

Forage Research Update

Minnesota - UMN Dairy at Morris Adopts an Organic Focus

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The dairy research and outreach program at the West Central Research and Outreach Center is transitioning a portion of its crop and dairy herd to organic production. The project will include 72 organic and 80 conventional cows, 50 ac of cropland and > 200 ac of pasture, as certification is phased in from 2009-2011. Research during the transition will focus on changes in mastitis and other measures of herd health. Research in cross breeding, grazing, out-wintering, calf rearing and low-input system organization will continue and be incorporated in the organic plan.

Other future research topics may include:

- improving quantity and quality of pasture and stored forages,
- multiple benefits benchmarking of organic and conventional systems to include biological and economic efficiency, product quality, carbon footprint, emissions, quality of life, etc.,
- non-synthetic treatments for disease in organic herds,
- nutrient flows including field, feed and animal,
- development of best management practices for organic dairy.

“Organic” is a production system managed to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity. To sell milk as organic, the farm must be certified and inspected to verify that an organic plan is rigorously followed. Interest in organic dairying is on the increase due to the growing organic market, premium prices for organic milk and a preference for less intensive production systems. Organic is a production system, not a product.