

Linda Leehman

From: James Maroney <maroney.james@gmail.com>
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To: Linda Leehman
Subject: [External] My thoughts after your meeting on August 24th

Most people know that the conventional paradigm introduced after WWII produces more milk at a lower cost than the organic model but most are unwilling to concede that the conventional model is the proximate cause of both farm attrition and lake pollution. With growing awareness however that conventional farming is one of the principal causes of global warming, and with the passage in Vermont of the Global Warming Solutions Act, it is time for the state to begin constraining the conventional paradigm.

The news two days ago that Horizon will stop picking up milk from Vermont's small organic dairy farmers should elicit a response and at the same time resolve an internal inconsistency in the state's policy towards and the industry's trend to fewer larger dairy farms.

The national organic program (NOP) obliges dairy farmers to pasture their cows outside on grass during the summer months. This rule effectively limits farm size to +/- 200 cows or they would be using more energy getting to remote pastures than they get from eating the grass on them. Horizon has been willing — even eager — to allow its farmers to disregard the pasture rule because it is obviously easier and cheaper for processors to pick up from fewer larger farms than from many smaller ones. This is one way that organic coops keep control of over supply and therefore over price and coincidentally over dairy's effect upon the environment. (Conventional dairy farms deposit an order of magnitude more nutrients in the soil on the farm than organic farms.)

But Horizon is a for profit company not a farmer owned coop and it is fine with offering milk labeled organic but which is conventionally made. Conveniently the USDA also likes fewer larger farms because it is addicted to cheap food irrespective of its effects on farmers' incomes and the environment. Accordingly, the USDA has been willing for years to look the other way as Horizons farmers flagrantly break the pasture rule. So bottom line the term organic is about to be coopted by the conventional people.

Vermont could save the situation but Vermont would first have to resolve an internal contradiction; it has favored larger fewer farms for generations and has shown no signs that it will suddenly change course. But to fail to do so now will destroy the meaning of the term 'organic' and discard forever what little chance there is left to decide whether the future of Vermont dairy is in supporting the production of more cheaper milk while at the same time destroying more and more farms and polluting the lake, or whether the future of Vermont farming is with more smaller organic farms that make a taxable income and do not pollute the lake. Compliance with the Global Warming Solutions Act, which is mandated not discretionary, is the key to this decision.

One more thing: I would make Joanna Lidback a member of the task force without delay.

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