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Organic production means changes large and small

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Third-generation Aamodt Dairy near Hubbard, Ore., went organic in 2006. The dairy, owned by siblings Doug and Steve Aamodt and Norma Aamodt Nelson, made the transition to get a higher price for their milk and sell the 2 million pounds produced each year by their 100-cow herd to Organic Valley Creamery, a co-op of organic dairy farmers.

"It worked out well because all our ground was already organic, but everything costs more, too," Steve Aamodt said. "Everything needs to be approved and documented and can only contain certain ingredients, so it's an ordeal."

Fighting infection is a different story in organic production.

"We start with natural treatments and use antibiotics if necessary to save the cow's life," Aamodt said. "At that point it must be taken out of the herd and the whole ordeal documented."

Thankfully, the use of topical mint oil has proven quite effective for treating mastitis, which is often a dairy cow's



Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press
Steve Aamodt checks on heifers at the family farm near Hubbard, Ore. He and his siblings made the switch to organic production 12 years ago.

biggest issue.

"You find out right away how much money you wasted on antibiotics," Aamodt said. "God gave us an immune system that, if you work with it, is really something. Some of these mint oils and just trying to take care of your cows with vaccines, providing good feed, not pushing them to high production and just letting the cow do its thing really makes a difference."

The Aamodts dedicate 280 of their 400 acres to the dairy. The amount of pasture an organic dairy provides dictates the number of cows. Over a 120-day period they must get

at least 30 percent of their dry matter from pasture feeding.

In addition to pasture land they raise alfalfa, corn for silage, oats and wheat for their cows. Alternative feeds such as tortilla shells or brewers grain are not permitted unless certified organic and nitrogen for the soil must be natural and come in such forms as poultry waste and blood meal.

"We don't spray our crops at all," Aamodt said. "You get more weeds and set your sights on yields being down a little bit."

Conventional milk is fetching around \$14-15 per hundredweight and organic is going for about \$30.

"Customers pay a premium. ... Milk is a good food and people want that choice," Aamodt said. "It's filling a market that people want. ..."

"It's been a good market, but we are currently in the middle of a surplus because some large farms have started up and flooded the market," Aamodt said. "We're in a downturn on our pricing, but that's both conventional and organic. It's kind of a tough time to be a dairyman, period."



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