



the ORGANIC Cultivator

VOL 21 ISSUE 3 FALL 2023

Mahalko Dairy - Kevin Mahalko Lessons in Grass Farming

by Joe Pedretti, Client Services Director

Kevin Mahalko farms 395 certified organic acres, a mix of managed pastures and some woodland managed for hardwoods that he may eventually use for organic maple syrup production. "I want to have everything that I am doing under organic management because I think it's highly important," emphasized Kevin. "I milk 45 purebred Holstein dairy cows that have been selected over the years for grazing, good feet and legs, deep bodies, and strong frames. Body condition is a big concern with Holsteins on grass; you have to have the right genetics, and my cows can keep good condition even on 100% grass. The World Dairy Expo is going on right now, and these are not those tall, bony show cows," chuckled Kevin.



"I choose Holsteins, even though some other graziers use smaller breeds or cross-breeds, because Holsteins have the most developed

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

MAHALKO DAIRY - LESSONS IN GRASS FARMING	1
FROM THE DIRECTOR	1
CERTIFICATION POLICY UPDATE	4
MIDWEST TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM	5
CLASSIFIEDS	6



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Cori Skolaski, Executive Director

Hello! I hope all is well with you in these beautiful autumn days. As we head into fall, MOSA's certification staff is in the thick of final reviews. Our work generally reflects the seasons of our clients, and like yours, it's a 365-day business. For our producer and farmer clients, we generally inspect operations during the growing season, while inspections for processors and handlers may occur at any time during the year as those operations are generally not so calendar-driven. And just a reminder if you haven't had an inspection yet, your organic certificate does not expire. You can lawfully use it until we issue you a new one.

Since March 2020, MOSA has been a virtual workplace; except

see DIRECTOR on page 7

see LESSONS on page 2

and most available genetic base. We've been farming Holsteins in our family since the 1800s, so it was a heritage thing too. I only use AI (artificial insemination) on my herd, so by selecting for grazing, good production, and better milk components I have a herd that does really well. I believe that with good genetics, combined with good soils and good grazing management you can definitely do well with Holsteins. Any breed can be selected out for good grazing."

"I work with a good breeding company (Genex) and we score the cows, do a mating assessment, and select for good udders, good feet and legs, and that is money well spent since you have so much money tied up in raising them. If you start with good potential, it doesn't guarantee that they will all be good, but definitely a high percentage of them are. AI (artificial insemination) breeding is a definite advantage for farmers."

"Our average cow's age is about six years. When I went to full grass, I would breed my heifers at least six months to a year later than the industry usually does. Waiting a little longer to breed young heifers gives them a chance to fill out better and they typically last longer in production. My cows last about eight years in production, although I have some that are as old as 12, maybe 13 years. I think waiting longer to breed really helps them maintain body condition," noted Kevin.

"I switched to once a day milking about two years ago. The biggest reason for changing from two times a day was time. I do a lot of educational work with Grassworks (Editor's Note: Kevin is President of the Board), Marbleseed and River Country RC&D. Being able to do my off farm consulting activities was important. The other thing is that Holsteins are capable of holding more milk, so they can adapt pretty well to once a day milking. They definitely dropped a little in production, but the components went up enough to offset that. My rolling herd average is 10.5 and butterfat is 4.4 to 4.5 and protein has been around 4.1. That's up quite a bit from doing twice a day milking. I am on the Organic Valley Grassmilk truck and that has been one of the drivers for my decision making. If I am not feeding corn silage and grain, we can't get that high production; we dropped about 5000 pounds after dropping grain (15,500 to 10,600 lbs). That is offset by the grassmilk premium and the higher components."

"My family has always had pastures. During my childhood we had some five acres pastures that we would move the cows around every two weeks. We were also supplementing with green chop every day. So we've always had a pasture component but during the 80s drought hay was too short to chop, so we dedicated more acres to grazing. That was an emergency thing, but we saw the potential. I went to college at Stevens Point in the early 90s and I went to one of the first few Grassworks conferences. There was a huge turnout of farmers and there was a lot of interest in the New Zealand style grazing system. It was a revolution I thought, and it was in a lot of ways. One of my neighbors started grazing and I went to local pasture walks and met up with a great group of local people interested in grazing. We were fully management intensive grazing on the farm by 1995. By the late 90s we started hearing about organic production. While grazing alone allowed you to be more efficient, we needed to get better milk prices. We started hearing about what Organic Valley was doing and it was pretty appealing. By 2001 I had started managing some fields organically and by 2003 decided to transition. We got certified organic in 2011. We were ready to go in 2009, but there was a wait for quotas around that time. It was great once we got on the organic truck."

"In 2006 I started as a grazing specialist with the River Country RC&D, and I am still with them. I have seen a lot of growth and farm success and learned a lot about grazing. My farm is in the north central part of Wisconsin on heavy silt loam soils. Historically this is what was known as the 'clover belt.' Clover grows really well and there is a huge seed bank. Graziers have often said 'plant fence posts and manage what comes.' I think that's still my dominant thinking- graze what grows and manage it well. I think the biggest improvement over the years has been the seeds available. There are many better choices now for species and varieties. I do a mix of no-tilling into pasture and new seeding in the areas where we outwinter. I will use a custom grazing blend. I really like the Grassworks mixes. I tend to blend mixes together for even more variety. I like the diversity mix with meadow fescue, perennial ryegrass, and I mix in timothy, white and red clover, alfalfa, trefoil, chicory, plantain, forage variety Kentucky bluegrass, and a little festulolium. I also get volunteer quackgrass, meadow brome, bluegrass, plantain, and legacy clover. With good fertility, and the right lime in the right range for pH, that mix grows really well and yields well in a variety of conditions," noted Kevin.

“My pasture management has changed since the early days. Then you put the cows in at eight inches and left two inches for regrowth. The goal was to move as often as possible. I found that you had to supplement fiber to do that. We were feeding fiber with our grain to slow down the rumen. If you want to go pure grazing, it is better to start grazing somewhat taller. I try to go in at 15 inches. You get more density, more root development and a better fiber/energy balance. The cows have better rates of passage and firm cow pies. They get less foot problems, less acidosis and lower MUNs. Maintaining mature and taller pastures works better for me and with the right rain, I average about 35 days between grazings. By then all of the manure is incorporated so parasite levels are lower too. I have permanent lanes and water lines with big paddocks that I divide with poly wire as needed. That gives me a lot of flexibility.”

“If we have good rain, grass grows like crazy here in May and June. My Dad Ken, who still helps a lot on the farm, and I will clip and put up bedding and hay from whatever the cows can’t eat. I don’t have a bedding pack and outwinter my cattle as much as possible. I do have stalls and mats for the cows. We feed some in the barn, usually haylage or baleage. Out in the pasture I set up feeder wagons with large square bales. What I like about that is being able to pull them from one spot to another to spread out the fertility. If it’s going to be muddy, I pre-place 10-15 bales where I want them and then I just move the poly wire. I do try to stockpile some paddocks for grazing in the winter. With the right weather, I can get them grazing in December and even January,” said Kevin.

“Organic production is really important to me. The whole community aspect. The democratic voice. Farmers engaged in making the rules. Listening to consumers. Then you tie that in with protecting the environment and treating animals with care and you have a real community. There are just so many factors about organic that are positive. It is important to me to remain committed to supporting organic grass based systems beyond just the day to day farming. I still remember my first Grassworks conference. That was the first conference where everyone was happy, engaged, cooperative and listening to one another. Add in organic principles and cooperative marketing and you have the peak of what this community can be. Farming doesn’t have to be this competitive thing.” ■



CERTIFICATION POLICY UPDATE

by Jackie DeMinter, Certification Policy Manager

National Organic Program: Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE)

MOSA, and all of the operations we certify **must be in compliance with the requirements of the SOE Rule by March 19, 2024**. Implementing these new requirements will mean some changes for MOSA as well as changes or new requirements for most operations. At MOSA, we are making updates to Organic System Plans, determining requirements for and collecting Fraud Prevention Plans, introducing the new Non-Processing Handler Organic System Plan, streamlining certification processes, and making updates to our internal processes and policies to align with the new and revised regulations. We are gearing up to begin generating certificates from the NOP's INTEGRITY database: <https://organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity/>. This will not change your certified products in any way, but your paperwork will begin to look a little different soon, and MOSA is required to report some additional information to the NOP.

MOSA is actively working toward full compliance by March 19, 2024. Continue to watch for MOSA communication about your operation's compliance. A few things to take specific note of:

- If you submitted your Fraud Prevention Plan (FPP) already, thank you! We will let you know if we have questions. If you have not yet submitted a FPP, submit it right away as we will otherwise be asking you to submit it as a pre-decision requirement at final review along with any other updates needed to assess compliance with the new regulations. **Not getting your FPP submitted may delay us getting you your updated certificate.**
- If you ship or store agricultural products that are not for retail sale, new labeling requirements for nonretail containers may affect your operation. Operations moving nonretail containers through the supply chain must display identification of the product as organic along with the production lot number; furthermore, audit trail documentation for nonretail containers must identify the last certified operation that handled the agricultural product. The only nonretail containers that are exempt are those that are used to ship or store retail labeled products with visible organic identification. If you already use nonretail labels, be sure that your updates are submitted, approved and you have a plan for use prior to March 19, 2024.
- Exempt handlers will need to complete MOSA's new Exempt Handler Affidavit. This affidavit will help determine if a handler is truly exempt. Exempt operations that must complete this form may include handlers that are supplying organic product to you or those that you use in your own supply chain. All organic products must be traceable back to the last certified handler, which may be through several uncertified handlers.

The National Organic Program is continuing their work to implement the Import Certificate requirements. NOP will be providing user guides, microlearnings, and other learning resources during the SOE implementation period. Mandatory use of Import Certificates begins for all operations on March 19, 2024 – however, NOP is encouraging all exporters to begin requesting import certificates and certifiers to begin using the new Import Certificate module well in advance of the mandatory date to avoid any issues with the new module.

More information about the new strengthening organic enforcement regulation can be found on the MOSA website here: <https://mosaorganic.org/strengthening-organic-enforcement>

Ion Exchange Filtration: Material Review Update

The National Organic Program issued a clarifying memo to certifiers on Ion Exchange Filtration in Organic Production. Long story short, the memo clarifies that exchange ions/recharge solutions need to be listed on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (National List), while the ion exchange resins do not need to be on the National List. If you use ion exchange filtration in your organic production, be prepared to provide additional information on the materials used in your system.

National Organic Program Organic Integrity Learning Center Updates

MOSA is encouraging our clients to stay abreast of NOP Learning Center courses. The National Organic Program (NOP) recently published a new course on livestock traceability. Traceability is key to maintaining the integrity of organic products. The new NOP-340: Livestock Traceability course gives certifiers a greater understanding of identifying livestock traceability considerations. This course focuses on the role of livestock traceability within the USDA organic control system. It introduces ways to strengthen organic integrity and identify potential fraud. The course

Midwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program: The First Year in Review

Allison Walent, Program Director

It was just one year ago that MOSA announced it was named by the National Organic Program to lead the Midwest Region's Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). The past year has been filled with learning moments, programming, systems development, relationship building, and more learning moments. MOSA hired two new team members to lead the work, connected with many potential partners throughout the 11 state region, participated in our first TOPP sponsored events, and developed plans to support the program's four main priorities: farmer to farmer mentorship, community building, technical assistance, and workforce development. Our 15 core partner organizations are primarily responsible for delivering programming to their constituents and engaging local organizations that will provide additional support to their efforts. The core partners have also been instrumental in lending their expertise and experience as we developed programming. Through this network, we are investing approximately \$3.75 million dollars over the next 16 months to support farmers who are transitioning land to certified organic production.

We know that learning from those who have walked through organic transition offers many benefits to those interested in embracing organic production methods. We also celebrate that learning is a two-way street and we expect experienced mentors will learn through the mentoring process too! Farmer to farmer mentoring is the foundation of TOPP. While not every farmer is keen on or ready for one to one mentorship, this program will offer opportunities to attend field days, workshops, or round table discussions; to participate in group mentorship; or to receive individualized support completing (or revising) an organic system plan. In addition to offering mentorship, technical assistance and community building, TOPP will support workforce development in the organic sector.

In September we launched our first [MW TOPP Newsletter](#) and a national website for TOPP. In future newsletters you will find information such as updates about MW TOPP programming, event highlights, information about becoming a mentor or mentee, and highlights of our program partners.

Also in September we, in collaboration with the other five regional lead organizations, launched an official TOPP website, www.organictransition.org. TOPP's new website is the national hub for program opportunities, news, events, and resources. The TOPP website features a host of essential functions designed to support and nurture the growth of organic farming across diverse regions. Key features of the TOPP website include: mentor and mentee program sign-up, comprehensive event listings, organic resources, and organic news.

The TOPP website is a testament to the commitment and cooperation of TOPP's six regional leads and countless partners, who collaborated diligently to create this user-friendly and informative platform. Their collective effort ensures that the website caters to the unique needs and challenges faced by producers nationwide.

Whew, what a first year it has been! We are looking forward to our second year: our first mentorship pairs under TOPP, an in-person core partner meeting, spreading the word at conferences in January and February, and above all increasing organic acres! Stay tuned for future program updates, and to learn more about TOPP, check out our website at www.organictransition.org!



CLASSIFIEDS

LIVESTOCK

3 HOLSTEIN SPRINGERS

Confirmed PG by Cashton Vet Clinic 9-22-2023. 2 Bred about 4 months, 1 Bred about 4.5 months. Asking \$2000 each, will negotiate if you buy all 3. Located in Westby WI. Please call Mike at 608-632-0345.

TWO A2 FLECKVIEH BULLS

First bull is purebred A2, polled Fleckvieh (dairy). Three years old. Second bull is a A2 Fleckvieh cross. One year old. Edgewood, IA. Call 563-255-1034.

ORGANIC SPRINGING HEIFERS

Four springing Holstein heifers, due in Sept. Grass fed certified (OPT) 3 bred to Jersey, 1 to beef. Asking 1800 each obo. Plus three head due in Nov. Located in Re- way WI. Call Jim Campbell 608-943-8380

ORGANIC SPRINGING DAIRY HEIFERS

Fourteen due to freshen starting Sep 1st, organic slaughter eligible and organic grass milk eligible. Twelve due to freshen starting Nov 1st, organic slaughter eligible. Located in Montfort WI. Call 608-943-6142.

MEAT PROCESSING AND MEAT SLAUGHTER

Integrity Meats does it all, from slaughter, to cutting, and packaging. Will cure and smoke, vacuum seal, etc. Call Sandy 608-572-4303. USDA Inspected. Integrity Meats, N3825 County Road P, Elroy, WI 53929

PREMIER LIVESTOCK & AUCTIONS- NOW CERTIFIED ORGANIC!

Premier Livestock & Auctions is now the only certified organic livestock auction barn in the Midwest. Sell your certified organic cattle and feed. N13538 State Highway 73, Withee, WI 54498. 715-229-2500.

CRESCENT MEATS - USDA INSPECTED - CERTIFIED ORGANIC.

FAMILY OWNED for 15 YEARS

- FULL SERVICE SLAUGHTER FACILITY - USDA INSPECTED - CERTIFIED ORGANIC
15332 State Highway 27
Cadott, WI 54727
Phone: 715.289.3000
crescentqualitymeats.com

ORGANIC DAIRY AND BEEF COWS

Organic Farmer cutting back on dairy and beef cows. \$1.75 per pound live weight. Located east of Green Bay WI. Call 920-388-1116.

LAND/FARMS

ORGANIC GRASS DAIRY FARM IN RIB LAKE WI

220 acres, Turn- key \$1,120,000. Open to selling shares. Call 715-905-0597.

EQUIPMENT

CLOSING BLUE MOON FARM

2 - 30x60 movable greenhouses, Electric Harvest Trucks, brush washers, harvest crates and much more. Located in Urbana IL area. For a complete list contact: blue-moonfarmurbana@gmail.com

ROLLER CRIMPERS

Organic Roots Way is a dealer located in Camp Douglas, WI. Contact Joel @ joel@rollercrimpers.com or call 608-424-5577 for information and pricing shipped directly to your address. See <https://rollercrimpers.com>

HORSE DRIVEN IMPLEMENTS

New I&J Manufacturing cover crop roller & horse driven implements. Organic Roots Way is a dealer located in Camp Douglas WI. Contact Joel for info and pricing shipped directly to your address. 608-427-3423.

VEGETABLES/TRANSPLANTS/SEEDS

CERTIFIED ORGANIC ALFALFA SEED

2022 crop grown on Our 5th Generation Family Farm. \$4.00 per pound. Bulk sales only with volume discounts. Galen Ackerman, galenackerman@gmail.com, call or text: 785-547-7072. Located in Sabetha KS.

FORAGES/GRAIN

CERTIFIED ORGANIC

ALFALFA HAY FOR SALE

3x3x8 Dry Square Bales, Stored Inside or Covered. RFV Ranging 120-210. First, Second & Third Cuttings Available. Approximately 30 different lots all tested by Dairy Land Laboratories and Certified Organic Verification by WFCFO. Located in Strasburg, ND 58573. Contact John Krumm 701-851-0327 or Derrik Krumm 701-851-0195.

LOOKING FOR TRANSITION BARLEY IN SE MINNESOTA (LAKE CITY AREA)

Contact (320) 309-6632.

CUSTOM ROASTING OF SOYBEANS

Golden Grains in Sparta, WI. Call 608-269-5150.

ALFALFA AND ALFALFA/GRASS HAY

Certified organic. 3x3x8 large square bales. Test results available. Reasonably priced. Located by Linton, ND. Shipping available. Dave Silbernagel 208-867-9939 or dsilbernagel1960@gmail.com.

To submit an ad to be posted in the printed version of the Organic Cultivator and on the MOSA website, send it to MOSA, PO Box 821, Viroqua, WI 54665, or email to mosa@mosaorganic.org.

All ads will be posted for 60 days free of charge for MOSA clients (100 words max). For non-clients, cost of an ad is \$5.00 for 40 words, and \$0.10 per word over 40 (max 100 words). MOSA does not guarantee that all products posted on this page are certified organic, and MOSA is not responsible for the accidental purchase of non-organic products through the use of this page. Always check to guarantee the certification status of any product before purchasing or using.

cont. POLICY from pg. 4

demonstrates ways to perform organic livestock traceability at inspection and to verify handlers' and processors' compliance with USDA organic livestock regulations.

While this course is geared toward certifiers, it will help you understand the requirements that we are working to verify on your operation. We will maintain a heightened awareness of livestock traceability on your operation and between organic operations during our review processes. ■

cont. DIRECTOR pg. 1

for a few administrative staff, the rest of us work from our home offices via computers. Our staff is located in 12 states and two countries beyond the US (Peru and Costa Rica). In early October, we invited everyone back to our HQ in Viroqua for a staff retreat. It was rejuvenating and so nice to be physically in the same space with co-workers. MOSA does its best to create a sense of community, but it's challenging to do it on-line. This was a chance for people to come together and have those water cooler conversations that lead to ingenuity and creativity.

I encourage you to read through this newsletter; there are some updates you should know about and some interesting articles. As always, if you have any questions or comments about anything in this newsletter or about MOSA please feel free to contact me at Cori@MosaOrganic.org or 844-637-2526. Thank you for reading, and thanks for your continued commitment to organic integrity. ■

How to Contact MOSA!

One of the most important parts of our work here at MOSA is client communications. Our Client Services Department spends much of each business day on this vital work. Daily, we receive and respond to many calls, emails, faxes, mail, voicemails, and in person visits. Because we value good communication with you, our clients, we continually seek to improve access and efficiency in this area.

To meet that goal we now offer texting! You can text us at: 608-424-4118. We'll accept short documents (PLUDs or VALUs, for example), photos, or specific items requested by MOSA staff. MOSA will not accept the following via text: applications, responses to non-compliances, proposed suspensions, settlement agreements or the like. Admin staff will reply to all texts. Call our toll free number if you do not receive a reply.

Here are the many ways you can contact MOSA:

By Mail at: MOSA, PO Box 821, Viroqua WI 54665.

In Person at: 122 W. Jefferson St. Viroqua, WI. Administrative staff are onsite at MOSA on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9-1. Outside of that time, or to meet with certification or financial staff, an appointment is required.

Call us toll free at 844-637-2526. We'll soon retire other MOSA phone numbers. When routed to voicemail, simply leave a message for our administrative team or listen to the short menu and select another MOSA department.

Email us at: mosa@mosaorganic.org.

Fax us at: 608-492-0470

MOSA

CERTIFIED ORGANIC

122 W. Jefferson Street
P.O. Box 821
Viroqua, WI 54665
(844) 637-2526

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID
LGI

— the — ORGANIC Cultivator

VOL. 21 ISSUE 3 FALL 2023

MOSA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Laura McBride, *President*
seejattan@gmail.com

Jamie Lamonde, *Vice President*
jamie@kindshipgroup.com

Altfred Krusenbaum, *Treasurer*
krusen@krusengrassconsulting.com

Jim Wedeberg, *Member*
jim.wedeberg@organicvalley.coop

Megan Grinde, *Member*
Megan.Grinde@organicvalley.coop

Matt Hartz, *Member*
matt.hartz@pfc.coop

Ryan Matthews, *Member*
rmatthewws@gmail.com

Visit us at mosaorganic.org • Contact us at mosa@mosaorganic.org
Visit us on Facebook: facebook.com/MOSAOrganicCertification
Joe Pedretti, Editor • (844) 637-2526 • jpedretti@mosaorganic.org