University of New Hampshire Celebrates Organic Dairy Farm
By Kevin Brussell, UNH Organic Research Project Director.

On January 8, 2007 the University of New Hampshire (UNH), celebrated a unique event in the organic world: becoming the first U.S. land-grant university to develop a certified organic dairy research farm. Funders, faculty, and farmers gathered at the Burley-Demerritt to celebrate the momentous occasion.

University President J. Bonnie Newman welcomed the crowd stating, "As we celebrate the Organic Dairy today it is clear that the land grant mission is alive and well at UNH. We have made a commitment to the organic dairy community, including first and foremost, farmers, but also producers, retailers and citizens. Our commitment will help fill the void in urgently needed science-based research on organic production." She also noted, "The success that we celebrate today that is so important to all of us was achieved and will be sustained by vital public/private partnerships. I want to thank all of you who have supported the Organic Dairy Research Farm, particularly, our donors including Stoneyfield Farm, Horizon Organic, Aurora Organic Dairy, Hannaford Brothers Supermarkets, Organic Valley, the Newman's Own Foundation, HP Hood, the American Jersey Cattle Association, the Maine Organic Milk Producers and a host of other individuals and organizations who have made this initiative possible."

Gary Hirshberg, CE-Yo of Stoneyfield based in Londonderry, New Hampshire, Kelly Shea, Vice-President of Organic Stewardship, Horizon Organic, Marc Peperzak, CEO of Aurora Organic Dairy, and Ed Maltby, Executive Director of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance each spoke to the gathering regarding the importance of this research farm to the organic dairy community. Several important milestones were noted. The university raised $1.2 million in donations to fund the innovative project. A new commodities storage building has been completed. The existing sheep barn was renovated into a four-stall step-up milking parlor with maternity pens. The existing bull barn has been renovated into a calf nursery and the existing beef barn now houses the milking cows.

Following the formal presentations, the guests toured the calf nursery and the brand-new milking parlor and maternity barn, and finished the afternoon at the President's House where they gathered for a reception that featured organic milk and cookies as well as champagne.

On January 15, 2007 Organic Valley picked up the first shipment of organic milk. Renovating the sheep barn into a four-stall step-up milking parlor and maternity barn took longer than planned but the end result was well worth the wait. Everyone is pleased with the flow of the parlor and the convenience of the maternity area.

Forty first-calf heifers now milking are averaging 47 pounds of milk per head per day. Six heifers are still left to calve as 2 of the original 48 never settled. Despite the wet, cold weather no major health problems have surfaced other than a few cases of mastitis. We are currently using sawdust for the bedded pack.

The winter feeding trials for the USDA research grant with the University of Maine are beginning, which compare four different diets: two with home grown forages including corn silage; one uses cornmeal and the other a typical grist purchased from a feed mill. The other two diets are made up of homegrown forages with no corn silage; one diet consisting of cornmeal and one with a typical grist purchased from a feed mill. Due to the very wet growing season last year no small grain baleage was produced and the corn silage was of poor quality. As part of the farming research commitment, we will continue to produce and compare the quality and yield of

small grain baleage, corn silage, sorghum baleage, and grass-legume mixtures to see which ones produce the most net profit for the farm system. We also plan to produce small grains to compare their role in the diet relative to corn.

The planning of laneway construction for the available pastures this coming season is underway. Last year we discovered raised laneways were necessary so the cattle could get to higher paddocks during wet spells. A new cattle lane is being cut through the woods from the Burley-Demerritt farm to the Bartlett-Dudley farm to access more pasture. We also plan to explore ways to extend our grazing season on both ends, spring and fall.

ARS researchers associated with U-Maine and Pennsylvania have started mapping the fields, testing soil, and identifying pasture grasses and forbs. Dot Perkins, UNH Cooperative Extension, is assisting with this part of the research. She has begun identifying herbs already growing in the pastures and hedgerows and plans to research the potential benefits of cattle self-medication using pasture species. UNH will be collaborating with them on additional projects as the farm research agenda develops.

We at UNH are excited to have the opportunity to do research that is relevant to the organic community and look forward to you as NODPA farmers participating in our research and production agenda.