

Final Report for OFRF Education and Outreach grant

The Liberation of ODairy Archives

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Summary of grant proposal

The main objective of this project was to expand the scope and accessibility of the Odairy archives.

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA)-sponsored and -moderated Odairy is an internet-based listserv that assists organic dairy farmers throughout the Northeast, North America, and internationally to access information and hold discussions about:

- 1) Organic production practices
- 2) Organic veterinary practices
- 3) Organic policy issues
- 4) Availability of organically certified feed and replacement animals

The listserv facilitates peer mentoring and provides support to transitional and established organic dairy farmers. The project addressed the need created as a result of the dramatic increase in transitioning and newly certified organic dairy farmers who have not yet developed the skill base to apply organically certified production and veterinary practices. Organic farmers cannot resort to chemicals, antibiotics, or buy readily available conventional feed or inputs for their animals and land, but instead have to rely on the limited knowledge amongst dairy service providers on organically certified practices. Few resources are currently devoted to organic dairy research, the education of large animal veterinarians, or to Cooperative Extension personnel to provide those support services to farmers.

This project expanded the volume of research and education related to organic dairy production that is easily available to organic dairy farmers by making a bounty of archived research and educational material easily accessible in a user-friendly format. NODPA used the funds to complete the transfer of the listserv to its own domain server rather than use the generic Yahoo listserv. NODPA now provides all the archives in an easily accessible portion of its website, www.nodpa.com or www.organicmilk.org.

The listserv planned to expand its scope by having all archived educational materials and discussions organized by topic and date for increased ease of accessibility for users. We failed to organize the data by topic as the volume of work was far more than anticipated and the cost of the software to complete the transfer was considerably higher than projected, but the archives can be searched by topic, date, and name of person posting to the listserv.

Introduction to Topic

The problems or needs the project addressed are a result of the dramatic increase in transitioning and newly certified organic dairy farmers in 2008-2010 as a result of the rapid growth in organic

dairy, more than 20% year over year. Those that transition from non-organic production have not yet developed the skill base to apply organically certified production and veterinary practices. Organic farmers can not resort to chemicals, antibiotics, or buy readily available conventional feed or inputs for their animals and land but have to rely on the limited knowledge amongst dairy service providers on organically certified practices. Few resources are currently devoted to organic dairy research or the education of large animal veterinarians or Cooperative Extension personnel to provide those support services to farmers. NODPA's mission is to educate all farmers about organic dairy and has a substantial existing program that works to achieve these goals. The Odairy listserv is unique to NODPA and provides direct information to the email box of subscribers.

Project Objectives

The project objective was to expand the scope and accessibility of the NODPA-sponsored and -moderated internet based listserv, Odairy. The listserv facilitates peer mentoring and provides support to transitional and established organic dairy farmers.

- This project expanded the volume of research and education related to organic dairy production that is easily available to organic dairy farmers.
- The listserv was upgraded and housed within the NODPA domain.
- The archives of the listserv are now stored on the NODPA website and are easily accessible to all farmers and others.
- The archives are within a searchable database where they can be organized by topic, date posted, and person who posted the email. OFRF funds were used to upgrade the database and troubleshoot the problems that came from the transfer of the listserv from the Yahoo system.
- The transfer from Yahoo made all the archives more easily accessible and ensured that NODPA would retain ownership of the material, as well as safeguarding the integrity of the listserv from outside control or by being hijacked by an individual or organization.

NODPA failed to realize the sophisticated software that would be necessary to both make the information secure and easily accessible to farmers who may not be familiar with web-based systems.

NODPA used more of the funds than planned to develop and safeguard the database from corrupting computer viruses and did not have the funds necessary to organize the posts by topic. NODPA has recently spent several thousand dollars to upgrade the database again and purchase a service contract to ensure a consistent supply of emails to the mailbox of farmers.

Educational Approach

NODPA has fulfilled its goal of educating the following constituencies and expanding its services to farmers in the following ways:

- 1) It continues to educate legislators, consumers, and the media about the integrity of the production methods used by organically certified dairy farmers by providing information in an easily accessible print and electronic format.
- 2) It has expanded and protected peer mentoring education among organic dairy farmers by improving the accessibility, sustainability, and presentation of the Odairy listserv.

- 3) The improvement in NODPA's resources has increased its ability to partner with other organizations to safeguard the organic marketplace by continuing to advocate for the highest standards in organic production to ensure continuing consumer confidence in the validity of the USDA organic seal.

NODPA occupies a unique position within the organic dairy community as it is an organic dairy farmer-controlled organization that is not tied to any one brand or processor; therefore, NODPA possesses the ability to advocate without any pressure from the economic needs of the marketplace. NODPA had over 800 listserv members when it was on Yahoo. There are currently over 640 members and growing on the new listserv housed on the NODPA domain.

Odaily has a button on the home page of its website which is available at www.nodpa.com or www.organicmilk.org. Farmers and others that go to the home page can easily access the Odairy archives directly from that location.

NODPA publishes a bi-monthly printed newsletter mailed to over 2000 farmers and organic dairy stakeholders. This printed newsletter has a regular section devoted to topics raised in Odairy. This helps to stimulate farmers and others to go to the website archives to read the full text of the posts.

NODPA publishes a monthly e-newsletter and Odairy is promoted in the e-newsletter every other month.

The upgraded and more accessible Odairy was promoted at the 2010 and 2011 NODPA Field Days and Annual Meeting. The 2010 Field Day was in Maine and the 2011 event was in New York. Both were attended by over 120 farmers.

Project Results

The project was designed and funded to provide organic dairy farmers and others information on the organic dairy production practices; organic and agricultural regulatory information and changes to organic rules; policy developments; and increase the availability and accessibility of electronic peer mentoring that organic farmers benefit the most from.

NODPA has developed its website to be as easily as possible accessed and used by farmers that may not be "techno savvy." The Odairy list serve was developed to be delivered directly to the email box of subscribers rather than the more efficient and cheaper web-based versions because our survey of organic dairy farmers made it very clear that they had limited time to access websites and some farm families are severely limited by dial-up internet. One reason why NODPA continues to have a print newsletter is the response from farmers that they prefer this form of receiving information.

NODPA now has an easily searchable database on its website as well as a safe and unique listserv that is delivered in real time to farmers' computers. The archives are stored on the NODPA server and accessible directly from the home page of the website. NODPA.com receives over 2,500 visits each month navigating to an average of 3 pages per visit.

The project was successful in ensuring that the listserv and the website are accessible and the content is relevant to farmers and organic stakeholders. NODPA underestimated the cost, time, and difficulty of sorting the information from the Odairy archives into discrete documents that could then be published and promoted on the website and elsewhere. NODPA instead used the grant monies to ensure the Odairy and its archives were safe from viruses and had an easily searchable database.

With hindsight, we should have used the funding from OFRF to establish the new Odairy on the NODPA domain with more secure software and more knowledgeable technical support rather than attempt to collate the contents of Odairy into discreet documents or groups. If we had invested earlier in the technical and “background” cost of the software that is so easily supplied by Yahoo and others, we would have saved a lot of time and effort.

The investment in an independent Odairy that is controlled by organic producers for organic dairy producers is a long-term benefit that ensures that NODPA will control content, storage of content, the ability to ensure civil discourse, and the integrity of email addresses. It also allows NODPA to “own” the content and prevents Yahoo for exercising any proprietary control over content in the future.