

4/15/14

Good afternoon,

My name is Tamara Martin. My husband and I are co-owners and managers of Chandler Pond Farm in S. Wheelock, VT in the Northeast Kingdom. We are a diversified farm of 200 acres. We grow 5 acres of vegetable and berries, process 1000 pastured chickens a year, as well as pastured pork, grass-fed beef eggs, maple syrup, hay and lastly raw milk. This diverse model works for us as we direct market all of our products and are able to provide a wide variety of nutritious food for local community while keeping the family tradition of farming going strong. It also allows us not have all our income in one basket and lets our enterprises complement each other, For example our waste vegetables and milk go the pigs, manure from the animals is composted for the vegetables etc. It's a very connected system.

My husband is the fifth continuous generation in his family making a living farming in Vermont. He also teaches biology part time at Lyndon State College. His uncle still operates a commercial dairy on the family farm where he spent every summer. There is a blue milk pitcher in the fridge that has been there for many many years. Our family has had a similar pitcher in our fridge for the last ten years feeding us and our three children 8, 7 and 5 fresh milk since we began our family and started farming.

I am here today to talk specifically about raw milk and S. 70

We currently market our products through several avenues. All of it local. We have a 45 member CSA, a farmstand on the farm and attend two farmers markets. The raw milk of course is currently only sold at the farm. We are a micro dairy. We milk 2 to 4 heritage breed cows, American Milking Devons whom don't produce a large volume of milk but it is incredibly high quality. Milking Devons are known for their higher protein content as well as higher CLA's and Omega- 3s. Buying a product like that, pure Devon milk, anywhere but directly from the farm is virtually impossible in Vermont. We don't sell a large amount of milk, largely because of the location of our farm. Even if we were able to meet reasonable guidelines to sell at drop off points or market our dairy herd would never grow as large as many in Vermont. We chose this path of a micro dairy for various reasons. As a milk producer it allows us to produce a high quality milk, we are able to take care of cows and our milking systems to the degree of cleanliness and sanitation that we feel best about, we have been interested in shipping milk for health and economic reasons.

Fresh milk sales in Vermont feel particularly challenging. I have personally done plenty of research and reading about regulations in other states such as New Hampshire, Maine, as well as accompanying statistics. I understand desire for food safety but only when balanced by common sense and the idea that people have an inherent right to choose the food that is best for their family, whether we agree or not. We can choose raw milk or Diet Coke, understanding the risks, it's our choice

One has to realize that even before being farmer, I am a mother. I am not interested in feeding my children an unsafe product. But I also am not interested in fear, I like to understand the risks and benefits and how it fits into the scheme of daily life. It is easy to read one scary story and have a knee jerk reaction. When this happens to me I force levelheadedness to take over. There are risks in everything. Do I allow my children to eat poached eggs, can they jump on a trampoline or will I feed them raw milk from a source that I know to use the highest standards of sanitation and precaution, do I allow them to visit Grandma in the hospital during flu season? Should they touch the grocery cart when Norovirus is going around our small town? I can't fear everything. I make decisions based on facts and risks. With all that said, we drink raw milk from our farm and have from others that we trust when we aren't milking. I guess I felt the need to explain this to because I would never knowingly sell something I personally wouldn't drink or feed my children just for economic benefit.

So let's talk economics

It is hard to sell milk when your farm is just 6 miles out town. I can't imagine farms that are 20 miles out that have an excellent quality product and no customers.

In order to make your micro dairy profitable you have to be able to sell a certain volume, with a certain bottom line. This is a business and our expenses are real, as is our time. Both on the farm as well as for our families. If it's established that this product is safe, please, let us sell it and support our families by farming. If we're selling lots of it, then the regulations should be appropriate, if we are just selling a few quarts a day, then let's use our common sense in those regulations. Scale appropriate rules are ideal in risk and economics.

I get dozens of requests from customers every summer who know I have milk for sale at the farm, to sell it at market or even just bring it to town. I am constantly explaining to them that this is illegal. They're always disappointed and sometimes even frustrated. They want to drink fresh milk, for their own reasons, but can't afford the time and gas to come out to the farm every week.

Now I want to address really quickly what some of the realities of milk delivery to market or central drop off locations might look like at our farm. Feel free to ask questions, I'll do my best to answer. First off understand that we currently bring a truckload of vegetables, eggs as well as 2-3 coolers of frozen meat to two markets a week all summer. As well bi-monthly winter markets. Keeping products chilled and high quality is always a concern and the biggest effort of farmers markets for many reasons. Number 1 being that NO ONE wants to sell (or try to, rather) substandard product,

Bringing the meat in coolers frozen solid has always worked like a charm. The meat stays frozen even on the hottest days. We leave the lids on with a price list and open to let the customers choose their product then close them. No problems. Vegetables can be a difficult at times but we have found if they are prechilled prior to loading up for market with cold towels they do very well. Based on those experiences I could imagine several scenarios for transporting and keeping milk chilled. I am always amazed at farmer's ingenuity. For example the many different ways small micro dairies like ours have figured out how to chill milk in the time limit given to the right temps.

The initial ideas for us when thinking about transporting milk to market or central locations involve making sure the milk is adequately chilled ahead of time, plenty of ice packs and possibly an ice water bath with a small cooler of secondary ice packs to change out on particularly hot days. A min/max thermometer in our cooler etc. I urge you to allow drop off points and farmers sales and with a few COMMON SENSE guidelines and let us try at our hand at how we'll do it. I know that currently there is a law to allow delivery to homes. In allowing drop off points and market sales the last concern is what happens to the milk from the time it leaves the farmer to when it gets to the fridge. I tend to trust people to make good decisions. I know you or I would. At market currently I am constantly talking to people about keeping their product. Most customers for example, when purchasing meat but maybe lingering at the market for lunch, will leave their meat in my cooler until they are ready to head home, I don't tell them to do this, and they do it their selves because they are smart and can be trusted to figure out how to take care of their food. Others bring insulated bags or cooler in their cars with ice packs, the same goes actually for folks who buy milk at our farm. I don't see how drop off points or market really changes anything. At some point we have to assume when making laws that people are smart, just like we assume they wash their cutting boards after cutting meat and wash their hands.

Lastly, one of the things that gets me most frustrated about food rights is the poverty and justice side of this issue. We've passed a law that says folks can buy this product, it is safe enough for that, BUT they'll need to go to the farm, or live in the delivery area of the two farms delivering milk, AND be home when that delivery is supposed to come. Well what that says to me is, if you don't own a car and have the gas, money and time to drive 5 to 20 miles or more you don't actually have that right. It means this is a product available only to those who can afford it. It isn't the market price that is not allowing them to feed their selves in the best way they believe possible, it's the laws around the product, which by default have eliminated the families or persons who don't make enough money to get it.

I encourage you to pass S.70 with changes to make fresh milk available to all of those who choose. Many family and friends we know and love have been drinking raw milk for years have enjoyed it and benefitted safely. Some years it's been illegal I imagine, but the disconnect of what is legal to eat at any given time and what generations of Vermonters have been eating and continue to eat hopefully is closing as we close the culture gap and the legal gap with common sense regulations and allow ALL Vermonters access to the food of their choosing whether they live near a farm or not. I also encourage you consider the economics of the families choosing this livelihood when writing regulations about testing, vet visits, and more.

Thank You for your time,

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