



WESTERN ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS ALLIANCE

A Re-cap of the 2023 WODPA Conference & Trade Show

The annual WODPA Conference & Trade Show kicked off this year in the historic town of Ferndale, California. Ferndale is a quaint Victorian village and the northern gateway to California's Lost Coast. Attendees enjoyed drives through the coastal redwood forest and a couple breaths of fresh air on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. The real treat, however, was the beautiful venue we hosted the conference at this year – The Barn By Fernbridge.

Monday evening, we kicked things off with a highly attended reception at the Bear River Casino. We feasted on delicious, donated cheeses from various organic vendors, enjoyed cocktails and coffee with new and old friends and a very short program covering the following day's plan of events. The reception was supposed to only be an hour and a half but lasted well over 2 hours due to the enjoyment of the evening!

Tuesday was the formalized start to the conference with a welcome by Zach Cahill (WODPA President) and Stewart Kircher (WODPA 1st Vice President) at 8:30am followed by the WODPA Business meeting. Executive Director, Lia Sieler, provided a full recap of the year and all that WODPA has been working on including the increased benefits to farmers and stakeholders, allocated funds we have advocated for, trips to Washington D.C., Lunchtime Learning opportunities made available for all WODPA members, and reminders of new NOP rules coming into effect in the upcoming year as well as many other important details of the year. One exciting point we don't want to fail to mention is the announcement of our new logo which can be found at the top of this letter as well as on our website! After Lia finished her presentation, we opened the conversation for ideas on how WODPA can better represent our industry. Some great ideas were thrown out and we are excited to see where the year takes us!

Zach Cahill wrapped up the WODPA business meeting with elections. Dean Wesen and Darby Heffner were re-elected as Treasurer and Secretary respectively. In addition, we voted on a couple of new at large representatives. Their information and bios can be found on the WODPA website at wodpa.com. From there, we had a chance to hear a quick introduction from each of our 26 tradeshow vendors before opening the Trade Show for the first time during our coffee break sponsored by American AgCredit.

We re-convened for our organic certifier panel with representatives from Organic Certifiers, Oregon Tilth and Where Food Comes From. We gained some in depth perspectives from these certifier representatives on questions pertaining to the implementation of SOE, explanations on on-farm inspections being increasingly more detailed and the material approval

processes as well as many other areas of interest. These certifiers provided their contact information for people to follow up with any comments, questions or concerns they may have. We moved on from there to learn about effective calf raising from Dr. Luke and Ulises – both from Alltech. Once they were finished with their presentation, we enjoyed a delicious lunch sponsored by AL Gilbert & Lockwood Seed. We got to indulge in ice cream for dessert from Jersey Scoop before moving on to the afternoon agenda.

We had the privilege of hearing from 5 current organic producers including Andrew Dykstra, Colton Brodt, Chris Eggert, Tony Schilter, and Monty Schilter giving us all some tips and tricks for surviving the industry and constantly working to improve our operations. That concluded the formalized portion of the day, so we jumped on a tour bus to explore a few local dairies. We were graciously invited to tour Cahill Dairy where we saw a few successful improvements including an AMMP grant Barn and new parlor. From there, we ventured over to the Brodt Dairy where we were greeted by a couple adorable kiddos handing out homemade cookies and got the chance to view some newly installed milking robots. The Brodt Family provided tours of the facilities and an in-depth description of the robotic system they use. We concluded our farm tours with Ghidinelli Dairy, where we gazed at some beautiful white Holsteins and ventured over to the newly refurbished calf barn where animals are raised in group housing and given free choice food and water. As the sun set, we took the bus back to the Barn By Fernbridge where the environment was transformed into an intimate happy hour sponsored by Hunt & Behrens. At the same time, our trade show vendors were busy chit-chatting the night away with potential new customers. We also had many community members and stakeholders join us for dinner and a live auction to benefit both WODPA and the Chico State Dairy Science Club. It was an incredible dinner including prime rib, fresh salad and delightful cheesecake. It was a late night full of laughs, support and lots of fun!

Wednesday started with a full breakfast sponsored by American AgCredit along with a presentation by Ben Laine from American AgCredit on a global perspective of the industry. Ryan Koory from Mercaris/ Argus Media covered an update on the organic milk statement survey work WODPA has been working on this past year as well as a commodity recap and outlook for 2024. One of our long-time sponsors – Zoetis – was represented by Mat Schager who gave a talk on what we know about genomic testing and why health traits are important. Zoetis also sponsored the coffee break where we got to chat with fellow attendees and get some last-minute time in the Trade Show.

Finally, we rounded out the conference with a full training session on Calf disbudding including a live demonstration and hands-on practice on a handful of calves from a local dairy. We invited local organic dairy employees to come learn proper techniques and try it out on some live animals. This was made possible by offering the training in both English and Spanish. Alltech was the generous sponsor and presenter of this training, hands-on demonstration, and lunch. Those in attendance receive a certificate from trainers Dr. Luke and Uli.

All in all, this was an incredible conference with an overarching feeling of optimism and excitement for what is to come in the organic dairy industry. WODPA would like to send a big thank you to Stakeholder Members, Sponsors and Vendors. Without their support, it would be very difficult to continue effectively advocating for our industry. We would also like to thank the organic dairy farmers who work day in and day out. We know how difficult this season of dairying has been and we admire those that have continued to fight and remain in business – supplying safe, quality milk to our world all while maintaining the integrity of the organic seal.

We can't wait to see everyone again next year!