



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension



**New York Organic
Dairy Initiative**
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Organic Dairy Barrier/Opportunity Breakouts Topics

On April 25th 2006, the first meeting of the NY Organic Dairy Task Force was held in Syracuse NY. One of the tasks accomplished was the creation of list of barriers and opportunities for NY's organic dairy industry. The areas covered were:

- Challenges (Chal)
- Opportunities (Opp)
- Production Management Changes (Prod Mgt)
- Business Management Changes (Bus Mgt)

There were a total of 54 topics suggested across these areas. The topics were prioritized at the meeting by the 17 attendees, which included: 8 organic farmers, 4 educators, 3 organic dairy processors, and 2 observers. The topics were then sent out to 40 organic dairy farmers from across the state. We asked the farmers to prioritize the topics again. From these we received 21 responses. The final list uses the prioritization of these 21 farmers.

The Task Force Leadership committee was charged with creating subgroups of the Task Force to brainstorm actions to address the topics. They decided that some of the entries were similar in nature; to make the work of the subgroups more efficient, they grouped the entities into broad categories. These are the Breakout Categories and the list of affiliated topics. The area (Chal, Opp, Prod Mgt, Business Mgt) and the priority ranking are in (): the higher the number the higher the priority.

Breakout Categories

- Maintaining the integrity of the standards for Organic Dairy
- Research and Education
- Economic factors
- Infrastructure

1) Maintaining the integrity of the standards for Organic Dairy

- Maintaining the integrity of “organic” both in the eyes of consumers and in the certification process as demand increases and the organic dairy industry grows. (Chal. 281)
- Unifying organic standards and the interpretation of organic standards so all organic producers are on a level playing field. More uniform methods for certifying and monitoring organic dairy operations. (Chal. 281)
- False or misleading advertising regarding organic production. (Chal. 229)
- Lack of consumer understanding of “organic” and organic standards and communication to consumers regarding the benefits of organic and the integrity of organic production. (Chal. 210)
- Organic grain contamination: overspray or spray drift, cross pollination, GMO, contamination during grain processing and mixing. (Chal. 186)
- Improve (tighten up and unify) the standards and interpretation of the standards for organic certification. (Opp. 252)
- Promoting the organic dairy industry’s role in maintaining green space and improving quality of life in local communities. (Opp. 214)
- A mindset shift as to what constitutes “success” in the dairy business. (Bus. Mgt. 176)

2) Research and Education

- Maintaining and enforcing milk quality standards. (Chal. 205)
- Lack of opportunities and resources for education of producers in terms of both transitioning to organic and organic production management. (Chal. 200)
- Lack of institutional support for organic production: NRCS, Cornell, SUNY Schools, NYS Dept. of Ag. & Markets, Farm Services Agency, Soil & Water Conservation Districts. (Chal. 167)
- The opportunity to work with local watersheds to promote the role of organic in water quality protection. (Opp. 190)
- The opportunity to develop a diverse support base for organic dairy production: health professionals, consumers, local communities, agricultural support services, etc. (Opp. 180)
- Lenders not willing to work with Organic Dairies (Chal. 152)
- Developing preventative animal health practices and animal health interventions (diseases, infections, parasites, etc.). (Prod.&Mgt. 281)
- Better practices for soil fertility and fertility management. (Prod.&Mgt. 257)
- Management help in the conventional to organic transition process. (Prod.&Mgt 238)
- Education about and adoption of more intense and more efficient grazing practices and production of higher quality forages.
- Education and guidance in attaining and maintaining milk quality standards in order to receive milk quality premiums. Understanding of the economics of maintaining milk quality. (Prod.&Mgt. 224)

- Techniques for extending the grazing season using alternative crops. (Prod.&Mgt.214)
- Education about the expected potential results with various available weed control practices. (Prod.&Mgt. 186)
- Education in how to use the information available to producers to make profitable management decisions and changes [e.g., herd health, production and reproduction information; milk quality, soil and forage test information; farm financial records]. (Bus. Mgt 205)
- Organic dairy educational and internship opportunities. (Bus. Mgt 186)
- Time to gather and analyze information, utilize effective problem solving/decision making methods and make good, effective decisions. (Bus. Mgt 181)
- Outside financial management advice from consultants and financial institution staff that has training in organic dairy management. (Bus. Mgt 157)

3) **Economic factors**

- Milk price stability. (Chal. 252)
- Cost and availability of organic feeds (Chal 248)
- Pay price for milk not meeting the cost of production. (Chal 238)
- Balancing the growth of supply and demand for organic milk and the potential for too much organic milk production resulting in an associated milk price drop. (Chal 214)
- The opportunity to bring in new farmers and young farmers and use idle land (Opp. 243)
- Proximity to a large consumer population. (Opp 171)
- Clustering of small farms in order to achieve economies of scale for supply purchases and milk sales, without individual farms becoming large farms. (Bus Mgt. 195)
- Techniques for acquiring high moisture corn in the fall when prices are low, then effectively storing it and saving on drying costs. (Bus. Mgt 167)
- Affordable and effective organic crop insurance options (165)
- Public perception of the organic dairy industry and organic milk as influenced by the roadside appearance of the farms. (Chal. 167)

4) **Infrastructure**

- Encouraging and pacing the growth of organic dairy allied support industries such as grain and forage production, feed, milk processors, supplies, vet services. (Chal. 219)
- Obtaining veterinarian support for organic dairy herd health (Chal 214)
- Encouraging and pacing the growth of the organic dairy industry to fill the demand for organic milk. (Chal 200)
- Building a sense of optimism for family farms and a willingness to work together cooperatively. (Opp. 238)

- Processors moving to different locations due to a lack of available milk in particular regions (Currently the big buyers are nationwide and can shift their geographic buying and processing focus). (Chal 181)
- Large companies and organizations getting interested in and involved in providing products and services to the organic dairy industry. (Chal 162)
- Lenders not willing to work with organic dairies. (Chal 152)
- Building an effective organic dairy industry infrastructure: vets, marketing, research, education, supplies, feed (Opp. 233)
- Building an industry that is characterized by communication and cooperation between all its parts. (Opp. 233)
- The opportunity to build a more diverse dairy industry (Opp 186)
- Large companies and organizations getting interested in and involved in providing products and services to the organic dairy industry. (Opp 165)
- A networking system that builds relationships and provides collaborative opportunities that allow producers to obtain organic grains and forages from producers who have them. (Bus Mgt. 244)
- Better systems for marketing and communication when there is no phone or no internet access. (Bus. Mgt. 151)
- Dairy sales for good genetic stock organic cows, heifers and calves similar to breed sales for conventional dairy cattle. (Bus Mgt. 200)
- Working to improve milk quality standards and the perceptions of organic milk quality. (Prod Mgt.200)
- Homeland security and the feeling of safety in being and buying local. (Opp 176)

Compiled by Fay Benson, Organic Dairy Initiative Project Manager