Northeast Pasture Consortium Meeting Poster Abstract:

Poster Title: Snapshot of Eighty Grass-fed Dairies of the Northeast

The poster is preliminary review of surveys received from 80 grass-fed Cow Dairies mainly located in New York and Vermont. The surveys were sent out as part of a Northeast SARE Research and Extension Project: Begun September 1, 2016 End: October 31, 2019 titled:

 Supporting the Grass-fed Milk Market in the Northeast with Education and Benchmarks

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ABSTRACT PART 1: PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATION

Consumer demand for grass-fed dairy products is growing, and dairy farmers are being offered premiums for milk produced without grain. As milk processors add product lines, more grass-fed milk is needed throughout the country and in particular in the Northeast where market demand is soaring. The pay price is $5.00 per hundred pounds over the typical organic pay price, which is alluring to many farms already feeding low grain diets; however the transition away from grain can create unique problems and risks for the farm and the animals. Primary concerns include meeting energy demands of lactating cows with only forage, having sufficient quantities of forages to meet herd requirements year round, and maintaining herd health including reproduction and body conditions scores. Many farmers interested in this market will need to make management changes to monitor both herd health and production, and to improve forage quantity and quality. This project will provide critical information to farmers to help them make an informed decision on whether grass-fed markets are a viable option for their farm. Further, the project will develop tools to help farmers successfully transition and monitor their grass-fed farms.

The poster “Snapshot of Eighty Grass-fed Dairies of the Northeast” will share some of the information gathered through a survey sent out to the approximately 120 organic dairies shipping to Organic Valley Milk Coop under their Grass-Milk label and Maple Hill Grass-fed Yogurt. These two processors aided the project team by mailing the survey to each of their producers. In a testament to the eagerness of these producers to support the SARE project we received 80 responses or, a 67% return. Many of them agreed to be part of further parts of the 3 year study. The other parts of the study are:

 Grass-Fed Monitor:

For farmers interested in working more closely with the research team, there is the opportunity for farms to share more information with an additional farm data collection survey, a visit to the farm by Sarah Flack, and then participation in the monthly Grass-Fed Monitor. The Grass-Fed Monitor is a data collection tool that will require someone from the farm to fill out a monthly online (or paper) survey that will consist of information from your milk check, changes in herd inventory, and forage being fed to the herd. Participation will require the farms to commit to two years of data collection and allow for at least one on-farm visit to collect in-depth farm data.

In return the farm will receive:

• Monthly reports to compare how their performance has changed over the year, the report will also show how their benchmarks compare to other farms in the study.

• Free periodic sampling of forages.

• A monthly stipend for filling out the Grass-Fed Monitor.

High Energy Forage Species Study:

Energy is believed to be the weakest link in an all-forage diet. Determining which forages may help farmers produce the highest energy feed is work that will be done by Dr. Darby at UVM. She will plant trials to help identify high energy forage species that can be grown in the northeast. If you are interested in providing feedback on this trial please contact Dr. Darby.

Putting It All Together:

The project team will compile the information from the surveys, on-farm visits, and the grass-fed monitor tool to develop a series of educational materials and tools that will help inform the production practices of current and aspiring grass-fed dairies We look forward to sharing what is learned in this study to support the success of farms as they produce grass-fed milk for this growing market of consumers who are interested in the nutritional and environmental benefits of these products.