

Filing: Organic dairy broke rules

Aurora defends grazing, feed practices at its Dublin farm

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By PAULA LAVIGNE / The Dallas Morning News

An activist group has complained to a federal agency that a dairy farm west of Dallas that supplies one of the nation's largest organic milk companies is violating organic standards.

Aurora Organic Dairy in Dublin was named in a complaint filed Thursday with the U.S. Department of Agriculture on behalf of the Cornucopia Institute, an advocacy group for family farms.

The group alleges that the dairy isn't giving its 4,400 cattle enough time or room to graze and that it bought feed from a questionable supplier.

Aurora officials said neither allegation is true and that their Dublin farm meets all USDA requirements.

Aurora Organic Dairy is headquartered in Boulder, Colo., and provides milk to retailers who sell it under their private labels. One is Safeway's O Organics milk, which is available locally at Tom Thumb stores.

Organic milk is supposed to come from cows that are eating organic feed and grazing on organic pasture, both of which must be approved through the USDA organic program.

The institute's complaint asks the USDA to investigate whether Aurora fed its cows silage and corn from a local farmer who sprayed his fields with banned chemical weed and bug killers.

The complaint states that the allegations are based on interviews with people who knew or worked with the farmer.

Aurora spokesman Clark Driftmier said the farmer provided feed for some nonorganic cattle that the dairy sold in September, not long after starting its organic operation.

The farmer now provides organic feed to Aurora's organic cattle and has USDA organic approval. He's denied wrongdoing.

Cornucopia co-founder Mark Kastel also criticized the Texas farm for having only "token pasture" where it would be impossible to circulate the cattle in any "meaningful way" during grazing.

Organic rules say cows must have access to pasture but don't specify how long they must graze or how much of their diet must come from pasture. The industry is waiting for the USDA to make the rules more precise.

In the meantime, Aurora officials say they're adding more pasture to the 2,410 acres already at the Texas farm.

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LARA SOLT/DMN
A complaint filed with the USDA say cows at this dairy farm in Dublin may have been fed nonorganic feed.

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