New York Organic Dairy Task Force
December 3rd, 2015
DFA (Dairylea) Offices,
5001 Brittonfield Pkwy, East Syracuse, NY 13057

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Fay Benson - New York Organic Dairy Initiative
Ellen Fagan - New York Organic Dairy Initiative
Peter Miller - Organic Valley
Liz Bawden – Producer Hammond, NY. NODPA
Jamie Stoughtenger - DMS, Milk Marketing Analyst
Dave Hardy - Organic Valley NY pool coordinator
Anne Phillips - Organic Valley
Kyle Thygesen - Farmer Relationship Manager for Stonyfield Organic
Robert Parry - NOFA, on behalf of Bethany Wallis
Andre Brito - Professor of Organic Dairy Management UNH
Bob Zufall - Producer
Dan Guido - DFA
Jerry Synder - Producer
Carrol Wade - Producer Jasper, NY
Beth Meyer - ADADC
Sarah Johnston - NYSDAM, RMA
Mike Davis - Upstate Niagara Coop organic milk supply
Rebecca Bray - grant coordinator NYFVI
Aileen Randolph - NYFVI

10:15am discussion/reports/efforts

Attendees went around table, introduced themselves and gave updates from their perspective of the dairy industry:

Peter Miller

- Organic Valley recently concluded 2 annual business meeting nationally with whole membership.
  400 dairy farmers in transition nationally between now and starting in 2018.
- Currently supporting and promoting PCO organic transition program
Liz Bawden
- Reported that NODPA is currently focusing how we can support next generation of farmers.

Dave Hardy and Anne Phillips
- Observes that conventional producers wanting to transition to organic because of the pay price. Also, those most interested in transitioning are already very close to being organic already and already have grazing herds. In addition, many farmers are asking about grassmilk.

Robert Perry-NOFA
- Recently received a small NYFVI grant for transitioning farmers, offering funds for consultants for transitioning farms, after dairy and field crop conference in March (has documents about the program)
- NOFA Certification Program has seen 15% growth in applicants. 800 certified operations (all types of farms). Dairy, 100 in transition.

Andre Brito
- UNH has a grant with University of Wisconsin
  - Doing focus groups and interviews w/ farmers, NY ME NH VT and WI
- Developing farm based inputs, challenges and successes, in transitioning higher forage rations, even no grain.
- Will be developing grants from this information, possibly submitted to SARE USDA OREI, etc. in the next couple of years

Dan Guido
- Explained his role in DMS, representing and servicing markets and producers.
- Explained the F.A.R.M surveys that they are currently doing on farms. These surveys focus mainly on animal welfare. DMS is hoping to make this survey mandatory for a producer to be a DMS member.

Mary-Howell Martens (Via Phone Call) - (11am)
- Gave an update on grain yields and prices. Observed that grain prices have dropped substantially in the last 2 months because of:
  - the crop in midwest was excellent
  - the predicted strong demand for grain by organic chicken didn’t happen. (Purdue)
  - and because of substantial imports of organic grain
- Mary observes that biotech crops are losing popularity, people wanting to buy non-GMO, not planning to be organic. This might be an interesting topic for the next meeting.

Sarah Johnston
- Addressed Sharad question from an earlier meeting: How much organic milk is being produced in New England?
Sarah provided some information and data on organic fluid milk produced in NY packaging plants. Numbers are one year old (2014). Doesn’t mean it is consumed here in NY. From division of milk info.

Aileen Randolph NYFVI
- dairy profit team program, provides grants to individual farms. Working with NYDAM to increase dollar value per farm.

- Topic Specific Program -
  - NOFA pilot program, working with 5 farms in transition
  - Fay running one to increase enrollment in organic dairy business farm summary. Hopefully 25 farms will participate so it can be published. 4 points of interaction with expertise brought into the farm to solve problems highlighted by business summary
  - Still accepting ideas and other topics.

Andy M. Novakovic (Featured Speaker) His presentation is attached.

Sarah Johnston
- Crop insurance, pasture rangeland program
  - More people doing it statewide, for drought only. This year 84 producers actually had claims.

Antibiotic Policy
- The attendees discussed the issues around antibiotic use on organic farms. Peter Miller described Organic Valley’s process with dealing with a “hot load”, in which he mentioned the need for cooperation with others on the topic. Robert Perry responded that the biggest challenge for certifiers is that when cases closed on these investigations, producers’ right to appeal to NOP. This appeal immediately takes the case off NOFA’s or PCO’s desk. He observed that generally there’s a lack of protocol about who’s going to make the call about what should be done. OV plans to be more aggressive with their investigations.

- In response to the risk that tainted loads put the industry at OV has addressed the issue at their regional meetings and have sent out a letter (passed around) for producers that outlines the illegal antibiotic use protocol. They suggest to their producers that they contact their processor and certifier when they use antibiotics, and get those antibiotics through a vet with a prescription. Peter, Dave, and Anne have observed that producers are not familiar enough with organic standards and many believe that antibiotic use is completely prohibited. Peter suggest that there be more education outreach and that certifiers need to consider more white hats, where they offer one-on-one education because processors don’t have enough time to explain organic standards to producers.

- Anne suggested maybe organic dairy could benefit from a quality assurance program similar to the Beef industry BQA certification. Don suggested that it might be beneficial to increase education outreach to milk handlers and equipment dealers on organic standards as well.

Closing Discussion and Concerns:
The group discussed their concerns about the pressure of expanding “mega dairies” and the lack of land access for the next generations of farmers. Sarah observes that over the next 30 years, 60% of farmland will be changing hands. It is suggested by both Sarah and Robert that funds need to be allocated for young farmers by government programs. Sarah also suggest that young farmers need multiple funding models to work from; an example, private investing.