge our growth and compare lbs. of DM per acre but given the cloudy and rainy weather the satellite data was not very accurate, and reports were limited in July



**Figure 3: September 12th, Grazed versus Not Grazed**


and August while OV tried to recalibrate satellite imagery. In lieu of the satellite data, we physically walked pastures weekly and observed that the oats were the least productive from the planting (given that they were planted in July versus late August/early September).

Our herd grazed the summer cocktails once per day with remaining permanent pasture making up the balance of forage. We noted milk production was up 3.5-4lbs/cow/day when they were grazing the summer cocktails compared to not being on them. No real change in components.

Take aways:

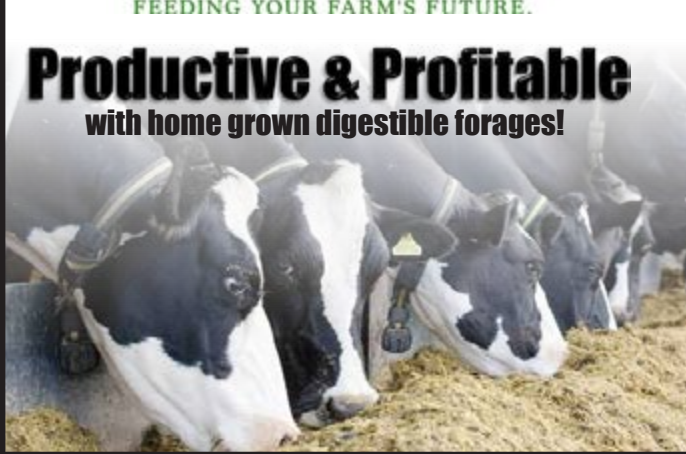
- Our cows did not like turnips. Heifers and dry cows only ate them after the final grazing in November.
- We would not do a repeat planting of oats and winter triticale together. Perhaps use Italian ryegrass as a companion next time.
- Totally impressed with Italian ryegrass even with poor growing conditions; had a good amount of hairy vetch and clover as well. Palatability was excellent as was regrowth!
- Milk production was up when grazing summer cocktails.

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[hart2hartfarm@gmail.com](mailto:hart2hartfarm@gmail.com), (207) 692-4507.



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## ORGANIC INDUSTRY NEWS

## Bipartisan Organic Dairy Data Collection Act

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Congressman Molinaro commented that “The USDA collects pricing and production cost data so dairy farmers can have access to competitive markets, keep a pulse on industry challenges, account for feed costs, and make accurate decisions with reliable information. Unfortunately, this same data isn’t available to organic dairy farmers. New York is one of the top states in organic production and during my farm bill listening sessions I have heard firsthand from organic dairy farmers about the uncertainty they experience,”

The bipartisan Organic Dairy Data Collection Act:

1. Directs USDA to collect and publish cost-of-production data for organic milk, including the costs of major organic feedstuffs, domestically produced or imported.
2. Directs USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to gather and report monthly data about the amounts that organic dairy farmers are being paid for organic milk.
3. Directs USDA NASS, the Economic Research Service (ERS) or Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to publish reports on the cost of production data by state, regional data on the quantity of organic milk production and prices.

This legislation has support from across the country including the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Organic Farmers Association, National Organic Coalition, Organic Farming Research Foundation and Organic Trade Association.

“The famous business adage “You can’t manage what you don’t measure” applies to the organic dairy market. The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance supports the Organic Dairy Data Collection Act as it will provide that necessary measurement by requiring the collection and publication of data that will shed light on the state of the organic dairy sector. Representative Pingree’s leadership with this Act will help facilitate understanding and improvement in the market,” said Kathie Arnold, a New York organic dairy farmer and chair of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance’s policy committee.

“We are thankful to Congresswoman Pingree and Congressman Molinaro for taking the lead and acknowledging the lack of data we have accessible for organic dairies. This is a nationwide issue affecting organic dairy farmers of all sizes and backgrounds. Our hope is that this information becomes the conduit to many

necessary conversations that the sustainability and succession of our industry hinges upon,” said Lia Sieler, Executive Director of the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance.

“Improved organic data collection and reporting, bolstered by this bill, is going to provide more reliable and consistent information on organic dairy production costs and markets. The reality is that this type of information can vary region by region so this effort can help farmers like me plan for the year and make decisions on what actions I need to take on my organic dairy,” said Annie Watson, Organic Valley farmer-member and owner of Sheepscot Valley Farm in Whitefield, Maine. “Representative Pingree continues her life’s work to advance organic agriculture with this bill – big thanks to her and Representative Molinaro for introducing this targeted but meaningful bipartisan legislation.”

“Family run organic dairy farms provide healthy food and environmental stewardship to rural communities across the country. The Organic Dairy Data Collection Act can provide valuable data collection to inform future support for an industry facing economic crisis,” said Kate Mendenhall, Executive Director of Organic Farmers Association. “We applaud Representatives Pingree and Molinaro for championing this important work.”

“Organic dairy producers and consumers in Maine and across the country are grateful to Representative Pingree for her introduction of the Organic Dairy Data Collection Act,” said Sarah Alexander, Executive Director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). “A perfect storm of adverse effects, including escalating costs of production, low pay-prices, a labor shortage, unstable international supply chains, and dramatically shifting weather patterns have created a crisis for the organic dairy sector. This legislation is a critical component of an urgently needed rescue plan for organic dairy. Having a clear national picture of all costs associated with organic dairy production in each state, regional production data and pay prices will help ensure that technical and financial assistance goes where it is needed most.”

“Farmers, like all business managers, depend on solid and trustworthy data to make decisions. With the continued fluctuations in market conditions from global events impacting domestic organic dairy farmers, it is more important than ever for producers, stakeholders, and USDA to have access to accurate data. The Organic Trade Association is grateful for the vision and work of Reps. Pingree and Molinaro in introducing this important legislation, which will result in better and more useful regional organic dairy data collecting and reporting. We look forward to working with the sponsors in the House of Representatives to ensure its passage,” said Matthew Dillon, Co-CEO of the Organic Trade Association. ♦



# Calendar

**Saturday, February 10, 8:00 am until 5:00 pm**

**NOFA NH 22ND ANNUAL WINTER CONFERENCE,  
A Holistic Food System Future: Farms, Community, and  
Environment, Southern NH University**

The future of food ripples beyond the production of sustenance - our food system is an intricate web of biological, physical, social, emotional, technological, and spiritual relationships. Developing a sustainable and equitable food system requires us to investigate these complex relationships and how they connect and tether our environment, economy, and communities. NOFA-NH's 22nd annual Winter Conference will explore the ecosystem of food and invite participants to build skills that cultivate abundant businesses, communities, homes, and systems.

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To register click here, <https://form.jotform.com/223115496679163> to go to the registration form.

**Tuesday, February 13, 10:00 am until 2:00 pm**

**WINTER NYCO MEETINGS**

**Jordan Hall, Cornell Agritech campus, Geneva, NY**

The annual NYCO meetings bring together farmers to build community and share knowledge. An informal potluck lunch is the centerpiece of the event as well as the lively discussions that follow.

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There will be several presentations from farmers, researchers, and industry leaders on topics such as cover crop interseeding, reducing tillage and organic dairy markets. This year, the meetings will be held on January 9 and February 13. Presentations at the first meeting will focus on dairy and the second meeting on field crops, but farmers are encouraged to attend both meetings.

Meetings are free to attend, and all are welcome, we ask that you bring a dish to pass for potluck lunch. Optional pre-registration to receive updates on possible weather-related changes can be made at <https://tinyurl.com/NYCO2024> or by leaving a message at 315-787-2432.

Topics:

- Organic dairy market insights and trends
- Focusing on the margins: comparing profit from contrasting feeding systems
- Farmer panels and farmer-led research updates
- Cover Crop Interseeding
- Reducing tillage for soil health in organic

**Cornell Cooperative Extension Southwest and Northwest Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops programs and the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center are sponsoring tours of on-farm dairy processing facilities in eastern NY to learn more about farm diversification options and benefits/challenges.**

Additional details, including tour stops, departure and arrival times and formal registration will be released in January. Let us know you're interested now by contacting Katelyn Walley at 716-640-0522 or [kaw249@cornell.edu](mailto:kaw249@cornell.edu) or Margaret Quaassdorff at 585-405-2567 or [maq27@cornell.edu](mailto:maq27@cornell.edu).

**Friday, March 29 - Saturday, March 30, 2024**

**NOFA VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM, WEB-BASED**

The chapters of the Northeast Organic Farming Association are excited to offer a new virtual experience this winter. Join all of us online to hear from speakers on important topics in agriculture and our food system. This is a unique opportunity to connect as a region with other organic advocates, farmers, home growers, non-profit professionals, and more.

If you register for our in-person Winter Conference, you will get access to the online program at no additional cost (access code will be in your confirmation email). If you prefer to attend the Virtual Symposium only, you can register here, <https://registration.socio.events/e/nofaconference>.

## ORGANIC PRODUCTION

## Ask the Vet

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Aside from hiring traveling bands of opossums and Guinea hens to eat ticks off pastures... there isn't much I know of to reduce tick populations. Keeping grazing cows away from woods and border habitats will help reduce exposure. There is ongoing research on tick vaccines and organic compounds such as lavender oil that may be effective. Some regions utilize prescribed burning of pastureland and rotational grazing with poultry. ♦

NODPA would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Martens, DVM, Valleywide Veterinary Services, Bridport, VT for sharing her knowledge in this issue's Ask The Vet column. Dr. Martens can be reached at <https://www.valleywidevets.com/> or (802) 758-6888.

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



*Asian-longhorned-tick-Haemaphysalis-longicornis*

## Classified Ads

## ANIMALS

**COWS WANTED:** Grassfed cows or heifers wanted for a certified organic and certified grassfed farm herd size expansion. They might also buy certified organic animals if they are well suited to transition to grass fed. If you've got some to sell between now and spring, contact Sarah Flack (802-309-3714 or [sarahflackconsulting@gmail.com](mailto:sarahflackconsulting@gmail.com)) and she'll put you in contact with the buyer.

**Contact Sarah Flack for location.**

## EQUIPMENT

**EQUIPMENT FOR SALE: 2015 Meyer V Max 2636 manure spreader.** We sold our cows and are looking to sell this spreader. Vertical beaters, tandem axles with flotation tires, 4 inch factory extensions. Beaters and bearings recently replaced, New pto shaft. Great spreader in great shape, spreads beautifully on hay ground, fits under a barn cleaner. Asking \$13,500 or best offer. Delivery available. Call or email any time. Nathaniel Stephens, [N.Stephens4020@gmail.com](mailto:N.Stephens4020@gmail.com), 973-459-2691.

**Location: Sussex, NJ**

**EQUIPMENT FOR SALE: Premier1 Intellishock 20B, 9V/12V Battery Electric Fence Energizer. Model 10255.** Can also be solar powered. Energizer is new in original box. Never been used. Includes 12v leads. No Battery or

instruction manual. 2 available. \$75.00 each plus shipping. **Stafix/O'Briens 3:1 Geared Electric Fence Reels** also available. Excellent condition. \$40.00 + shipping. **Case IH Windrow Hay Moisture Tester.** Excellent condition. \$150.00 + shipping. Contact Perry Griffin at [perryg88@earthlink.net](mailto:perryg88@earthlink.net), 540-425-5550

**Location: South Carolina**

## FEED AND GRAIN

**FOR SALE: NOFA-NY Certified Organic 2023 BALEAGE.** Alfalfa/grass mix - 1st & 2nd Cut. Timothy/grass mix - 1st Cut. All 4x4 round bales. Contact Jeff @ 607-566-8477 or [Mitchellorganics@hotmail.com](mailto:Mitchellorganics@hotmail.com).

**Location: Avoca, NY (Steuben County)**

**HAY, BALEAGE, and MINERALS FOR SALE:** We have recently sold our cows and have all of our minerals up for sale. 42 bags of Neptune's Harvest OMRI approved kelp meal, and 15 bags of Redmond OMRI approved trace mineral salt. Asking 50 dollars a bag for kelp and \$20 for salt. Delivery in the northeast available. Also 100+ bales of certified organic first cutting hay. 4x4 net wrapped round bales stored outside, good for heifers and dry cows. \$40/bale. 40 bales of roto cut BMR sorghum Sudan baleage. \$30/bale. Call or email any time. Nathaniel Stephens, [N.Stephens4020@gmail.com](mailto:N.Stephens4020@gmail.com), 973-459-2691.

**Location: Sussex, NJ**



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***More details coming in the  
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