

March 19, 2015

Testimony in Support of the Raw Milk Bill H.426

Dear House Ag Committee -

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today. I am testifying in SUPPORT of H.246.

My name is Lisa McCrory and I own and operate Earthwise Farm and Forest with my husband, Carl Russell. Our farm is a certified organic, diversified farm located in Bethel, VT. We have been operating our farm business together for 15 years. Professionally, I have been a grazing consultant and organic livestock consultant for the past 25 years, working for UVM in the 1990's and then for NOFA VT as the Dairy and Livestock Technical Assistance Coordinator, and most recently for the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance. I have also been involved in an annual study looking at the cost of production for Vermont Organic Dairy farms for the last 10 years (working with Bob Parsons, UVM Professor and Extension Ag Economist). I am very familiar with the cost of production and the profit margin (or lack thereof) in the conventional and organic milk market.

We live 'off grid', using solar power and energy conservation practices as part of our whole farm design and use draft animals (primarily horses) for logging, field, and garden work. The emphasis of our farming enterprise is to function as a self-sufficient 'whole farm organism', applying ecological principles of Holistic Management, Biodynamics, Dowsing, motive (animal) power, and renewable energy to create healthy, vibrant food and forest products for our family and local community. The name of our farm points to our belief in the inherent wisdom of established processes of the Earth; as we work to secure what we need from the land.

We produce and sell certified organic milk (from 2 cows), chicken, heritage turkey, beef, garlic, flowers, vegetables, and non-organic (though gmo-free) eggs, pork and lumber. We also offer educational workshops on our farm, and take in the occasional intern to share what we have learned along the way.

Many of our farming methods are labor intensive, which means that we can have a personal, intimate, and focused relationship with our food system, but it also means that we are limited in the use of economies of scale that could reduce costs. By being honest about these costs, and educating consumers about their role in making thoughtful practices cost-effective, we can build a food system that shifts the emphasis from cost-based profitability, to one that is based on knowledge and responsibility.

Our farm is a representation of a **growing** number of farms that are taking shape all over the state of Vermont. With our diversity of products and income streams, we feel that we can be more resilient and self-reliant. We also find that our customers search us out; they are looking for the 1-3 cow farm that can supply them with milk, vegetables, meat and other products. They want to understand where their food comes from and the process of getting it from the farm to the table.

About our dairy cows: We have 2 cows, ages 10 and 2.5 years of age. We find our dairy animals stay with us for 11-years or greater, compared to the industry average of 4.4 years of age. Our cows live longer lives as a result of the way we manage and care for them; we manage them on pasture through a rotational grazing system, do not push them for production, and do not try to have a calf from our cows every year (one of our cows has been lactating for 2.5 years). Production per cow averages about 24 lbs a day over the course of their lactation (versus 60-80 lbs/day for your typical dairy farm).

We are a Tier 1 dairy farm and have enjoyed providing milk to our customers, which complements the other products that we sell on the farm. Some of our customers come to us because their doctor has prescribed raw milk as part of their diet. Others come to us because they love the taste of our milk, saying it is the 'best stuff around'. We sell milk to our veterinarian, people with jobs in the medical field, and neighbors up and down the road. We also enjoy offering educational workshops on our farm. We offer a Raw Dairy Class 4-6 times a year where **I** teach people (near and far) how to make their own value added products in their own kitchen. A few of our customers have taken the class and now make their own butter, yogurt and cheeses from our milk.

This bill is not as much about finding ways to regulate milk, but allowing for informed and educated commercial relationships between discerning customers and principled producers. We are not trying to make the case in support of raw milk, that has already been done by others in previous legislative sessions, this effort is in support of increasing effective access to a desirable and desired product. This bill is indicative of the growth in Vermont back toward a human scale agriculture that has been pushed out of the modern consciousness in favor of the conventional model.

This market has helped us grow our farm business and provides a more stable year-round income, complementing the other products and services that we offer. We do not have an interest in milking more cows at this time - with our current land base and other livestock operations, milking 2 cows is perfect for our farm. Some of the most important parts of the bill that will help our farm the most would be to create a Neighborly Tier, to change the labeling and sign message, and to be able to produce and sell value added products such as skim milk, cream, butter and yogurt.

Thank you,

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