

3/24/15

Dear House Ag Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to hear my story. My name is Kalyn Campbell and I run the Family Cow Farmstand in Hinesburg, VT. I bought it as an existing business in 2013. After running it for a year and half I am very happy with my decision to buy a business that is focused on the sale of raw milk. With the age of farmers seemingly ever increase it is vital for Vermont to get young people attracted to farming if we are going to keep feeding ourselves. As a beginning farmer I face many financial barriers when starting a farm. Many young farmers do not have the funds to buy the supplies for a 60 cow dairy farm and need to grow slowly. This will be done, I believe, by making small farm operations more viable by lifting restrictive regulations. Selling to a dairy co-op becomes less and less viable as you decrease in herd size, so other milk selling avenues need to be used. Cheesemaking is also expensive to start-up, so selling safe raw milk is the logical choice for new dairy farmers. I grew up here in Bolton, VT and left for college. I recently moved back with the intention of starting a cheesemaking operation. I quickly found that it was going to be difficult to start with no capital and no equity with student loan debt on top of that. I was fortunate that I found a business to purchase that is financed by the sellers because they were able to build equity by starting out small. I would like to see many other young dairy farmers granted the same opportunity to grow slowly by making raw milk a more viable business with a few regulatory tweaks.

Family Cow sells around 30 gallons of milk each day for a total of 210 gallons a week. The farm has been Tier 2 for 6 years and the stellar test results show that the milk has been safe throughout this period. With this in mind I would like to see the new testing protocol that the Agency of Agriculture adopted in the fall of 2014 changed back to the original protocol. Previously, we were able to have 2 out of 4, or 2 out 5 test results be above the limit without being penalized. Now if we have one bad test result we must inform our customers, which will creates unwarranted fear. In the past 6 years of testing the milk there have been very few instances where our results were over the limits, but never more than twice in a row. One bad test result does not necessarily reflect poor milking practices. Sometimes there are lab mistakes and flukes, which should not degrade the integrity of my business. A few times this result helped improve the safety of the operation by pointing out sanitary flaws that were easily fixed. This new protocol just creates unnecessary fear and stress for the farmer and consumer.

Another challenge with selling raw milk is the necessity of sending the test samples in the containers that they are sold in. It is burdensome for me because it requires me to find a way to drive it to the lab since it is too expensive to ship a quart jar of milk. It also concerns me that if the state lab moves to Randolph, as the plans are in 2018, I would have to truck my quart jar of milk all the way to Randolph twice a month. I have no other reasons to go to that part of the state, so this would become onerous very quickly.

Lastly, I want to touch on the delivery and access to the milk. Being in Hinesburg has helped the business immensely since it is very close to the Burlington area with large numbers of people and potential customers. Even with this close proximity I struggle to convince busy customers that they should make the trip to the farm. They prefer having their milk delivered to them, which becomes very costly and requires a lot of time. I would like to be able to deliver to central drop-off locations to get my product to my city residing customers without having to spend too much time driving to many different households.

I hope the Vermont legislators and the Agency of Agriculture will start improving marketplace conditions for young farmers by allowing them to start small with low cost operations.

Sincerely,

Kalyn Campbell

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