

## **Getting Down to Business in a Down Economy:**

### **What's Working for Vermont's Organic Dairy Farmers**

#### **Session 1: 9:15-10:30**

##### **Improving the Bottom Line: What Works**

Vermont dairy farmers, Earl Fournier of Swanton and Brent Beidler of Randolph will lead a discussion of decisions, innovations and practices that can aid success on organic dairy farms in Vermont, as well as problems, risks and pitfalls to watch out for along the way. Earl and Brent will discuss their own experiences and approaches to pasture management, forage production, farm planning, financial management and other topics. Farmers attending the workshop will join in a discussion of “what works” for them on their farms. This workshop is an excellent opportunity for organic dairy farmers, at all levels of skill and experience, to learn from and help one another be more successful.

#### **Lunch Hour Roundtables: 1:00-2:00pm**

##### **Roundtable A**

##### **Selling Raw Milk in Vermont --- Understanding the Regulations**

The direct sale of raw milk to the public can provide additional sources of income on dairy farms. Vermont law now enables dairy producers, large and small, to sell up to 40 gallons directly to consumers, advertise and make home deliveries. Shelby Girard from Rural Vermont will discuss the basics of the new law and what farmers need to know about new state standards for raw milk sales. She will be joined by a commercial dairy producer whose sales of raw milk provide substantial income. A facilitated discussion will follow. Rural Vermont's Raw Milk Seller's Guide will be available.

##### **Roundtable B**

##### **Buy Less Energy → → → INCREASE Farm Cash-flow: Strategies for Reducing Farm Energy In-Puts**

Farming is an energy-intensive business that, basically, involves converting energy-inputs (e.g., feeds, fuels, electricity, fertilizers, sun, wind, water) into income-producing energy-outputs (crops, products, etc.). The more efficient this process is on a farm, the more profitable that farm will be. This roundtable discussion, led by Willie Gibson, the NOFA VT Dairy & Livestock Farm Advisor, will review important opportunities for efficient energy management on dairy farms and introduce a new *NOFA Vermont Energy*

*Audit Tool*, designed to help farmers identify good opportunities to save energy – and money. Bring your questions and ideas about farm energy usage, new technology, efficiency and conservation to the discussion.

## **Roundtable C**

### **Transferring the Farm: Challenges of Farm Business and Farmland Transitions.**

This workshop will examine the key issues involved in generational transitions and transfers of ownership of family farm land and businesses. UVM Extension Professor Bob Parsons has years of experience in helping farmers consider their retirement goals, intergenerational business transitions and legal transfer of ownership. Other topics will include writing of wills, methods to transfer assets, managing estate taxes, and improving family communication about these matters. Farmers will learn about key steps in the farm transfer process and have the opportunity to ask questions about issues they are facing on their own farms.

### **Session 2: 2:15-3:30**

#### **Workshop 2A**

##### **Behavior-Based Grazing Management: Principles to Practices -- Part 1**

Making more milk on grazed forages = lower production costs and more profit on Vermont's organic dairy farms. In this two-part workshop, Darrell Emmick, Grazing Land Management Specialist with NRCS in New York State, delves into an often neglected aspect of profitable grazing: the application of behavioral principles of cattle grazing to improve forage intake and animal performance on pasture. Dr. Emmick has spent 25 years promoting grass-based grazing and researching plant/diet selection and foraging behavior of lactating dairy cows. In Part 1 of this workshop Darrell will lay the groundwork for a better understanding of cattle grazing behavior and introduce the implications for grazing system design and herd management.

#### **Workshop 2B**

##### **Milk Quality- Making money with SCC under 150,000**

It is really very simple: improving milk quality = higher milk premiums and more money per cwt! This workshop will present ideas and proven strategies that farmers can use to improve their milk quality by lowering Somatic Cell Counts (SCC). A diverse panel of Vermont organic dairy farmers, *all with SCC under 150,000*, will discuss key herd management practices, milking procedures, equipment and other factors that have enabled them to consistently produce very high quality milk, as well as address problems at an early stage. Laurel Junkins, Dairy Systems Coordinator and milk quality expert with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, will discuss the critical points of making high

quality milk and steps farmers can take to troubleshoot and avoid costly milk quality problems. A Q&A discussion will conclude the session.

## **Workshop 2C**

### **Treating and Preventing Common Herd Health Issues: Vermont Veterinary Panel and discussion**

Vermont dairy veterinarians Dr. Rick Bartholomew, from Cold Hollow Veterinary Services, and Dr. Alan Clarisse, from Vergennes Large Animal Associates, will share their strategies, recommendations and experiences in working with organic dairy animals and maintaining herd health on their client's organic dairy farms. Disease prevention practices, diagnostic strategies and effective treatment alternatives to address important dairy cattle ailments on organic dairy farms will be shared and discussed with farmers in attendance. Bring your questions and share your ideas and experiences with others.

## **Session 3: 3:45-5:00**

### **Workshop 3A Behavior-based Grazing Management: Principles to Practices. Part 2**

In Part 2 of this workshop (see Part 1, above), Darrell Emmick, Grazing Land Management Specialist with NRCS in New York State, discusses how principles of grazing behavior can be applied by dairy farmers on their farms. Useful management practices and practical steps you can take to improve your overall feeding program and your herd's grazing efficiency will be discussed. Bring your questions and ideas for Darrell and others in attendance to respond to and learn from.

## **Workshop 3B**

### **Balancing Diversification**

The explosion of interest in locally produced food has expanded opportunities for Vermont's dairy farmers to develop new farm-based enterprises and bolster their bottom line. A growing number of dairy farmers have successfully integrated the production and marketing of beef, poultry, specialty grains, farmstead cheeses, raw milk and other products into their farming operations. Along the way, they've learned a thing or two, not only about the challenges of launching and operating new business enterprises, but also how to balance these efforts with the full-time responsibilities of running a successful dairy farm. In this workshop a panel of Vermont farmers will discuss the benefits, challenges and strategies associated with diversification on their farms. In the second half of the workshop attendees will have an opportunity to meet with individual farmer-panelists to discuss specific enterprises of interest to them.