

NOFA/Massachusetts Raw Milk Network

Raw Milk Talking Points

These points have been developed to help farmers and advocates communicate the message about raw milk clearly and succinctly, particularly when talking to the press. The first set of bullet points form the core of our defense of raw milk, and the rest of the sections offer more detail for more in-depth conversations. This document is a work in progress – if you have suggestions or additions, please send them to winton@nofamass.org.

- Raw milk, produced and handled properly, is a safe and healthy product that consumers demand and farmers should be permitted to provide.
- Massachusetts raw milk farmers play an integral role in the state's agricultural landscape, contributing to the economy, using sustainable farming methods that contribute to environmental preservation, educating their customers about the value of fresh, local food, and producing a healthy product for all to enjoy.
- Allowing farmers to sell raw milk is a way to save Massachusetts dairy farms without having to provide them with government subsidies.
- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts endorses raw milk as a safe product by setting standards for its safety and quality, and monitoring producers.
- Banning or further restricting raw milk sales will not stop the demand, meaning sales will become unregulated and potentially unsafe.
- Raw milk for retail sale is held to the exact same bacterial testing standards as pasteurized milk. Because raw milk dairies have to attain these standards without using pasteurization, these farms' operations are exceptionally sanitary and safe.
- There have been no reported illnesses from raw milk sold under the current guidelines in MA, which were put into place in 1993. (The unfortunate incident of boy scouts getting ill more than a decade ago was never conclusively traced to the milk they drank. Even so, the milk they drank was from a tank of milk destined for pasteurization, NOT milk up to the standards for raw milk sales, so the comparison is irrelevant).
- At its core, this is an argument about responsibility – the responsibility of farmers to follow practices that have been proven safe, the responsibility of regulators to balance public health issues with consumer demand and the livelihoods of farmers, and the responsibility of consumers to understand what they are eating and that with every bite of any product comes a risk.
- It is unfair that people's food rights are different depending upon where they live. Farmers in other states can deliver raw milk and sell it farmers markets – there is no valid public health reason for other states to be more restrictive.

General

- Raw milk itself is not dangerous. Like any other food, if it is handled improperly it can harbor pathogens.
- Raw milk, produced and handled properly, is a safe and healthy product that consumers demand and farmers should be permitted to provide.
- Products that are proven to have far more potential to cause health problems – tobacco, raw fish, even deli meats – enjoy far more open markets.
- Massachusetts raw milk farmers play an integral role in the state’s agricultural landscape, contributing to the economy, using sustainable farming methods that contribute to environmental preservation, educating their customers about the value of fresh, local food, and producing a healthy product for all to enjoy.
- At its core, this is an argument about responsibility – the responsibility of farmers to follow practices that have been proven safe, the responsibility of regulators to balance public health issues with consumer demand and the livelihoods of farmers, and the responsibility of consumers to understand what they are eating and that with every bite of any product comes a risk.

Economics

- About 80,000 gallons of raw milk is sold to consumers per year in MA, despite the requirement that it can only be sold on the farm.
- Allowing farmers to sell raw milk is a way to save dairy farms in MA without having to provide them with government subsidies.
- Dairy farmers selling into the conventional market are paid around \$1 per gallon, far less than the cost to produce the milk.
- Selling raw milk to consumers earns dairy farmers \$6 a gallon or more.
- While the number of dairies in MA dropped from 829 in 1980 to 189 in 2007, the number of raw milk dairies has more than doubled in just the last several years.
- As evidence that raw milk sales help to preserve farms, no farm licensed to sell raw milk to consumers has gone out of business in MA.
- Money from raw milk sales -- more than \$600,000 per year -- stays in the community and supports the local economy.
- Consumers who purchase raw milk also frequently purchase other items from the farm.

Safety

- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts already endorses raw milk as a safe product. Anyone is allowed to purchase and consume it.
- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts endorses raw milk by setting standards for its safety and quality, and monitoring producers.
- Banning or further restricting raw milk sales will not stop the demand, meaning sales will become unregulated and potentially unsafe.
- We want to keep raw milk legal, and allow it to be sold in more markets, because that’s the only way to ensure that what’s being sold is safe and clean (not underground).

- Raw milk for retail sale is held to the exact same bacterial testing standards as pasteurized milk. Because raw milk dairies have to attain these standards without using pasteurization, these farms' operations are exceptionally sanitary.
- Massachusetts raw milk dairies are required to label the milk they sell with government-written warnings about potential health concerns. No other food product is required to do so, even though many other foods can harbor far more dangerous toxins than milk can.
- There have been no reported illnesses from raw milk sold under the current guidelines in MA, which were put into place in 1993. (The unfortunate incident of boy scouts getting ill more than a decade ago was never conclusively traced to the milk they drank. Even so, the milk they drank was from a tank of milk destined for pasteurization, NOT milk up to the standards for raw milk sales, so the comparison is irrelevant).
- Food-borne illnesses are far more prevalent from food produced using industrial methods. Deaths from spinach and peanut butter in recent years prove that. A shorter supply chain, such as the one for raw milk, provides far fewer opportunities for contamination.
- Pasteurization was instituted in the 1920s to combat TB, infant diarrhea, undulant fever and other diseases caused by poor animal nutrition and dirty production methods. But advances in sanitation practices, improved animal management methods, modern stainless steel tanks, milking machines, refrigerated trucks, and inspections allow raw milk to be produced far more safely.
- Dr. Ted Beals, retired from the University of Michigan Medical School and VA Health Administration, has done extensive research into illnesses caused by raw milk and has determined that, statistically, one is more likely to be injured driving to the farm to pick up raw milk than from consuming it.
- “According to CDC statistics for 2007, there were 7,031 reported cases of foodborne outbreaks associated with bacteria, which resulted in 678 hospitalizations and 11 deaths (3 deaths of which were from pasteurized milk). According to those same CDC statistics for 2007, there were only 32 reported cases of illnesses attributed to fresh, unprocessed, raw milk (0.5%); there were only 2 reported hospitalizations attributed to fresh, unprocessed, raw milk (0.3%); and there were no reported deaths attributed to raw milk. More people are killed each year from lightning strikes on golf courses than die from milkborne illnesses.” (<http://www.grist.org/article/raw-milk-takes-center-stage-in-food-rights-lawsuit-against-fda/>)

Environment

- Farms selling raw milk and receiving a retail price are more sustainable, meaning long-term preservation of open space and the use of management practices that are beneficial to the environment.
- Cows are healthiest when they are able to be outdoors, grazing on pasture. In turn, they fertilize the soil and experience fewer animal health problems. When cows graze on pasture, less energy is needed to mow, bale, and move hay, reducing fossil fuel use and cutting the carbon impact of producing a valuable food.
- Raw milk dairy farmers steward more than 3,500 acres of Massachusetts farmland, keeping it open and in agricultural use.

Raw Milk Regulations Elsewhere

- 27 states allow some form of raw milk sales. Nine more allow cow-share agreements.
- At least seven states are currently considering legislation to expand sales of raw milk.
- Retail sales are allowed in nine states, including our neighbors – CT, NH and ME.
- Vermont raw milk farmers can deliver their milk to customers.
- Raw milk is common throughout Europe. It is even available in street-corner vending machines in some countries.

Health

- Raw milk contains high levels of calcium and other minerals, and the enzymes necessary to metabolize these minerals. Those enzymes are destroyed in the pasteurization process.
- Raw milk contains an abundance of beneficial bacteria that can rebalance a digestive system unable to process many foods, and can restore the immune system. These good bacteria help produce and assimilate vitamins and minerals, fight off illnesses, and regulate bodily processes. Pasteurization destroys all bacteria in milk.
- Raw milk contains water- and fat-soluble vitamins, two-thirds or more of which are destroyed during pasteurization. Vitamins B6 and B12 are almost entirely destroyed during pasteurization. More than 50% of milk's Vitamin C value is lost to pasteurization as well. Milk from grass-fed cows is higher in Vitamins A and D and has more omega-3 fatty acids ("the good fats") and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA).
- Raw milk contains a level of fat necessary for the body to absorb milk's calcium and protein. Pasteurized reduced-fat or skim milk is an ineffective source of calcium.
- Raw milk contains the enzymes phosphatase, essential for the absorption of calcium; lipase, which aids in the digestion of fats; and lactase, which helps with the digestion of lactose. Pasteurization, however, destroys all three of these enzymes.
- Raw milk contains amino acids, essential to the body's ability to repair tissue, metabolize protein and generate energy. Pasteurization renders these acids useless.

Source for MA data:

<http://www.nofamass.org/programs/organicdairy/pdfs/RawMilkinMassachusetts.pdf>

For more information, see: <http://www.marawmilk.org>