

# Organic Production

## Feature Farm

**Segalla Farm**  
**Rick Segalla**  
**East Canaan, CT**

*by Lisa McCrory*

It was just 2 years ago that we featured Rick Segalla in the NODPA News, but we felt it would be good to visit Rick once again as many of us will be at his farm in August for the upcoming NODPA Field Days.

Rick is one of the original NODPA members who descended upon Roman Stoltzfoos's farm in Lititz, Pennsylvania for the first Annual (2001) NODPA Field Days. It is amazing to think how much NODPA has grown in this short amount of time, and Rick has grown with NODPA as our Connecticut Representative, and a NODPA Board member since 2004.

Rick started transitioning to organic dairy in 1997 when he gave up the use of synthetic fertilizers and started using more sustainable practices such as crop rotations, green manures and mined minerals for his soil health and management. Other things he was wrestling with at this time was stray voltage. His farm was certified organic in 1999, but he did not have a market for his organic milk. A couple of options were in the making, however, and eventually Rick decided to sell his milk to Colabro Cheese and has been shipping to them ever since. Colabro Cheese is a 43-year-old Italian cheese company located in East Haven, CT that specializes in producing Ricotta, Ricotta Impastata, Mozzarella Fior Di Latte, Grated Parmesan and Romano and a line of select specialty cheeses.

Rick operates his family's 900-acre farm in Canaan Connecticut, milking 115 cows and raising an equal number of young stock. At this time there are 170 dairy farms remaining in the state of which 2 are certified organic. The farm has been in the family since the early



1900's and today it is a corporation owned by Rick and his siblings. A second and separate incorporated business owned by the family members is a gravel business, which totals about 100 acres of the farm property. Rick has lost about 50 acres of tillable land to the gravel business and continues to give up additional farmland when more gravel acreage needs to be put into production.

The farm consists of 300 acres wooded land, and the remaining tillable/open land is used for corn silage (65A), Alfalfa (76A), grass hay (200A) and pasture (160A). This year Rick and Morv Allen (whose farm will also be toured at this year's NODPA Field Days) are going to collaborate on some of the cropping needs and corn planting. Some of the

land that Rick owns is right next to Morv's farm in Massachusetts (5 miles from the Connecticut farm), so this partnership should be beneficial to both parties. Rick has raised soybeans in the past, but had some issues with flooding the last few years, which devastated the crop. This year, he would like to plant some flax seed as a nurse crop hoping it will increase the omega-3 values of the forages grown. Along with the dairy cows, Rick has been raising some Hereford dairy crosses for a small, but growing organic beef market.

Most of the dairy cows are Holsteins, though there are some Holstein/Jersey and Holstein/Hereford crosses. Cows are housed in a freestall barn, bedded with sand, and milked in a double six herring-bone parlor. At one time, he was milking 200 cows 3 times a day, but reduced his cow numbers to match the readily available pasture on the farm, as the cost for land (to purchase or rent) is incredibly high in his area. At one time Rick mixed lime in with the sand, but the pH of his soil went over 7.0 and his Magnesium levels (using high Magnesium lime) were way out of balance with his calcium, so this practice had to end.

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**Feeding cows and calves**

During the winter months, the cows are fed a corn silage/haylage/16% grain TMR (Total Mixed Ration). All but 6 lbs of grain is mixed into the TMR and the rest of the grain is offered in the parlor; 3 lbs per milking per cow. During the summer time, cows go out to pasture and have the option to return to the barn for a small amount of TMR. When the cows are on pasture, the % protein in the grain goes down to 12%. The TMR is fed out three different times over the day meaning that the feed gets cleaned up quickly, the cows are not slug feeding any one type of feed, and they are encouraged to go to pasture and graze in order to get their fill.

Calves are raised in groups of 4-6 and are fed milk from a bottle at the beginning and then learn to drink out of pails. From day one, the calves are offered hay and at 30 days, they are offered grain. The calves are weaned at 60 days and are out to pasture between 6-9 months of age depending on the time of year.

**Basic Farming Philosophy and  
Attention to Herd Health**

Rick’s basic philosophy to farming is to keep the operation simple and not push the cows for high production. He raises all his own heifers, has had a closed herd for 20 years, vaccinates calves for pink eye plus the 9-way vaccine at pasture time, trims feet as needed and uses DHIA as a farm management/record keeping tool. Cows are bred naturally with Holstein bulls (and the occasional Hereford bull that sneaks over from their small beef herd). Traits that he breeds for are longevity and good production traits. The bull will spend its first season with the heifers, then will graduate to the cows during the second season and will go down the road after that.

Milk quality is excellent with Somatic Cell Count running around 140,000. To maintain quality, Rick makes sure that the problem cow does not go into the tank, applies good milking practices and equipment maintenance and culls aggressively.

“You need healthy soils to produce healthy crops and pastures”, says Rick. “Once you have that, you are sure



to have healthy cows. Rick is not afraid to have a couple weeds in his feed; “it provides a broader spectrum of minerals in the diet”, says Rick.

**Involvement with NODPA  
and  
Looking into the Future**

Rick has traveled to numerous Midwest and west coast events in the last couple years contributing to the incredible efforts of establishing a national network of organic dairy producers (FOOD Farmers) as well as other regional organic dairy groups (WODPA and MODPA). He made the time to attend the NOSB meetings in the fall of 05 and spring of 06 during times when the pasture standard was being looked at closely and makes it to the NODPA Field Days every year. His leadership, feedback and consistent presence are qualities that seems to permeate the NODPA membership as a whole. It seems only right that we bring the 2007 NODPA Field Days to Rick’s doorstep this August. ♦

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