

MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF ORGANIC MILK

*Showcasing Ethical Family Farm Producers
Exposing the Corporate Takeover - Factory Farm Production*

BY MARK ALAN KASTEL

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Mark A. Kastel, Senior Farm Policy Analyst
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The Cornucopia Institute

P.O. Box 126
Cornucopia, WI 54827
608-625-2042 voice
866-861-2214 fax
organic@cornucopia.org
www.cornucopia.org

The Cornucopia Institute is dedicated to the fight for economic justice for the family-scale farming community. Through research, advocacy and economic development our goal is to empower farmers both politically and through marketplace initiatives.

The Organic Integrity Project will act as a corporate and governmental watchdog assuring that no compromises to the credibility of organic farming methods and the food it produces are made in the pursuit of profit. We will actively resist regulatory rollbacks and the weakening of organic standards to protect and maintain consumer confidence in the organic food label.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE METEORIC GROWTH OF ORGANIC DAIRYING is one of the rare success stories found in agriculture today. The business has been built over the past two decades and nurtured by family farmers collaborating with consumers hungry for organic food. For those farmers involved in dairying, organics has been a true lifeline. Those able to make the difficult three-year transition to organics have been rewarded by top commodity prices at the farmgate and a living wage—something that stands in stark contrast to the intense price squeeze that has driven many of their conventional neighbors from the business. In addition, organic dairy farmers are enjoying explosive growth in demand for their products.

Consumers have been willing to pay premium prices in the market for certified organic dairy products, with the understanding that the food has been raised in a sustainable, environmentally sound manner and that they are helping support and keep family farmers on the land. Many consumers assume that humane animal husbandry practices are employed by organic farmers, and they may believe that organic food is more nutritious.

Organic dairy products are also a “gateway” food to other organic products. Consumers recognize such familiar products as milk and cheeses, frequently sampling organic dairy products first before moving on and experimenting with other organic commodities.

But this success story is now at risk; it is threatened by powerful economic interests that covet their share of the organic pie (now in excess of \$15 billion in annual sales) and who are willing to twist, manipulate, and even ignore federal organic regulations in their rush to cash in. Some agribusiness giants are depending on consumers not knowing the difference between their product and those produced with ethics and integrity.

Identify your local dairy brands with the Organic Dairy Brand Scorecard at www.cornucopia.org

Some industry players have suggested that The Cornucopia Institute has an ulterior motive or a bias against certain companies involved in the organic dairy business. And they have charged that any public criticism of practices employed in the production of organic milk harms the organic label in the eyes of consumers.

Let us set the record straight. We strongly believe in the right of consumers and the public to know about the ethics and production practices involved in making the wide variety of organic dairy products. We fully understand the desire of those involved in the organic industry to present a positive view of their products. And we are as strong an advocate for organic food and agriculture as anyone.

But when practices are employed that shortchange or mislead the consumer, and harm the interests of the ethical family farmers who built this industry, we are going to speak out. We will identify what the problems are. We do this to inform, to protect, and to empower consumers and farmers, as well as to motivate all involved in the organic community to uphold the integrity and high standards of organic agriculture.

Margaret Hannah
Board President
The Cornucopia Institute

PULLING BACK THE VEIL: RATING AMERICA'S ORGANIC DAIRY BRANDS

This report aims to pull back the veil and allow consumers to easily identify those organic dairy products that have been produced with the best organic practices. By using the Web-based rating tool found on our Web page www.cornucopia.org, you will be able to identify the brands and products found in your region and examine their ranking, score, and how well they meet key criteria covering organic management practices. At the time of this publication, the survey rates 68 different organic dairy brands and private-label products found across the country.

The good news we can report is that *the vast majority* of all name-brand organic dairy products are produced from milk from farms that follow accepted legal and ethical standards.

However, consumers should also recognize that an increasing amount of milk used in certain organic dairy products is coming from factory farms that are employing suspect practices that skirt organic regulations and negatively impact human nutrition and the health and well-being of livestock. Nearly 20% of the name-brands now available on grocery shelves scored a substandard rating. And a growing number of new factory farms—housing thousands of cows in confinement conditions—are in development because of strong organic commodity prices, growing consumer demand, a shortage of certified organic milk, and a reluctance by federal regulators to enforce the current organic rules.

As more and more of these industrial-scale livestock operations come online, the potential will develop for a surplus of organic milk. Should a surplus occur, it is likely that the downward price pressure will wash many smaller family-scale producers out of business. This will repeat the same sad story that has forced so many conventional farmers off the land—even though organics was hailed as an antidote to the effect of corporate-controlled food production and its accompanying vertical integration of farming and its application of the industrial/confinement model.

Organic community observers have warned the United States Department of Agriculture for more than five years that factory farms have been moving into the organic livestock industry and that they have not been following key organic provisions faithfully observed by the many thousands of small- and medium-sized farmers. Our report also recounts that saga and the attempts by farmers, consumers, and organizations like The Cornucopia Institute to win USDA action. Mostly, the Agency has resisted or ignored the pleas for enforcement of federal organic rules, even sitting on recommendations from their own citizens advisory committee, the National Organic Standards Board.

EMPOWERING THE ORGANIC CONSUMER AND WHOLESALE BUYERS

But we believe that there is a *higher authority* than the USDA: the organic consumer! It is our hope that consumers and wholesale buyers in the nation's grocery stores will use our survey results and ratings as a guide to help them vote in the marketplace for those organic dairy products from businesses who share their values. This will also send a powerful message and it will serve to prod those who require encouragement to change their management practices.

The ratings of dairy brands on the Cornucopia Web site are based on a 19-question survey that 81% of the name-brand marketers executed. Brands received scores ranging from “one cow” through “five cows” (five cows ranking as best) based on their milk production or purchasing practices. None of the private-label marketers (grocery chains and distributors) opted to participate in the study—a lack of candor conspicuous in an industry founded on transparency. These *store brands* received a rating of one or two cows. Instead of depending on their participation in the research study, their rankings were based on industry sources and federal records indicating whether some or all of their milk was produced on factory farms.

From looking at graphic images of contented cows on luscious grass, or reading the heartfelt messages on some of the dairy product packaging proclaiming a deep and abiding reverence for the foundational philosophies of organic dairy production, consumers would never know whether their milk is coming from industrial-scale confinement farms—with questionable environmental, labor and animal husbandry track records—or from family-scale farms with a strong connection and respect for the land and animals. This report is intended to help you make purchasing decisions independent of industry chaff and PR.

PROMOTING ECONOMIC JUSTICE
FOR FAMILY-SCALE FARMING.



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