



# Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

*An organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system*

## **A Proposed Pasture Rule At Last! The USDA “Gets It Right” (Mostly)**

On Friday, October 24<sup>th</sup> the USDA’s National Organic Program published its long-awaited and anxiously anticipated proposed rule to clarify and strengthen grazing requirements for ruminant livestock on certified organic dairy and livestock farms. The “pasture rule”, when revised and finalized following a 60-day comment period, will have a critical role in shaping the future of certified organic dairy and livestock farming in Vermont and throughout the country.

Organic dairy and livestock producers, consumer groups, organic farming associations, animal welfare organizations, environmental groups, and industry associations have, over several years, strongly advocated for a requirement that organic ruminant animals be pastured throughout the growing season and that they derive a significant portion of their diet from grazed forages. The economic, health, animal welfare and environmental benefits of well-managed animal grazing systems are widely recognized and supported by family farmers and the majority of organic consumers. NOFA-VT and other members of the National Organic Coalition have been actively involved in a nationwide grassroots effort to help the USDA-National Organic Program “get the pasture rule right”.

And, for the most part, it has! The proposed rule adopts the key grazing provisions called for by those advocating a strong and credible pasture rule. The ninety-page draft rule also proposes new standards pertaining to a number of other livestock production practices, including organic livestock feeds, living conditions, origin of livestock and health care. Not all of the proposed standards in these areas are satisfactory and will require revision in order to make them applicable to and appropriate for all organic livestock operations.

NOFA-VT and other organizations are now carefully reading and discussing all of the provisions in the proposed rule. During the comment period we will be engaging organic dairy producers and others in developing and submitting comments and recommendations for revision to the USDA National Organic Program.

A copy of the proposed rule and related information and updates may be found at: Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance -- <http://www.nodpa.com> and National Organic Coalition -- <http://nationalorganiccoalition.org>.

The next issues of NOFA-VT’s *Dairy and Livestock Program* Newsletter and *NOFA Notes* will include updates and comments on the proposed rule. For further information contact NOFA-VT at 802-434-4122, [info@nofavt.org](mailto:info@nofavt.org).



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