



## Truly Organic?

**Organizations strive to help consumers know more about food labeled “organic.”**

5/25/2007

Most people purchase organic animal products with the belief that there are no hormones, antibiotics or genetically engineered feed with pesticides used in their production. Consumers are willing to pay significantly higher prices for products free from these additives.

Unfortunately, this standard is being called into question in the organic milk industry. The National Organics Standards Board (NOSB) passed recommendations in 2002 and 2003 that all animals brought into organic dairies be under organic management starting no later than the last three months of pregnancy.

Dean Foods, which sells milk under the Horizon label, has admitted to shareholder groups in a February 2006 meeting that they sell all calves born on their 4,000-head farm to save on the cost of feeding the calves organic feed during the first year of their life. Dean then purchases 1-year-old animals that have been fed non-organic feed and that have been given drugs to replenish their herd—sidestepping the organic rules set forth by the NOSB. A major risk in this practice of selling off animals is that the non-organic calves may have ingested feed exposed to BSE, which is allowed in conventional farming. These feedstuffs have been banned in organic farming as a firewall against the spread of BSE.

Some industry observers feel that the USDA has become too well-acquainted with giant agri-businesses, such as Dean Foods. Many large companies have acquired smaller companies and organic labels in an effort to get a hand in the booming organic industry. The NOSB would like to close the loopholes that allow this practice, reassuring consumers that the “organic” products they are purchasing truly are organic.

The Cornucopia Institute, an organic industry watchdog, allows concerned farmers and consumers to post their opinions at [www.cornucopia.org](http://www.cornucopia.org)

This story first appeared in the November/December 2006 Hobby Farms magazine.