

NOFA-NY Self Assessment Workbook

Bethany Weber, NOFA-NY

Organic dairy is the fastest growing sector of organic agriculture. This thriving market has attracted many dairy farmers to organic dairy. While the green pastures of the Northeast do make a good fit for organic dairy, the organic transition process carries substantial risk—including the potential for increased cull rates, sharply increased feed costs, decreased milk production, and increased labor requirements. In order to help reduce these risks, NOFA-NY, with the help of successful organic dairy farmers and agricultural experts, has developed two books to guide conventional dairy farmers through the transition process and increase the probability they will be successful.

The *Self-Assessment Workbook (SAW)* introduces basic requirements for managing a certified organic dairy. It provides farmers with questions to help evaluate whether this is a good option for their farm. Activities identify the management changes farms must implement and where to source information. After a farmer decides that organic dairy is a good choice for, they will find our second book, *Organic Dairy Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Transition and Beyond*, helpful in their next through transition and certification. The *Handbook* is a reference and helps answer common questions during the actual transition process.

Major changes in production practices are needed to meet federal organic standards including feeding a 100% organic ration, managing disease without antibiotics, and maintaining detailed records that document their compliance. Our objective has been to develop a management tool that will help dairy producers mitigate the production and related market risks that are inherent in the transition to organic production. Finally the SAW will provide producers with techniques for optimizing pasture management and forage production as it is a key component in developing and effective risk management plan for transition.

NOFA-NY utilized the DACUM Process to gather information directly from organic dairy farmers, which was then incorporated into the SAW. Developing A Curriculum (DACUM) is a process in which experts in the field define the duties and tasks required to perform their job, including knowledge and skills, worker behavior, tools, equipment and supplies as well as future trends and concerns. NOFA-NY worked with eight expert organic dairy farmers in New York State to help us identify the duties and tasks they performed during transition and the tasks they currently do to be successful. Through the writing process for SAW the information gathered from our expert dairy farmers has been revisited to assure that our resource is a comprehensive document.

To cover all aspects of organic dairy farm management NOFA-NY built an extensive team to write and revise both The Self Assessment Workbook and Organic Dairy Handbook. The collaboration of agricultural professionals from multiple aspects of dairy farm industry created a writing group dedicated to developing comprehensive organic dairy evaluation and management tools. The project advisory committee reviewed multiple drafts and offered professional advice and recommendations for this book. Also conventional dairy farmers, transitioning dairy farmers and certified organic dairy farmers helped field-test this workbook through the multiple phases of its development. Their time and contribution to the project helped ensure that this book is user friendly and meets the needs of transitioning farmers.

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