

National Organic Standards Ready

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (AP) —Consumers who are gobbling up organic products at an unprecedented rate should have a better idea of what they're eating when the nation's first organic labeling rules roll out this year, a federal agriculture official told farmers Thursday.

"This will not be a perfect rule, a holy grail, but it's a place to start so that farmers and consumers and the government can have some agreement on what organic means," said Keith Jones, who heads the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program.

Jones said the rules—expected to take effect this summer—will require organic producers to go

through a mandatory planning process, use materials off a restrictive list and get their farming practices verified by an authority.

Enforcement, he said, will be handled by state, county and private agencies that currently oversee the industry with a hodgepodge of rules and guidelines.

"We have empowered certifiers in this rule. But we're also going to ask certifiers to step up to the plate and take action," said Jones, speaking at the Ecological Farming Conference in Pacific Grove, Calif., the nation's largest annual gathering of organic farmers.

Congress called for consistent national "organic" guidelines 10 years ago. But earlier proposals included irradiated and genetically engineered food in the organic categories, drawing more than 280,000 protest let-

ters from consumers and organic farmers.

Jones said the revised rules now match industry standards that exclude irradiated and genetically engineered products.

Katherine DiMatteo who heads the Greenville, Mass.-based Organic Trade Association said that despite existing self-regulation, her industry needs the promised federal regulations.

"Without the government, we would not be able to enforce this program universally," she said.

While the USDA has been grappling with how to define organic, the industry has boomed. Sales reached \$6 billion last year, and industry organizations project growth of 20 to 25 percent a year as organic products become mainstream, according to the Organic Trade Association.

Bob Anderson, who chairs the

national organic advisory board and heads the 54-year-old organic farming network Walnut Acres in Penn Creek, Pa., said consumers have a lot to gain.

There will finally be a consistent standard, and therefore the consumer will know what's in an organic product and buy it with confidence," he said.

The USDA submitted its pro-

posed rule to the Office of Management and Budget last fall. The OMB is required to publish the rules in the Federal Register in February.

After that, there will be a 60-day Congressional review, followed by an expected 18-month implementation period.

New York Farm Bureau

GLENMONT, N.Y.—New York Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm advocacy organization, recently contacted the New York Congressional delegation urging support for expanding the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact to include New York State. The need for the Compact has increased as most New York dairy farmers are experiencing rapidly falling prices that are putting family farms in jeopardy.

"There are some New York dairy farmers who may be protected from the falling prices," stated New York Farm Bureau President John W. Lincoln.

"Those dairy farmers shipping milk into the Compact region will have the benefit of the Compact's stabilizing effect on prices. New York Farm Bureau believes all of New York's 8,300 dairy farmers should be able to join the Compact."

New York Farm Bureau has been vocal in showing appreciation to New York's delegation for their outstanding efforts during the first half of the 106th session of Congress. The over 30,000 farm family members were pleased by the achievement of Option 1A milk pricing and the extension of the current Compact.

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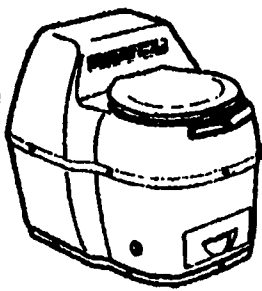
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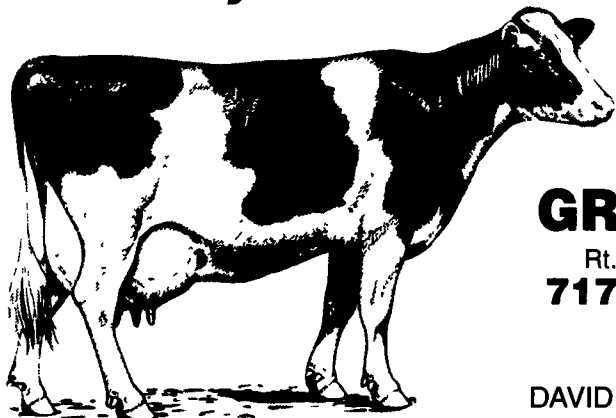
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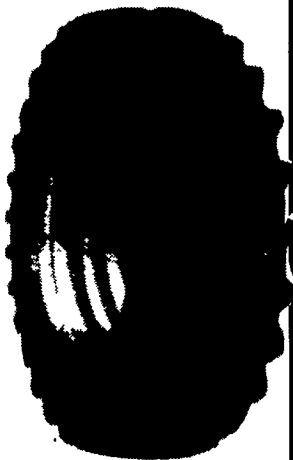
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