

ORGANIC FARMING

A growing segment of our population is willing to pay a higher price for food that is "Certified Organic". Two different organic companies, who met with local producers this year, report an annual growth rate that exceeds 20 percent. There is no indication this growth trend will diminish. An increasing number of agricultural producers are considering making the transition from conventional to organic. The process takes at least 3 years on land and a minimum of 1 year for livestock and dairy operations. The transition is the major hurdle most producers find when considering the change.

Over 70 percent of the organic wheat that is processed in this area comes from other states. A \$2.00 premium per bushel is not uncommon, all other factors being equal. Marginal lands, with limited moisture, can sometimes benefit from going organic. It is seldom feasible on irrigated lands. Dairies can expect a \$6.00 to \$10.00 per cwt increase in value, but currently the product is shipped out of state to be processed according to organic standards. There is also a minimum amount that must be produced daily to justify the longer trucking distances. Cache County producers are happy with their current processors and also know there would be a reduction in production per cow. As such, most are hesitant to make a change. There are some local Cache Valley dairy producers, however, who have made the transition. At this point they seem to be happy with their status.

The certifying process requires that producers/processors/handlers apply for certification from either the state organic certification agency (Utah Department of Agriculture and Food) or a private organic certification agency. The process will generally take several months and includes some fees. The application includes such things as production history, products being grown or raised, organic plan and practices to prevent commingling of organic and non-organic substances along with evidence of commitment to the organic concept. Successful applicants are required to keep accurate post-certification records and can anticipate an annual inspection from the certifying agency.

Those who have successfully made the organic transition suggest new applicants research a reliable market before beginning. The role of Extension is to provide periodic educational seminars to assist individuals who are considering the transition. As such, we have invited Dr. Paul Dettloff, DVM to present an educational workshop for dairy producers who have a potential interest in organic production. Dr. Dettloff is one of America's leading alternative herd health practitioners and works with Organic Valley Family of Farms.

The seminar will be held on Tuesday, June 13th at the Copper Mill Restaurant in Logan. Dr Dettloff will present from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. A "Hands On" session will take place at the Larry Pitcher farm in Lewiston during the afternoon. Organic Valley will provide lunch to all who participate. A call to the Extension office (752-6263) will allow us to have a close count on who to expect for the meeting and meal.

Two web sites that may be of interest to dairy producers are www.organicvalley.coop/ and www.horizondairy.com.