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Abstract Submission for Original Research Poster:

Characteristics of Organic Dairy Farmers, Farm Families, and Milk Production

This study examines the demographics and production characteristics of organic dairy farmers in New England within the environmental, economic, and social sustainability structure. To date there are no other studies that provide this information, therefore this gap in the literature leaves policymakers, educators, lenders, suppliers without a profile of this sector that accounts for 23% of dairy farms in New England. The study was conducted by researchers at the University of Vermont Community Development and Applied Economics Department through a longitudinal survey of 89 organic farmers in Vermont and Maine from 2005-2013. The survey tool included 63 detailed questions linked with economic analysis on about individual and family characteristics, production practices, attitudes, concerns, and future intentions.

The preliminary results show that the average New England organic dairy farmer is 49 years old, transitioned from conventional production, and more likely to be college educated. The farmers report that their herds are 63% Holsteins, average farms size is 240 acres, and 47% have no off farm employment. No correlation was found between grazing practices and profitability. More than 90% are satisfied with their decision to switch to organic with economics as the primary reason for moving to organic. Nearly 75% of the farmers believe they would not be in business today if they had not transitioned to organic. Full analysis will identify differences between organic and conventional dairy farmers.

The final results will indicate key characteristics of organic and difference with conventional dairy farmers that will aid policy makers, lenders, and service providers to develop policies and practices that will enhance organic dairy farming, making it a stronger element and contributor toward more sustainable New England rural communities