

## Chapter: What is Organic Dairying?

As far as the federal government is concerned, organic is a labeling term. The National Organic Program (NOP), based on recommendations made by the Federal Advisory Committee of the National Organic Standards Board, sets organic agricultural standards. The consumer can be assured that USDA-certified organic products are produced under “approved methods that integrate cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.”

The USDA provides no specific definition of what constitutes an organic dairy farm. Is it a matter of size? Is an organic dairy farm milking 2,000 cows any more or less organic than one milking 20? Is organic corn silage or pasture produced under irrigation any less organic than that raised under rainfall alone? Are cows raised under environmental extremes of heat and cold, necessitating artificial cooling or heating truly organic?

Perhaps, someday, these intriguing questions will be definitively answered. For the purposes of this book on organic dairy health and production, I'd like to venture at an inclusive definition of the organic dairy farm. Regardless of size, crop water source, or geographical location, an organic dairy farm utilizes feeds grown under NOP standards, pastures seasonally according to the same standards, and raises its livestock using best-management practices that minimize disease and render the use of synthetic parasiticides, antibiotics and hormones unnecessary.