



FARMERS CREAMERY

Monthly Newsletter | March 2019

GENERAL NEWS

Quarter 1 Producer Meeting | April 23rd

Please mark your calendars for our quarter 1 producer meeting on April 3, 2019.

Location: Kalona Creamery (upstairs meeting space)

Time: 10 am to 1:30 pm

Lunch: To be provided

Parking: Available on the north side of the building.

Meeting Topics: General updates, industry news, Kalona[®] SuperNatural[™] market updates.

Guest Speaker: Mark Seeley (Organic Certification Inspector) - Organic dairy certifications and updates.



Marketing Update From the Kalona Organics Team

In 2018, we started a brand advocate influencer program to increase Kalona SuperNatural brand awareness. This year, we have 15 natural food influencers who write, share photos, and educate other consumers about our products. They all have large followings, or communities, on their websites and social media accounts.

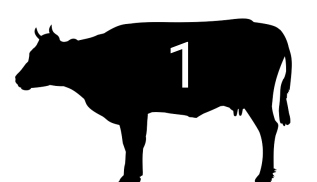
Over the past year, we've seen a 19% increase in our website traffic and a 5% increase across our social media accounts (Facebook & Instagram). Educating consumers is a key initiative for the Kalona Organics team, this program is one more way we can reach our target market.

(Pictured to right: A post from a healthy food blogger that reached over 40,000 people.)



COMMODITY PRICES

Grower FOB Farm Gate Organic Grain				
Commodity	Price Range	Average	Change	Prior Year
Yellow Corn	8.85 - 9.50	9.19	0.10	9.42
Soybeans	18.00 - 18.40	18.06	N/A	N/A
Grower Delivered Elevator/Warehouse Organic				
Commodity	Price Range	Average	Change	Prior Year
Yellow Corn	9.00 - 10.25	9.54	-0.47	9.41
Soybeans	18.50 - 19.00	18.92	0.41	18.33





INDUSTRY NEWS

How do you prevent mud issues?

Story Courtesy of Philip Witmer / Certified Organic Dairy Farmer near Dayton, Virginia / Article from Graze Magazine

This spring, our plan to avoid mucking up the place remains a work in progress. The current plan is to use two pastures that were sacrificed this winter for the marginal days, and to keep the cows indoors on the bedded pack and supplement feed when it is just too soft for them to go out.

Normally in the winter months we rotate cows on six pastures close to the dairy so they can get outside when the weather permits. Four of these pastures have had water standing in them since last spring, so we just haven't been able to use them this winter. While the polar vortex allowed the cows to graze this newly created marshland, in Virginia the ground doesn't stay frozen very long. So these pastures are likely out of the picture until summer dries them out.



Getting a Good Start

Our plan for the spring is to get out and set the rotation, not to mess it up for the rest of the season. Given how wet we have been, this coming spring looks to be a challenge. Not wanting to mess things up for the rest of the season. We usually begin spring grazing in fits and starts. Once we start rotating, if it gets the same thing for the heifers, as we always have a pad available for feeding hay in wet weather.

When spring green-up does come and the ground is sufficiently firm to start rotating pastures, we have a good walkway system to get them to the higher and drier ground. Thirteen years ago we put in improved walkways. To that point we had tried to harness the indestructible nature of Kentucky-31 tall fescue by making walkways 50 feet wide to spread the impact. However, hoof traffic four times per day in all kinds of weather destroys even the toughest sod, and soon we had a system of 50-foot wide ditches and cow paths.

Our farm is just a few miles from a good source of soft shale. Walkways are 16 feet wide, with a 12-inch deep base of shale. Basically a mixture of clay and stone, it knits together tightly once packed and forms a very durable walkway. The key is to allow it a few months to settle prior to severe wet weather use. Once knitted, it is second only to concrete in terms of durability. We use the same material for wintertime outdoor feeding pads.

Water breaks were placed on the hills, and culvert pipes in the swales. Most walkways have a side slope due to our hilly land, and we allow that natural slope to carry the water off the side instead of down the walkway. The shale is so hard that we can't cut and grade the lanes to maintain a crown or slope, but we can add topping material. Heavy rains will wash the fines from the surface and leave the walkways with rougher subsurface stone. We use sand for bedding our loose-housing barn, and we haul out the cleanings to use as a walkway topper. We've found this goes a long way in avoiding bruised feet.

Multiple Paddock Gates

The shale walkways have trunk lines that go out to the paddocks, and then branch lines that go two-thirds of the way alongside each field. The fencing along the branch lines is polywire with a gate handle at each post, which are spaced at 40-foot intervals. This allows us to start grazing at the far end of the paddock and move back toward the barn. In this way, we alternate where the cows enter and exit after each break, and thus minimize the damage at the gate.

Before we renovated our walkways we had one gate at the corner of the paddock closest to the barn. Pasture productivity was reduced significantly near the gate and in the high-traffic areas across the paddock. Cows were using the pasture as a walkway to and from the dairy, and the compaction had a noticeable effect.

The evidence was stark when viewing satellite maps. Google Earth still shows small circles around watering troughs, but otherwise the hoof traffic is much more dispersed. We have shale aprons at the bases of the waterers, and there are two or three of these per paddock to minimize travel distance.

All told, we have about two and a half miles of walkways on our 180-cow dairy grazing platform, and I am very grateful for them, especially after last year. We had a lot of challenges grazing on saturated soils, but getting cows to and from pasture was never an issue.

Last year we successfully used the walkways as stand-off areas for our dry stock during the wettest times. We would put the heifers in to graze, and when they finished and started roaming we would fence off a piece of the walkway for them to wait on until we were ready to give them the next break. They didn't appreciate that, but it sure helped our pastures. When a torrential rain can we could pull them off for a half-day to give the soil time to drain. We don't use this tactic with the lactating herd, as they will generally graze and then lay down instead of roaming like the heifers.

