

NOTICE
Dairy Pasture Symposium

- When:** April 18-19, 2006
- Where:** Ramada Inn Conference Center, State College, Pennsylvania
- Who:** 4 panels of industry experts, farmers, & USDA certifying agents will address issues related to the role of pasture in organic dairy animal management and organic dairy products for consumers
- Sponsored By:** USDA's National Organic Program (NOP), preceding the Spring 2006 National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting
- Facilitator:** Robert B. Anderson, Sustainable Strategies, Inc.

Why the Symposium Is Being Held

Last November at the NOSB meeting in Washington, D.C., USDA announced this symposium would be held concurrently with the next Board meeting in early 2006. At that time, many parties raised the issue that the role of pasture was of concern in the organic community – to organic dairy farmers, consumers of organic dairy products, certifying agents, and many others with an interest in organic agriculture. USDA was urged to proceed to amend the NOP regulations concerning pasture for dairy animals. USDA maintained that many stakeholders in the organic community needed an opportunity to provide input to the NOP concerning the role of pasture in organic ruminant livestock production. An advanced notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPR), along with a symposium on the role of pasture – inviting various technical experts, dairy farmers, and USDA-accredited certifying agents – was determined as the next course of action to facilitate rulemaking by NOP on this important issue.

Who May Attend

All interested parties may attend; however, seating is limited. This is not a public comment session. The symposium is intended to inform the NOSB and NOP of issues related to pasture and how the NOP regulations might be changed. The NOSB and NOP will hear from technical experts on pasture and dairy animal management, farmers, and certifying agents on their experiences with pasture, and be able to ask questions of the panelists. The symposium is intended to provide input to USDA as part of a rulemaking exercise as it explores whether and how there should be a larger or a more specific role for pasture in the NOP regulations.

Audience Participation

Although this is not a public comment session, cards or other methods will be used to allow audience members to submit comments or questions during the symposium. These will be collected during the symposium and recorded and addressed by USDA as official comments on the ANPR. Beginning on Wednesday afternoon, the NOSB will start its spring meeting and there will be opportunity for public comment. Parties are urged to

sign up for public comment ahead of the meeting, by contacting the address in the Federal Register notice and on the NOP website for the NOSB meeting (see address below).

Will the Symposium Be Recorded?

Yes.

How the Panelists Were Selected

The Livestock Committee of the NOSB coordinated the nomination of individuals submitted by the entire NOSB. Certifying agents were selected based on their experience in certifying dairy operations across the United States. The dairies that are represented on the Dairy Production, Compliance, and Enforcement Panel were each asked to select a farmer that supplies milk to them, and were asked to consider geographic diversity, size, climate, and other diversity factors. The NOP extended the final invitations by letter.

Information Provided to the Panelists Before the Symposium

Panelists initially were provided with questions that are contained in the Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) on dairy pasture. It is our intention to publish the ANPR in the Federal Register prior to the symposium, with a 60-day comment period. Panelists were told that this material might prove helpful in developing a context for their remarks. Panelists also were informed of the facilitator, a time limit for remarks, and that a question and answer session would follow the panels. The question and answer sessions are intended to help the NOSB and NOP further understand the implications of changing the role of pasture in the NOP regulations.

After the Symposium

The symposium will be considered along with comments received during the 60-day ANPR comment period. All of the public input will be addressed at the close of the comment period when USDA determines how to proceed in rulemaking.

The Symposium Agenda

The agenda can be viewed below, and on the NOP website as part of the NOSB spring meeting agenda at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nosb/meetings/meetings.html>.