

Thursday, March 19, 2015

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My name is Burton Wilcke. I am a professor in the Department of Medical Laboratory and Radiation Sciences at the University of Vermont (UVM). Prior to joining the faculty at UVM I spent over twenty five years in public health at the state and local level. My experience has primarily been in the field of disease surveillance. My testimony is not provided on behalf of UVM but rather on behalf of the Vermont Public Health Association (VtPHA). I sit on the Board of VtPHA, a member organization that supports creating the opportunity for all Vermonters to be healthy and to stay healthy.

We believe that having access to safe food is, at its core, a public health issue and a public good. The public should be reassured in the knowledge that food sold for its consumption is treated in a way that conforms to the current best food production practices and incorporates the best science behind food safety. Our policy position on food safety calls for: public education regarding foodborne illness risk, appropriate labeling of foods, agricultural practices that minimize harm to the public, surveillance of the food supply and rapid response to foodborne illness events.

The Vermont Public Health Association does not support the sale of raw milk to the general public for the following reasons:

- Pathogenic bacteria acquired through the consumption of raw milk, have been known to cause disease, sometimes permanently debilitating and even fatal disease, for well over a century.

- Communicable diseases that have been documented to be transmissible via raw milk include, but are not limited to: brucellosis, campylobacter enteritis, enterotoxigenic E coli disease, listeriosis, Q fever, salmonellosis, tuberculosis, and yersiniosis.
- Pathogenic bacteria can be passed into the milk supply, even from cows that appear clinically “healthy”, and even when these cows are managed and milked under extremely good and clean management.
- To ensure a safe milk supply requires: optimal cow health, clean environmental surroundings including a safe water supply, hygienic milking practices and pasteurization. All of these are important in helping to assure a safe milk supply.
- Better animal health has reduced but not eliminated the risk of acquiring milk borne diseases.
- Although anyone may become ill from the pathogens that may be acquired through raw milk, the individuals most at risk from those pathogens are: the very young, the very old, and those with compromised immune systems. It is particularly important that the higher risks to these groups be recognized.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collects data on milk-borne outbreaks. Over a recent five year span they documented almost 1000 cases of disease attributable to raw milk consumption. These included over seventy hospitalizations. Almost two thirds of the cases involved children under the age of five. It is acknowledged that many outbreaks go unreported so that these findings are clearly an underrepresentation of the disease burden resulting from raw milk consumption.

Increased food safety, which includes the routine pasteurization of milk intended for human consumption, is recognized as one of the top ten public health successes of the 20th century. It would be most unfortunate for us to start down the path of undoing what public health has accomplished over the last 100 years.

For all these reasons the Vermont Public Health Association joins the following groups (among others) in recommending that raw milk not be sold to the general public.

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Academy of Family Practitioners
- American Farm Bureau Federation
- American Veterinary Medical Association
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Food and Drug Administration
- International Association for Food Protection
- National Association of Public Health Veterinarians
- Vermont Veterinary Medical Association

Thank you.