

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What farm commodities do you market?

A. MOPC is focused primarily on organic grassfed beef right now, but will also be marketing lamb, goats, pork, and bison as we line up enough animals in these other categories to be attractive to buyers. As we grow, we will likely be adding organic grain marketing to our list of services to our member producers. We have a great communication and information exchange network already in place, and want to work toward providing data back to producers on their output so they can better manage their operations and continually improve their products.

Q. Where does MOPC operate geographically?

A. Based in Montana, MOPC is best suited to meet the needs of agricultural producers in the northern plains and Rocky Mountain states, specifically Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska.

Q. Do you market under a Brand Name?

A. Many co-ops develop their own branded product line and market under their own brand name. At least for now, MOPC is NOT developing a branded product (which is very costly with a high level of financial risk) and is selling strictly value-added live animals; the added value being certified organic and grass fed.

Q. How do your pay prices compare with other co-ops?

A. Many co-ops are structured to pay lower farm-gate prices retaining some capital for needed research, marketing, sales, processing, warehousing, etc. with hopes of building profits to return to the farmer down the road. Our steering committee opted for a co-op that concentrated on selling raw materials and live animals, eliminating much of the need for additional capital investments, which generally results in higher pay prices for the producer, but lower (if any) profits to return later.

Q. How do you determine what pay prices should be?

A. We're working with other co-ops through our membership in OFARM and with other groups to develop good cost-of-production (COP) models upon which to base our target prices. We believe that pricing based on COP plus a fair return can revitalize rural America and the small family farms and rural businesses which are the backbone of this country. Our pricing should reflect fair trade policies promoted in trade with other countries here at home as well. U.S. farmers are as much entitled to a living wage as farmers in third-world countries.

Q. What kind of premium over commodity does organic bring?

A. The systems used to grow organic livestock, especially grassfed beef and lamb, bear no resemblance to commodity grain-finished systems, the prices of which are based largely on the price of commodity corn. COP plus a fair return is the model most other businesses in a free society use to determine their sale price, and the one we wish to emulate. It has little or nothing to do with commodity beef pricing. Besides, certified organic grassfed meats more closely fit the profile of specialty, seasonal products than they do to year-around commodity meats.

Q. Do I need to commit all of my crop to become a member?

A. Many co-ops require 100% of your production be sold through the co-op. MOPC's steering committee opted to not make any volume requirements of any kind. However, we do require that if a producer makes a commitment, he fulfills it. He can always change his mind and sell MORE through the co-op, but if he commits to a certain number of animals, he'll be legally required to sell at least that many through the co-op. We need this commitment so that each year we have a base number with which we can negotiate prices. Our aim is to help farmers manage their operations in whatever way works best for them. Our hope is always to do a good enough job for our members that they'll choose to sell most, if

not all of their production through the co-op.

Q. What does it mean to be a "qualifying organic producer of agricultural products"?

A. To be accepted as a voting member of MOPC, five criteria must be met: 1) your farm/ranch must be in a geographic area we're capable of serving; 2) you must be currently certified organic by an authorized certifying agency; 3) you must be actively engaged in growing/raising certified organic crops and/or livestock; 4) you must be sponsored by an existing member of MOPC, or allow a farm audit by a MOPC representative; 5) your application must be approved by the MOPC Board.