



Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance www.nodpa.com

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Family Farmers Say NO to Factory Farms in Organic Dairy
Cattle must be managed organically from birth and have access to pasture**

STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA: Idyllic scenes of cows grazing on green pastures adorn many cartons of organic milk. Why? Because milk processors know that organic consumers want and expect their organic milk to be produced by cows that feast on pasture—good for the environment and healthy for both the cows and the humans who consume their milk. Family organic dairy farmers, however, are upset that such images are being used to market milk coming from factory type operations that are allegedly keeping up to 6000 head of cattle in confinement-type conditions without the legally mandated access to pasture.

“Organic dairy farmers know that their cows are healthier and happier on well managed pasture,” said Tony Azevedo, a long time organic dairy farmer near Modesto, California who is fond of saying “Grass is what cows get high on.”

The families who’ve produced organic milk have historically been committed to produce products that fulfill the desires of their organic dairy consumers--milk and other dairy products that have extra nutritional benefits that come from pasture-based production. Research has shown that grass-fed meat and dairy products have higher levels of beneficial essential fatty acids and vitamins.

Steve Pechacek, president of the Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association (MODPA), says that “It is imperative that the desires and expectations of organic consumers are met. Allowing a breach of the standards in order to bring more organic milk to market, by a handful of factory farms, is unfair both to consumers and to all the farmers who uphold the standards to the highest level”.

Organic dairy family farmers from across the country have been working diligently to ensure that all organic dairy operations meet at least a minimum pasture standard. These farmers have been very disturbed by the currently few but growing number of organic dairy operations that do not provide pasture for any or all of their milking cows, and are distressed with the few certifying agencies that are allowing it. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) staff maintains that the current regulation requiring “access to pasture for ruminants” is too vague for them to cite these operations as non-compliant with the regulation. However, much of the organic community differs with

their interpretation and believes these operations are clearly in violation of the current regulation.

In addition, organic dairy producers are concerned because some operations are purchasing conventional (nonorganic) young cattle for their milking herds--animals that likely were treated with antibiotics and fed rations that contained genetically modified organisms, both practices banned under the USDA organic standards.

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), the nation's largest organic dairy farmer organization, with 452 farmer-members in the Northeast, has polled its membership several times, always reaffirming overwhelming farmer support for maintaining strong organic regulations. In addition to reiterating their stand that after a dairy operation is converted to organic, all new animals must be under organic management from the last third of the mother's gestation, NODPA called for strict benchmarks that would help enforce the rules requiring pasture that now appear to be abused.

NODPA and their counterparts in the Midwest, MODPA, and in the far West, WODPA, support requiring all organic dairy producers to pasture their animals for the entire growing season, but not less than 120 days, and during that time consume a minimum of 30% of their feed through grazing. Certifiers must carefully monitor pasture stocking rates to ensure that the definition of pasture stated in the regulations is maintained, thus safeguarding soil and water quality and animal health.

NODPA President Steve Morrison, who milks 50 Jersey cows in Maine says: "We believe that the USDA should adopt these recommendations to ensure that the consumer is buying a high quality organic product that comes from cows that are able to graze naturally on pasture and have not received nonorganic feed or drugs in their lifetime."

Family dairy farmers from around the country are now trekking to central Pennsylvania to attend the USDA's Dairy Symposium held in State College, to petition the USDA to adopt new rules to truly close the loopholes now being exploited. Five years have passed since the USDA's advisory panel, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), first affirmed guidance language clarifying the pasture regulations. The USDA has not yet adopted any of the four guidance documents or draft rule changes endorsed by their advisory panel.

Kathie Arnold, chair of the NODPA policy committee and a New York State organic farmer since 1997, commented that "We need the USDA to clarify and put more specificity in the rule on pasture and livestock management to close the loopholes and provide a level playing field for all organic farmers. Our position reflects the heart and soul of organic farming and comes from the knowledge of working farmers."

NODPA, MODPA, and WODPA will host a **press conference** featuring farmers, certifiers, and other organizations on Tuesday, April 18 at 12:30 P.M. EST, at the *Ramada Conference Center, 1450 Atherton Street State College, PA* to discuss pasture

and dairy cattle replacements for organic farms. This event is in advance of the USDA NOP Organic Dairy Pasture Symposium.

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For more information and interview opportunities with organic family farmers from around the country please contact Ed Maltby (413) 772-0444, Cell: 413-427-7323 or ednodpa@comcast.net. To participate in the press conference by phone, call 800-566-2245 with a pass code of 877845 at 12:30 P.M. EST.

The **Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA)** is an alliance of organic producers whose mission is to enable organic family dairy farmers to have informed discussion about matters critical to the well being of the organic dairy industry as a whole.

The **Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association's (MODPA)** mission statement is "to promote communication and networking for the betterment of all Midwest organic dairy producers and enhance a sustainable farmgate price."

The **Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA)** is an organization of organic dairy producers in the Western U.S. who are committed to preserving the integrity of organics.

NODPA, MODPA, and WODPA will present the following position as comment at the NOSB meeting on April 19th 2006:

a) Organic dairy livestock over 6 months of age must graze on pasture during the months of the year when pasture can provide edible forage. The grazed feed must provide significant intake, at minimum 30% of the dry matter intake during the growing season but for no less than 120 days per year. This provision must be for all cows, whether dry or lactating. Certifiers must carefully monitor pasture stocking rates to ensure that the definition of pasture stated in the regulations is maintained, thus safeguarding soil and water quality and animal health.

b) After a dairy operation has transitioned to organic production and been certified, all animals brought onto the operation must be certified as organically raised from the last third of gestation, just as all young stock on the farm need to be under continuous organic management. Whole herd conversion must be a one-time only opportunity, encouraging transition, but should not be used to continuously bring non-organic animals into an organic herd.