



Rural Vermont

February 4, 2014

TO: House Committee on Agriculture and Forest Products
FROM: Andrea Stander, Director, Rural Vermont, andrea@ruralvermont.org, 802-223-7222 or 802-522-3284
RE: Rural Vermont's 2013-2014 Raw Milk Report and S.70

Good Morning. My name is Andrea Stander. I am the Director of Rural Vermont, a non-profit educational, grassroots organizing, and advocacy organization representing hundreds of diversified family farms from all over Vermont.

Thank you for this opportunity to present to the Committee, Rural Vermont's fifth annual Raw Milk Report. For your reference, when Act 62 was passed in 2009, Rural Vermont agreed to annually survey raw milk producers and present to this Committee, and your colleagues on the Senate Agriculture Committee, a report on the status of raw milk production and sales as well as the farmers' perspective on the effectiveness of Act 62.

Each year Rural Vermont has compiled the Raw Milk Report, we have worked hard to survey as many raw milk producers as possible. I am happy to report that our 2014 Report is based on completed surveys from the largest number of farmers ever – 110. In addition, Rural Vermont has conducted over 9 months of educational forums for and intensive community outreach to raw milk producers from all corners of the state.

Highlights from the 2014 Raw Milk Report and Rural Vermont's outreach to raw milk producers:

- Largest number of farms to date responded to the survey – 110
- Rural Vermont organized a dozen open forums to talk directly with raw milk producers of all sizes, providing information about the current law and hear their concerns and experiences with the law
- We are concerned to report that production has declined by over 11,000 gallons since 2012 and total sales has declined from \$448,000 to \$373,000 in that time period
- At the same time the average price per gallon has increased by 2012
- Survey respondents reported selling raw milk to almost 2000 unique customers and anecdotally reported that consumer demand continues to grow strongly – in many cases beyond their ability to meet it
- Obtaining insurance coverage for raw milk production continues to be a barrier—over half of the farmers we surveyed do not carry it – reasons reported are primarily cost and lack of availability
- Almost 1/3 of raw milk producers we surveyed also ship to coops, bulk buyers or cheese makers
- The majority of farmers we communicated with reported that complying fully with the current Raw Milk law makes producing raw milk impractical and uneconomical.

At Rural Vermont we are not statisticians and we are not scientists. We are passionate advocates for healthy, sustainable, community-based food production and the farms and farmers who are the foundation of Vermont's

storied local food system. Raw Milk producers are largely grass-based farmers and have the potential to contribute significantly to feeding us all as well as preserving our working lands and natural resources and providing a livable future in Vermont.

As a result of Rural Vermont's work conducting the annual Raw Milk survey, and our extensive community outreach to raw milk producers over the past year, we have compiled a list of improvements to the current Raw Milk law that farmers have identified as priorities to improve the success of their farms:

- Develop more reasonable and affordable animal health testing protocols for Tuberculosis and Brucellosis.
- Create a third "Neighborly Scale" production tier that enables very small quantities of milk to be sold with limited regulations.
- Allow for sale of high customer demand lightly processed raw dairy products such as cream, butter, yogurt, kefir, fresh cheeses, and ice-cream.
- Create an average daily or a weekly productions/sales allowance to accommodate farmers who may have more customers on particular days of the week.
- Develop testing rules and regulations that make it feasible for more farmers to sell at the Tier Two level.
- Expand sales to farmers markets and other central drop off locations. (*NOTE: S.70 only allows delivery at farmers markets by Tier Two producers to prepaid, existing customers.*)
- Develop inspection protocols that promote a positive relationship between producers and inspectors.
- Remove productions limits to allow greater quantities of sales.
- Replace the current warning and label sign with language that is consistent with that used in other New England states. For example, the required signage in New Hampshire simply states: *"Raw milk is not pasteurized. Pasteurization destroys organisms that may be harmful to human health."*

We are prepared to offer testimony from Vermont raw milk producers, their customers, and other relevant professionals in support of these changes to the current law. Rural Vermont respectfully requests that this Committee implement these priority improvements through legislative improvements to the Raw Milk law by amending and passing S.70. Thank you.