

## Humble Beginnings, Exciting Growth, Promising Future

**H**ere's the quick version of Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO)...in 1996 a few farmers got together (all PASA members incidentally) around a kitchen table and agreed that Pennsylvania, with its rich heritage of organic farming, needed its own organic certification agency. Right then and there they dreamed up the mission and purpose of PCO, which just celebrated its 10th anniversary this year.

PCO started with 20 farmers, no dairies, and 1 part-time employee. PCO now certifies 400 operations (including 200 dairy farms), employs 12 staff and 15 inspectors.

Beyond their growing dairy market, other operations include such commodities as mushrooms, poultry, beef, maple products, pretzels & snacks, feed processing, and even coffee roasting. PCO also represents Pennsylvania organic producers at state, national and international organic policy-making opportunities. "We want to make sure organic regulations remain strict and sensible" stated PCO Executive Director Leslie Zuck.



*The staff at Pennsylvania Certified Organic is available to answer your questions and concerns about becoming a certified organic producer or business.*

PCO staff and board are pleased with the role they've played in the increased interest in organic foods and farming. "Pennsylvania ranks in the U.S. top 10 for organic mushrooms, dairy, poultry and overall organic production," added Zuck. "We work diligently to offer quality certification services to this growing market."

"Concentrating on the needs of new people coming into certification is key," stated Zuck. "In response to requests from the many new farmers and processors interested in organic certification, we have created the 'Organic Transition Team.' These certification specialists work with new applicants directly, from the first time they call until, and even after, they achieve certification. In some cases our organic transition specialists visit the operation to assist in the comprehension of what is required during the certification process. We feel that this level of personal care is necessary to reduce the steepness of the learning curve."

An example of this PCO approach is a company new to their certification roster — Land O' Lakes Purina Feed, who is about to launch an organic line of livestock feed. Ingredient Merchant Scott Davenport acknowledged, "PCO has been great throughout this whole process, very professional. This is our first venture into organics, and it has been a real *adventure!* Learning all the rules and regs in organic livestock feed production has been extremely complex, but the professional staff at PCO has lent our company tremendous guidance in the process."

Mike and Terra Brownback at Spiral Path Farm, who have a 1,000 member CSA, sell through a farmers market, and wholesale, give a similar glowing testimonial. "We decided early on that organic agriculture was what we would do. Our love of PCO begins with the mission statement 'assuring the integrity of organic agricultural products.' We think that says a lot...and says a lot about us!"

Leslie Zuck concluded, "PCO is grateful for PASA educational opportunities and we're happy to support the field day program and annual *Farming for the Future* Conference."

There you have it folks, a simple story with powerful longevity. ■



**USDA Organic Certification  
for Pennsylvania's Producers**

**Our Organic Transition Team will help  
you navigate the certification process.**

*Contact us for a free info pack or to connect with  
our weekly organic marketplace newsletter.*



**ASSURING the INTEGRITY of ORGANIC PRODUCTS**

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