

## Representative Pingree speaks at the Common Ground Country Fair on Organic Integrity

*As the 41<sup>st</sup> annual Common Ground Country Fair began on Friday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, U.S. Congresswoman Chellie Pingree spoke on behalf of defending the integrity of the Organic Certification Standards. The following is an excerpt of her speech.*

The full video can be found on MOFGA's YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHe6JhHJUgw>

I was at some of the earliest [MOFGA] meetings back in the seventies. Some of the people who pioneered the organic movement in Maine have taught me everything I needed to know. I was an early employee of MOFGA and was the first apprentice in the apprenticeship program. So, when I bring my experience and knowledge to Washington, it's really thanks to everybody in the state of Maine and all the farmers that we connect with [here].

Many of you have worked so hard to support organic farming and to support the integrity of an organic brand. You have given me the stories and the experience to go down to Washington and say, "I'm not making this stuff up. I live in a state where the average age of the farmer is going down. Where we have doubled the number of women going into farming. Where we have new land under cultivation."

...We have a rural economy that's been growing because of people's interest [in], and support for, organic farming and providing locally. That support is really important on the side of the farmers and the growers, but also the consumers and the eaters.

Maine people will go out of their way to buy food locally, to join a CSA, to do everything they can to support their rural environment.... People who come to visit Maine say to me, "I'm going to take a vacation in your state and I can't wait to start eating." That's because we grow the best food, cook the best food, and we have the best people doing the work.

I want to talk a little bit about organic integrity. That is something that I know a lot about from the growers' side and the consumers' side.... I have an organic

vegetable operation and the standards aren't easy to meet. We all put a lot of effort into it. We work hard to have good soil. We work hard to practice and to comply with the standards. I am one of many people who has a growing concern about how we make sure we protect that integrity and I'm working on that from the federal level.

Organic farmers deserve to get a good price. The biggest danger to that is flooding the market with [products] that are not accurate. That are not organic. That are fraudulent.... Right now, about 50% of organic corn in this country and maybe 70% of organic soybeans are imported from another country. I have two really big concerns about this. One is about the integrity of what comes in. The second is about the importance of the USDA in encouraging more organic farming [domestically].

...The USDA, in my opinion, has a responsibility to assist farmers and consumers to get exactly what they are looking for.... some [USDA] programs get used in Maine and are very beneficial: [the Local Food Marketing Promotion Program and the Farmers Market Promotion Program] for people who want to buy locally, EQIP (the Environmental Quality Incentives Program), and Value-Added Producers Grants for young farmers and ranchers, among others.

...[These grants] make up a very small part of the USDA budget, but they make a huge difference if you want to add hoop houses and extend your season. If you want to start an organic goat cheese dairy. If you want to...start a new farm but you don't have the capital to get started. These programs are incredibly important. I say to the USDA—and have for the last few years—that it's a dereliction of their duty if they're not doing things to encourage more organic farming when it's currently 13% of the market. That [13%] should be all domestic!

We should be creating opportunities for American farmers. That should be their first job, but they don't do anywhere near enough of it.

These last eight years I spent in Congress, I've been working on the policies in the

farm bill...to give less to crop subsidies for corn, cotton, and wheat in places where they don't need the subsidies, and give more to the things that consumers want—that's organic, sustainably grown, and locally grown food. We have to change the policies at the USDA. We're working hard, but as you can imagine, when it comes to food and farm policy there are about 1,200 lobbyists on Capitol Hill, who spend over 300 million dollars a year, to convince my colleagues, generally, to do the opposite of what I think they should do. So, make no mistake, this isn't an easy thing to change!

...One other big piece of legislation we're working on is getting more [money into] organic research.... We have a bill right now to move 50 million dollars into organic research. It only makes a dent [in what's needed], but we're working together...and saying, "Not only do we need to protect organic integrity, but we need to invest in this!"

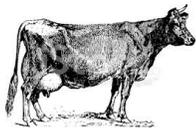
We had the Office of the Inspector General in front of [the Agricultural Appropriations Committee] recently. Their job is to oversee things like [organic integrity] and they just came out with a report on imports. The report held up what we already knew.... It said the National Organic Program had to have better controls at the point of entry; that means we have to have better inspections. There should be much more transparency, so we can tell, when something's imported, whether it was inspected and where it came from.

There are countries that, allegedly, are exporting more organic products than they could possibly grow. We don't have any doubt that there's fraud out there. We know that at times "organic" products are fumigated and treated with chemicals...

We need a better system for tracking... and [the Agricultural Appropriations Committee has] been working on some remedies.... You can take out your smartphone and know every step you took yesterday...there's no reason we can't understand where a soybean was grown, who inspected it, and how it got to us!

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# CATTLE CORNER

## Organic Milk ≠ Organic Beef

by Katie Webb, Dairy Certification Specialist

Many people assume that an organic dairy cow would naturally be good for organic beef. However, that is not the case. The organic standards for dairy/milk are slightly different than for slaughter stock/beef. That is why MOFGA Certification Services inspectors are checking records for slaughter eligibility during the annual dairy inspection.

In order to verify the slaughter eligibility of the dairy herd, the organic inspector will be checking to see that health history records are kept for each cow, what types of health care materials are used, and that calving records are complete and traceable for each animal to the last third of its gestation. In other words, the dam and date of birth on an organic farm.

Slaughter eligibility of the organic dairy herd falls into three categories. You will likely see one of the following listings added to your organic product verification this year:

- Dairy cattle for slaughter—some eligible
- Dairy cattle for slaughter—all eligible
- Dairy cattle for slaughter—none eligible

**Some eligible.** This applies to many dairy farms. Examples include established herds that still contain individuals from the original dairy herd transition, herds with purchased organic cattle that did not come with the ideal paperwork documenting dam and exact date of birth as well as health history records, or, operations that have used ivermectin, moxidectin, or fenbendazole on some individuals animals.

**All eligible.** This applies to operations where all animals are organic from the last third of gestation. Many closed herds meet this criteria. Additionally, records of the lifetime health history document that the slaughter stock requirements are met indicating that ivermectin, moxidectin, and fenbendazole are not used.

**None eligible.** An example is an operation that has recently completed the organic transition, or an operation that cannot provide documentation of health treatments over the lifetime of the animal.

If you would like to sell cull dairy animals for organic slaughter, you will need to provide your buyer with a copy

of your organic certificate and any other documentation that he or she may request. If you would like to buy dairy culls for organic beef, we recommend not only requesting the organic certificate but also documentation of the animal's organic status from the last third of gestation (dam and date of birth) and health records.

### Relevant sections of the Rule

#### §205.236 Origin of livestock.

(a) Livestock products that are to be sold, labeled, or represented as organic must be from livestock under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation.

(b)(2) Breeder or dairy stock that has not been under continuous organic management since the last third of gestation may not be sold, labeled, or represented as organic slaughter stock.

c) The producer of an organic livestock operation must maintain records sufficient to preserve the identity of all organically managed animals and edible and nonedible animal products produced on the operation.

#### §205.603 Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production.

(a)(17) Parasiticides—Prohibited in slaughter stock, allowed in emergency treatment for dairy and breeder stock when organic system plan-approved preventive management does not prevent infestation. Milk or milk products from a treated animal cannot be labeled as provided for in subpart D of this part for 90 days following treatment. In breeder stock, treatment cannot occur during the last third of gestation if the progeny will be sold as organic and must not be used during the lactation period for breeding stock.

- (i) Fenbendazole (CAS #43210-67-9)—only for use by or on the lawful written order of a licensed veterinarian.
- (ii) Ivermectin (CAS #70288-86-7).
- (iii) Moxidectin (CAS #113507-06-5)—for control of internal parasites only.

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The other issue within this country is organic deception. That's a particularly big concern for us and for a lot of small- to medium-sized farmers. I can't tell you how many dairy farmers talk to me about how carefully they protect the brand every step of the way. Yet [we] see big dairies where questions are raised about whether or not the cows ever get to see a blade of grass. So, when it comes to enforcement and upholding strong standards, we're arguing the same thing at the USDA: that there aren't enough inspectors, that they're not cracking down hard enough. Last year, we know how many complaints and investigations there were, and we also know that not enough of them were reviewed and not enough penalties were assessed. You cannot protect the brand if you don't enforce it, and you can't ask people to work as hard as they do as organic farmers if you're not protecting that brand.... You can't count on consumers to trust a product forever if they start to get worried they're paying for something that isn't true!

The last piece that I'll mention is that... we're fighting for the Organic Livestock Rule (the Organic Animal Welfare Rule). The Organic Livestock [and Poultry Practices] Rule is something we've needed for a long time: to have it clarified in law that an organic chicken has to see daylight—it has to scratch on the ground. An organic cow has to eat grass and lead a life on pasture. You can't mess with these standards and you can't try to claim something as organic when it isn't!

...We need to have more people fighting back...and more consumers keeping an eye on all this, which I know everybody here does. And I just want to say how much I appreciate coming from the state of Maine, where people care deeply about these things. Where they understand the rural economy. Where, however much money they have in their pockets, they do everything they can to buy locally, and to buy [products that are] organically or sustainably grown... Thank you so much for being here, and for taking the time to listen, and I'll look forward to working with you on this, and so many other issues, as we keep up the fight.

