

Richard Larson
69 South Street
Wells, Vermont 05774

April 14, 2014

Agricultural Committee
Vermont House of Representatives

RE: S70

1. Over-view:

The states with strong commodity dairy interests, like Vermont, are the states which in which raw milk sales are most seriously limited. Per capita consumption of fluid milk in the US had declined 25% since 1975, yet as the Rural Vermont Milk Report shows, there is rising consumer demand for unprocessed of “raw” milk. I think it is for this reason that the commodity dairy industry fears the growing raw milk movement. I urge you to listen to the growing number of Vermonters who want easy access to fresh unprocessed fluid milk. Remember, for consumers to have access to raw milk, we need the ability to deliver it to them.

2. Introduction

- a. I have been a Commercial Dairy Farmer for 40 years, winning various production and quality awards
- b. Raised 8 children on raw milk and homemade yogurt: one graduated with honors from Harvard Law School, one MS social work, one in medical school, three given full 1-year scholarships at Oxford, England. Raw milk didn't hurt them!
- c. I currently milk 40 Jersey cows, ship to a local cheese maker, sell as much raw milk and grass-fed beef as I can from the farm store.
- d. Our raw milk customers include a broad spectrum of socio-economic levels, including a significant number of health care professionals (a dentist, a psychologist, and two chiropractors) who purchase for themselves and recommend our milk to their patients.

3. Discuss Farm Viability results: Currently working with the Ag Viability Program studying ways to improve farm finances. (Thank you for that program)

- a. With the assistance of two financial advisors, we analyzed a number of potential market plans and product mixes.
- b. With our current herd size, if we marketed the maximum 50 quarts per day as a Tier I farm, and sold the rest to the cheese maker, the farm would net \$27,000/year. If we were able to market the maximum 40 gallons/day as a Tier II producer, and sell the remainder to the cheese maker, the farm would net \$58,000.
- c. This difference is of \$31,000 is attributed to the ability to sell only 27 gallons per day more as unprocessed ‘raw’ fluid milk.

- d. **This Farm Viability Study clearly demonstrates the importance of raw milk sales to the financial viability of small Vermont dairy farms.**
4. **Important Changes to S70 to improve consumer access to healthy unprocessed milk:**
 - a. **Remove the limit on sales volume.** Once a farm meets the milk safety standards (herd testing and bacteriological testing), there is no logical reason to limit sales. It is patently obvious that the limits are designed by the Agency of Agriculture to keep raw milk producers from being profitable.
 - b. **Remove the limits of venue of sales.** One wouldn't think of telling Thomas Dairy or Mountain View Dairy where they may or may not sell their product, or how they may market it. We should be treated the same. Let each raw milk farmer decide which market or markets make economic sense based on their region and personal style, be it farmers' markets, drop off points, retail stores, or individual sales.
 - c. **Cost-effective and reasonable Bacteriological Tests.** I am at threshold for 'Tier II'. However, the requirement for me to hand-deliver bi-weekly samples to Burlington is an excessive, onerous and unnecessary rule established by the Agency. This makes it totally unrealistic for anyone in more remote parts of the state to comply. It would be a 5-hour round trip for me, costing \$160+/- in labor and vehicle expense, or \$320/month, or almost \$11/day. I sell milk @ \$6/gallon, because mine is not an affluent part of the state. My production costs are \$2.75/gallon, meaning my 'profit' per gallon is \$3.25. So the first four gallons per day pay for testing costs alone. I currently ship milk samples via mail or my local milk hauler to Dairy One for under \$10. **Please forcefully require the Agency to adopt less costly protocols for any required bacteriological testing.**
 - d. **Cost-effective and reasonable Herd Health Tests.** I milk 40 cows, yet sell about 7 gallons of unprocessed milk per day, or milk from 2 cows. The current brucellosis and TB testing requirement that I test the entire herd annually is unnecessarily burdensome. **Please forcefully require the Agency to adopt less costly protocols for any required animal health testing.** For example, initial herd testing, followed by use of the Ring Test of the bulk tank sample, is adequate. Closed herds should require testing only every three years, as is the case in New Hampshire. In fact, the State of Vermont used to do regular TB and brucellosis testing of commercial dairy herds. Why did they stop? Because there is no brucellosis in Vermont. The Vermont Health Department stopped reporting brucellosis (undulant fever) in 1998 because it had been so long since there had been a case. Vermont is officially a 'brucellosis-free' state. Why do we have to test for it?
5. Important word changes to S70:
 - a. Change 'licensed' back to 'registered'. This is an important context. I did not get a license to home school my children. I registered with the state to inform them what I was doing, but did not need to get a license.
 - b. "Refrigeration unit" needs to be removed. Simply state that it must be kept below 40 degrees. The existing wording will be interpreted by authorities to require an

expensive electric refrigerator, while inexpensive Styrofoam coolers and ice packs work very well.

- c. Remove the paperwork requirement that we inform the Agency of every sale date and location.

Thank you for the time and thought you give to this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Rich Larson