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I am Dr. Jill Skochdopole. I currently own Rygate Small Animal Hospital in Ryegate, VT but spent the early part of my career in a mixed animal practice. I am also married to a farmer who currently raises dairy replacement heifers but who milked a 40 cow Jersey herd for 10 years.

As a veterinarian, I am both well-schooled in and deeply concerned about public health issues. Professionally I am very knowledgeable about potential health hazards associated with raw milk. That said, I am a consumer of raw milk. We have a family cow which we got to help keep our teenaged kids adequately supplied with milk. Our cow produces enough for us to sell some milk to friends. I am a firm supporter of all of the current regulations, which we follow. I also make sure anyone who is interested in buying milk from us is aware of the potential risks. Popular media regularly expounds the purported benefits but rarely do I see the risks clearly spelled out.

While my family and I consume raw milk and products made from it, we never drink raw milk from any other source. My husband spent 10 years following the cleanliness standards of state inspectors and the creamery that purchased his milk. We also know the health of our cow and the feed she is fed. We both know what can go wrong and how best to prevent this. I feel like I have the information to truly make an informed decision. I know the general public does not have the information and knowledge to make informed decisions.

I am extremely concerned about allowing milk to be transported to farmer's markets for customer pick up. These markets are mainly during the warmer months and being able to guarantee the milk stays below 40 degrees seems impossible; for example, the milk leaves the farm in a cooler at 7 am but is not picked up until 11 am on a 90 degree July day. Then we have consumers who are used to pasteurized milk which can get warm for brief times so they might leave it unprotected for some time on their way home. Most of those consumers don't realize that brief warming can allow tiny amounts of contaminating bacteria to multiply and then be problematic.

Lastly, I wanted to address my concerns about some of the changes to current law that Rural Vermont and other raw milk advocates are suggesting. The changes seem to stem from a desire to make it easier for small producers of raw milk to make a living. I applaud this. However, you are also responsible for the health and safety of the general public, most of whom are not knowledgeable about risks associated with raw milk. You are also responsible for promoting and preserving all agriculture in Vermont including all the dairy farms that make pasteurized milk and the creameries that make butter, cheese, yogurt and other value added milk products. The "Made in Vermont" label is equated in the consumer's mind with wholesome, healthy, and safe. One disastrous outbreak of disease associated with raw milk could severely harm all of Vermont agriculture. If consumers hear about a large number of people sick from drinking raw milk or a small child being permanently incapacitated, they will just hear Vermont milk, not raw milk. I urge you to be cautious.