

Testimony Notes  
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Vermont Cheese Council  
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Vermont Cheese Council Concerns  
Regarding H426 –  
2015 Raw Milk Bill

The Vermont Cheese Council supports the right of Vermonters to have easy access to safe fluid milk regardless of whether raw or pasteurized, and for all licensed milk handlers to sell their milk. The value of the \$650,000,000 Vermont cheese industry is dependent upon the exceptional quality of its milk and the people who produce it. We believe that value added dairy products like cheese, butter, yogurt and other cultured products should be prepared and manufactured by licensed cheesemakers, in licensed and inspected facilities whose primary focus is on the safe production, handling and aging of quality artisan raw-milk cheese. The Council does not believe that the modification of the Raw Milk Law of 2014 takes into account its effect on the ever growing reputation and stature of the cheese industry in Vermont, and do not support this bill in its current form.

1. The cheesemakers of Vermont encourage the production of more raw milk cheese made in Vermont. Our concerns are not with raw milk, but with the production of cheese in an unregulated and unlicensed processing/production facility whether kitchen or commercial facility.
2. Vermont cheesemakers are concerned about producing a safe and healthy product that meets the current regulations, codes and permitting requirements of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to sell cheese in Vermont. We are concerned that this bill does not take into account the reasoning and justification for licensed facilities or current regulations.
3. Vermont cheesemakers currently test their milk along with samples of all batches of pasteurized and raw milk cheese throughout its lifecycle. This ensures that a safe, quality product is available for Vermont consumers.
4. Vermont cheesemakers do not see the cost of outfitting a small cheese production and storage/aging facility as onerous or unreachable. It is simply the cost of doing business. Many of the small, licensed cheesemakers in Vermont have started their facilities with funding from a variety of state, federal, and NGO grants and loan programs created for the production of value added farm products. We do not feel that there are insurmountable obstacles to construction and maintenance of an inspected facility regardless of size.
5. Vermont cheesemakers have worked incredibly hard to build and sustain the reputation of the Vermont cheese industry, recognized in the US and around the world for its quality, consistency and its commitment to the dairy farm families of Vermont. As a group, the Vermont Cheese Council and its members have worked diligently to educate themselves about cheese, cheesemaking and most importantly, safe food handling and processing practices. As a group, Vermont cheesemakers, their families and their employees have played by the rules regardless of their size or reach of their businesses.
6. The bill leads one to the conclusion that the purpose of the bill is to make small, independent farms more viable reasoning that regulations currently in place to ensure safe and healthy

products are detrimental to their well-being. Vermont cheesemakers recognize that there is a substantial investment of resources, time and space needed to age cheese or make and store cultured products in a stable, clean and temperature controlled environment before it is available for sale, in transport and on market shelves. We are concerned that these investments in safety are not apparent in the bill.

7. The bill as written is lacking in specifics regarding the safe handling of aged cheese or the environment in which it is prepared. The science of aging cheese points to controlled environmental conditions, the addition of specific bacteria and molds to flavor cheese and help in its aging process. Vermont cheesemakers are concerned with unintended bacteria and mold growth in uncontrolled environments which can lead to issues that could affect the health of the Vermont consumer, the quality of the raw milk cheese, and the viability of the cheese industry as a whole.
8. Vermont cheesemakers are very supportive of supporting local family farms and strongly embrace ideals of independence and self-sufficiency. It is the very reason that many Vermont cheesemakers have made the investments of time, energy, and resources to build their own value added dairy businesses on their family dairy farms so that they remain in the family.
9. No other value added food industry in Vermont is allowed to operate without licensing, permits and inspections whether prepared in homes or in commercial food production facilities. Nor is any other food product offered for sell to the public without liability insurance. Our members are all insured.