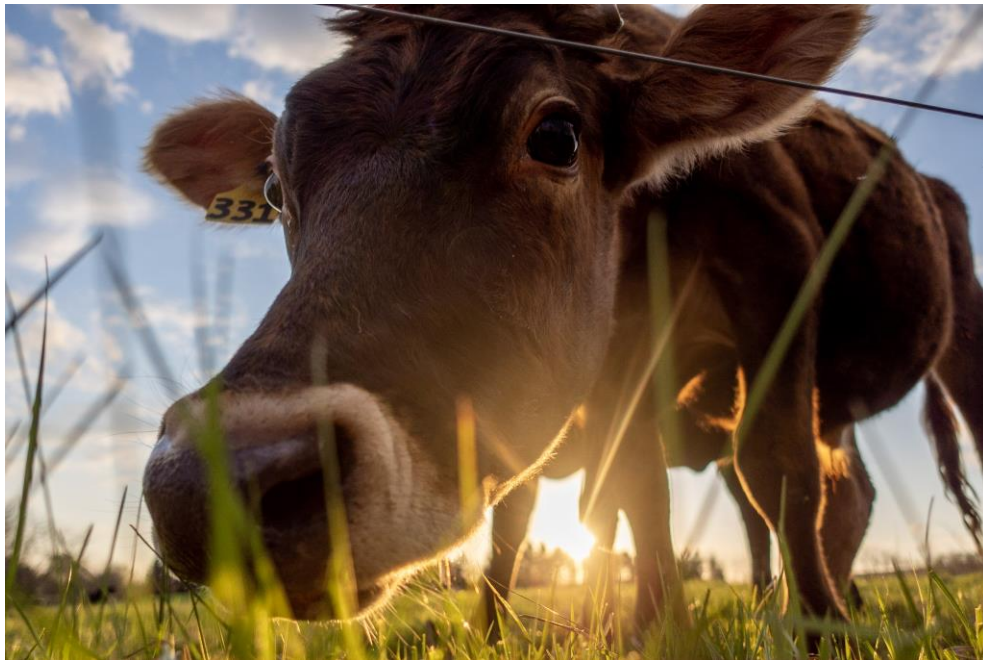


# ENGAGING WITH ORGANIC BUYERS - DAIRY

## RESOURCE GUIDE: APRIL 2025

This Resource Guide outlines best practices, considerations, buyer information, and further resources for navigating organic dairy markets. As demand for organic products continues to rise, understanding the unique dynamics of these markets is essential for growers looking to maximize their opportunities and profitability. Whether you're new to organic farming or looking to refine your approach, this resource serves as a companion on your journey towards successful market navigation.

The National Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) supports transitioning and organic farmers with Market resources including Buyer/Seller discovery events to facilitate meaningful connections between organic sellers and buyers and Market Development Workshops. The key takeaways and resources in this guide emerged from a webinar series on organic dairy markets in April 2025. To learn more and find events near you, visit: [www.organictransition.org/region/national/events](http://www.organictransition.org/region/national/events).



### EVENT RECAP:



This organic markets webinar series consisted of three online events. The first webinar focused on farmer perspectives on the return on investment of organic transition through the lens of markets. The second webinar of the series featured buyer perspectives on effective organic sourcing. The closing and final webinar was an open Q&A with the farmers and buyers featured in the preceding webinars.

All of the webinars in this series were moderated by Taylor Ussery, Region Local Products Specialist for FreshPoint and former Chief Operating Officer of Ran-Lew Dairy. The panel featured Chris Wilson from Wilson Organic Farms in Wisconsin and Hayley Painter from Painterland Sisters in Pennsylvania. You can watch the recording [here](#).

The second webinar panel featured Allie Hausladen Batsell from Whole Foods Market, Miranda Leis from Organic Valley and Jason Johnson from Stonyfield. You can watch the recording [here](#).

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The last part of the webinar series was not recorded to encourage the free flow of conversation. Notes from the call can be found below.

| Key Takeaways/Best Practices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FINDING A BUYER:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the Organic Integrity Database (OID). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This site allows you to search by location, product, etc.</li> <li>○ It's a great tool for direct marketing specialty crops and small lots but it takes some time learning to navigate. Know the key words for what you are searching for – you'll be able to find emails/phone numbers of decision makers here.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <b>WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU CALL:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn the name of the decision maker prior to making your call. Ask whoever answers the first for that person by first name to avoid "getting stuck at the front desk."</li> <li>• Always follow up by email after calling. If you don't know their email, make sure you ask while you have them on the phone.</li> </ul>                                                                                                  |



- Communicate why your products are special, highlight value of product, talk about your practices.

#### **TIMING:**

- Like you, buyers are really busy so do your research to make sure you are calling the right person!
- Call them during the workday! 8-4pm; mornings seem to be the most productive times for cold calling... Many decision makers also get to the office as early as 7 and it may be to your advantage to call early!
- Consider time zones and lunch breaks
- Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays are the best days to call
- Decision makers may be on the road, visiting places and if you know they are, call while they are traveling as if they are traveling by car, they can talk via Bluetooth
- Wintertime is a great time to call and line up contracts. It's good to call around 8 brokers/buyers and let them know your planting intentions.

#### **Why is certification trust important in organic farming?**

- Trust in the organic certification process is key because it reassures consumers and buyers of product integrity.

#### **How much higher are organic dairy prices compared to conventional?**

- Organic dairy prices are generally 8-10% higher than conventional prices, especially at the farm level. However, the price difference is not as significant at the consumer level.

#### **What advice is given for those considering transition to organic farming?**

- Build a reliable team including people with expertise in farming, finance, capital, nutrition and veterinary care. Do not try to be an expert in everything – learn on your support system. Develop buyer relationships before making the transition and reach out to support organizations. Engage in local support networks as well and consider attending pasture walks.

#### **What is the first step in transitioning to organic for dairy farmers?**

- Start by asking questions and committing to the process, even if the benefits take time to show.

#### **What is the current demand for organic dairy?**

- Demand for organic dairy is at an all-time high with consumers seeking real organic dairy over alternatives. The current market demand presents a unique opportunity



for transitioning farmers. There are not many farms that are transitioning to organic, so this is a window for new entrants to secure market access. Panelists noted that the public's interest in what they consume is not just a passing trend and that long-term awareness will support continued growth for organic dairy.

### **What should farmers be cautious about when selling organic?**

- Do your due diligence. Work with experienced people who understand family farms and when working with buyers, do not just take the highest bidder. Consider long-term sustainability and reliability.

### **How can farmers use social media effectively?**

- Farmers should not be afraid of social media. Farmers should show the world their work as most people are not familiar with farming. Social media can be a powerful way to market what you already have.

### **What role do carbon credits play in organic farming?**

- Many organic practices align with carbon offset programs, offering a valuable additional revenue stream for farmers. For those interested in carbon offset programs, Chris Wilson from Wilson Organic Farms has opened the door for questions and conversations!

### **What are the biggest constraints to meeting high consumer demand for organic dairy?**

- Strict timelines and physical demands of organic farming are big constraints to meeting high consumer demand. It takes time and energy to adapt to new systems.

### **How are prices set and managed across different organizations?**

- At Organic Valley, prices are set by a farmer-led board of directors and informed by market research. Stonyfield takes a two-fold approach: market monitoring and discussions with producers about the cost of production. Their field staff regularly visit farms and conduct market research. Whole Foods determines pricing by evaluating consumer sensitivity, competitive retail prices, and product tiering – ensuring logical pricing between conventional and organic products.

### **What advice did Hayley give about pursuing value-added products like yogurt?**

- Hayley emphasized the importance of aligning product development with long-term goals. Her aim was to use all the milk from the farm in a short window. However, she cautioned that yogurt is a saturated market with a short shelf life. She advised



anyone pursuing value-added products to either develop strong marketing skills or partner with someone who has them.

### **Are there certifications beyond USDA Organic that buyers look for?**

- Yes, buyers are increasingly interested in other certifications like Regenerative Organic, Non-GMO Verified, Animal Welfare Approved and grass-fed certifications. Whole Foods, for example requires third party verifications for any product claims and actively explores new animal welfare standards in dairy.

### **Do co-ops and buyers require a certain scale to support alternative certifications?**

- In most cases, yes. There needs to be a sufficient number of certified suppliers in a region to justify processing and distribution under these certifications. However, pockets of opportunity exist for smaller groups or regions with emerging demand.

### **What defines a strong relationship between dairy buyers and farmers?**

- Strong communication, transparency and mutual understanding were emphasized by all panelists. Organic Valley and Stonyfield both prioritize meeting farmers where they are and ensuring that farmers' needs are addressed.

### **Do these organizations offer support beyond purchasing organic dairy?**

- Yes. Stonyfield offers technical assistance, financial support, and education, even to farmers not currently under contract. Organic Valley provides extensive field support, regular regional meetings, and technical resources. Whole Foods does not work directly with farmers but funds sustainability programs and incubators through their suppliers. They also offer loan and mentoring programs for small local brands.

## **RESOURCES:**

- [Organic Integrity Database](#) - use this to search for certified organic farms, businesses, and more
- [Find.Organic](#)
- [PA Preferred Organic Program](#)
- [PCO TOPP Resources](#)
- [PA Dairy Center of Excellence](#)
- [Organic Valley Cooperative](#)
- [Trees for Graziers](#)
- Local extension services
- [NRCS Livestock and Pasture Management](#)



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- [California Dairy Innovation Center](#)

## CONNECT WITH US

If you're a producer looking for deeper markets access guidance, organic crop rotation support, or to get connected with buyers, contact [Rodale Institute's Consulting Markets Team](#).

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