

Testimony in Support of H. 426
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Consumer, Essex, VT
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I've been a customer of Frank Huard's for the last year and a half or so. Frank delivers raw goat's milk to our home in Essex about once a week, and sometimes we're also able to pick it up from him at the Burlington Farmers' Market. The milk from Frank's farm is absolutely delicious, with a flavor much more subtle than anything off the grocery store shelf. I would drink it just for the taste, but I also drink it because most milk really upsets my digestion if I drink much of it. The milk from Frank's farm never bothers my digestion. I can drink it by the glass and feel good and nourished.

Frank has always been gracious about delivering to our door, but I've often wondered how he could possibly meet expenses when he has to drive all over the place to deliver milk to customers: Gas is expensive, and it has to take him a lot of time to drive to each individual customer.

If Frank could sell his milk via retail stores, it would be convenient for me, but what's more important is that it would be sustainable for him. We used to get raw goat's milk from Trillium Hill Farm in Hinesburg, but they stopped selling milk after the 2012 season because that part of their business had proven to be unsustainable. I find the present restrictions frustrating personally, but the biggest concern to me is that these restrictions make it so difficult for farmers to reach customers. It goes without saying that a business must be able to reach customers to survive.

I recognize and appreciate that the intent of the present labeling language is to protect the consumer, but I'd like to ask you to give more credit - and more responsibility - to consumers: In my experience, what pasteurization is and does is general knowledge. I think it's enough to state that the milk is raw/unpasteurized. So long as I'm clearly told what the product is, it's up to me to determine whether it's healthy for me. Please show that you respect me and other consumers by trusting us to do that.

In addition to speaking as a consumer, I'd like to say a few words just as a resident of Vermont: I don't think it's possible to emphasize too much how important small farms like Frank's are. They feed us, keeping us nourished and healthy and giving us a much-needed alternative to mass-produced, trucked-in food. They keep money in the local economy. They give Vermont the distinctive sense of place that makes this state a destination. They're vital to our sense of community: A teacher of mine used to say, "we all exist in a web of interdependence," and eating food grown or produced by someone in your community reinforces how much we all depend on one another.

The farmers I know are the hardest working people I know, and I think it's safe to say that, as a group, farmers are the hardest working people in Vermont. While some regulation is reasonable, the present requirements place unnecessary obstacles between the farmer and the customer. H. 426 won't change that farming is a difficult job, but it'll do a lot to make this work economically feasible for the farmers affected.

Anna Lappe said, "Every time you spend money, you're casting a vote for the kind of world you want." I want to vote for a state full of thriving family farms, by buying this good, wholesome product from a local farmer. Please make it easier for me to do that, and give Frank and other farmers a real chance to thrive by supporting H. 426.