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## PRESS STATEMENT

# Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative responds to free-range

Following the recent announcement of a UK retailer stocking 'free-range' milk, from cows that have been kept outside for at least six months of the year, the Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative (OMSCo), which represents 65% of the UK's organic milk pool, is keen to raise awareness of the fact that consumers have always had an 'active choice' when it comes to supporting a pasture-based farming systems and buying 'free-range' milk.

"Organic dairy farms in the UK have to meet strict independent legally binding production standards and are audited annually in-line with a range of regulatory criteria enforced by organic certification bodies," says Nicholas Saphir, OMSCo executive chairman.

"These standards state that organic cows must by law, spend as much time outside on pasture as conditions allow and that they must be fed a grass rich diet. In practical terms, this means organic cows are typically grazing for 215 days based on our latest independently conducted study. Therefore, 'free-range' milk has been readily available to the consumer in the form of organic for over twenty years," says Nicholas.

He adds that among other environmental, animal welfare and biodiversity requirements, organic milk offers additional benefits for consumers. "Organic cows are fed a diet free from artificial fertilisers, chemicals and genetically modified ingredients, and the routine use of antibiotics in the organic system is banned."

Organic milk in Asda is priced below this new product despite also providing several health benefits as supported by a growing body of scientific research, including the most recent study published in February 2016 in the British Journal of Nutrition. This research shows organic dairy (milk, butter, cream, cheese and yoghurt) contains around 50% more beneficial omega-3 fatty acids than non-organic.

"While we welcome pasture-based innovation; to consider the development of these 'free-range' principles as providing the consumer with a new choice would be incorrect," explains Nicholas. "We're encouraging consumers to recognise that organic farmers already exceed the 180-day minimum set out in this new "free-range" milk product as well as providing all the other benefits associated with organic production, at a lower price to consumers."



Finn Cottle, Soil Association, trade development consultant adds: “Organic milk is widely available across major supermarkets and independent stores and it’s the single biggest selling organic product accounting for over 10% of total sales of organic. It is also one of the highest penetration categories for organic sales.

“It answers consumer needs on so many levels, not only does it come from cows which are grazing outdoors when possible, but the milk comes from a fully certified system which is audited and inspected on an annual basis.”