

Rise of the Un-Corporation

You probably know Organic Valley Family of Farms as a trusted source of organic foods, but did you know the cooperative behind the Organic Valley brand has grown to be a family of over 1,100 like-minded farm families across America, offering milk, cheese, butter, eggs, juices, meats, produce and soy beverages?

Organic and farmer-owned since 1988, Organic Valley's decisions are based on the health and welfare of people, animals and the earth. In today's world, companies need to think differently, large corporations control business including government, global energy, agriculture and the global food supply. Organic Valley serves small farmers and the rural community health by combining two alternative business models — the family farm and the cooperative. The cooperative was formed to nurture local communities by keeping farmers on the land, farming. Organic Valley's voice of over 1,100 farmers represents approximately 10% of all certified the organic farming community in America.

Organic Valley credits their success to the partnerships society created between farmers, employees and citizens. As more farmers join the cooperative, they continually work to balance supply with consumer demand and labor needed to support their marketing operations. To enhance their sustainability, they have adopted a profit sharing model that recognizes the contributions of all: 45% profits to farmers, 45% profits to employees and 10% profits to community.

According to Travis Forgues, an Organic Valley Vermont farm-owner, "Organic Valley was founded by farmers, is owned by its farmers and is driven by a mission to save family farms, as well as to give future generations an opportunity to farm."

Kore Yoder, owner of Bev-R-Lane Farms in Lewisburg, PA (Union Co.) is a 13th generation farmer. In 1995, after taking over the farming operation from his parents, Noah and Amanda, Kore was tired of receiving low and unstable pay prices in return for the hard work of milking cows day and night. At that point Kore decided to sell the herd and focus on the crop production at the farm.

"By 2000, the organic market had grown to the point that we felt confident the demand was there, and we had heard about Organic Valley, an organic farmers' cooperative based in Wisconsin that was expanding its membership here in the East. We decided to go organic, revive the dairy farm, and join the coop. For me, transitioning the crops was a 'no-brainer'. I had been cultivating soybeans and corn and



hadn't used chemicals for years. It was raising cattle organically without antibiotics that I had my doubts about, as we made the decision to purchase cows that were in transition," said Kore.

"Farming the way we are, I have more time for my family. It's true we have more work, but I feel we are raising the children in an environment that's friendlier and safer. Without a doubt, we have a better quality of life," Kore states.

Organic Valley's base of loyal customers allows them to continue bringing more farm families into the cooperative, along with the land, water and animals they protect.

"Consumer demand for organic food continues to grow rapidly," says Jamie Johnson, Organic Valley's community relations manager. "Educational efforts have been successful at raising consumer awareness about organic and the benefits of eating organic food."

The same farmers who produce for Organic Valley also produce a full range of delicious organic meat under the Organic Prairie Family of Farms label. For further information, call 1-888-444-MILK or visit www.organicvalley.coop, www.organicprairie.com and the cooperative's farmers' website, www.farmers.coop. ■

Pictured left, Organic Valley sponsors PASA's Farming for the Future Conference. Peter Miller (seated) is their Northeast Dairy Pool Coordinator and works directly with regional farmers.