



# LSP Myth Buster<sup>#9</sup>

An ongoing Land Stewardship Project series on ag myths & ways of deflating them.

Updated: July 2005

**Myth:** *All certified organic milk comes from cows that spend most of the year grazing on pastures.*

**Fact:**

One of the nation's leading organic dairy companies, Horizon Organic, owns a large-scale certified organic confinement operation in Idaho that houses several

thousand cows in one location. Aurora Organic Dairy milks more than 5,000 cows at one confinement operation in Colorado.

Dairies like this are taking advantage of a gaping loophole in organic rules that require access to pasture except under particular circumstances, such as when cows are ill or in a "stage of production" such as birthing. It's the "stage of production" phrase that has blown the hinges off the barn door for factory organic dairies. Some of these operations have interpreted the exemption to include lactating cows—that's the stage when bovines are producing milk. The milk can still be certified organic since the feed the cows are receiving is made from organic crops. But such operations are plagued with some of the same problems that afflict their "conventional" factory farm counterparts—particularly the accumulation of large amounts of manure that must be disposed of. Some organic dairy cooperatives require milk to come from cows that have free access to pasture. In addition, an increasing number of individual grazing operations are processing and marketing their products straight to consumers.

In February 2005, the Cornucopia Institute filed two formal complaints with the USDA's office of Compliance asking it to investigate whether it is legal to confine cows without access to pasture and still label dairy products organic. In March 2005, the National

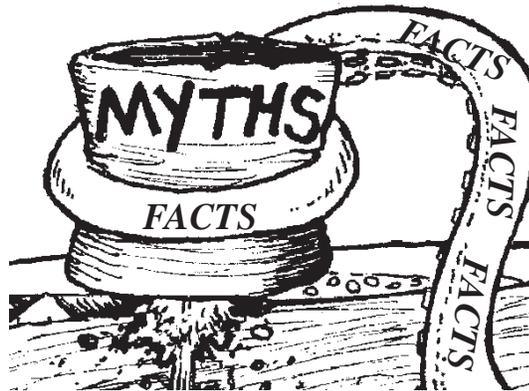
Organic Standards Board recommended that the USDA tighten existing rules related to pasture. The recommendations apply to all organic livestock, including chickens and pigs. Dairy cows specifically would be required to graze on pasture at least 120 days a year. The rules must be approved by the USDA and would not take effect for several years. That means the fight to make sure the recommendations are adopted by

USDA—as well as enforced by the agency—has just begun.

## More Information

◆ For details on the Cornucopia Institute's "Organic Integrity Project," including photos of a certified organic factory dairy farm in Idaho, visit [www.cornucopia.org](http://www.cornucopia.org). The Institute's phone number is 608-625-2042.

◆ The National Organic Standards Board website is at [www.ams.usda.gov/nosb](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nosb).



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*This Myth Buster is brought to you by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland and to seeing more successful farmers on the land raising crops and livestock. For more information, call 651-653-0618 or visit [www.landstewardshipproject.org](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org).*