

Open Letter Opposing Relaxation of Raw Milk Sales

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Dear House Committee on Agriculture and Forest Products,

I am constantly amazed at the collective short-term memory of our society. As proponents of local whole foods demand access to raw milk, they seem to forget that pasteurization was invented to prevent illness and increase shelf life. Regardless of changes in vitamin content, it is imperative that our food supply not make people sick. I used to drink raw milk packaged in half gallon cartons and sold in local grocery stores. I loved the taste and enjoyed the thought of its "natural" farm freshness. That was almost 30 years ago. On October 19, 1982, the Free Press printed an article about 9 people who became ill after drinking raw milk from a Chittenden County dairy marketed in local grocery stores. Although the dairy denied their milk was the cause, all 9 people who became ill had drunk the same raw milk from that dairy. Subsequent serotyping by the Department of Health (and the CDC) of *Campylobacter jejuni* from a patient's stool and that of a cow with diarrhea concluded they were the same. By October 20, the number of reported illnesses related to that same milk source was 21 and included one hospitalization. And that was just the people who called the State Health department after reading about the initial reports. They recognized the similarities and timeliness of their own illnesses and their consumption of that same milk. Who knows how many people were really affected over all? I stopped drinking it after I also contracted gastroenteritis for four days. Shortly thereafter the dairy stopped selling their raw milk. I am sure that an event like this is a financial and marketing nightmare for any company.

I still drink milk and I always will. But since September of 1982, after four days of nausea, cramps, and diarrhea, I pledged never to

take a chance on my health by consuming a food commodity that can be easily made safe. My mother grew up on a farm in the mid-west that had a few cows. She used to tell me that raw milk on the farm was delicious and a real treat (unless it was in the spring when the cows were eating wild onions), but she also warned me that the farmer had to be very careful of his herd's cleanliness and health or there could be dire consequences.

If you are a raw milk consumer, please be educated on the risks before you expose yourself (and possibly your family) to harmful bacterial infections. No matter how clean and healthy a dairy farm says their cows might be, no matter what precautions they take, the fact of the matter is that contamination can happen and does happen and pasteurization is the tried and true process for killing pathogens in milk. I am not taking the risk again of consuming raw milk.