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Demand grows for raw milk, but is it safe?

As ag panel reviews regulations, some farmers, health professionals debate safety of unpasteurized product.

By RYAN ROBINSON, Staff
Lancaster New Era

Published: Oct 17, 2007 11:35 AM EST

LANCASTER COUNTY, PA - Most dairy farmers sell their milk for about \$1.50 a gallon.

Rob Wentworth, however, is getting \$5 a gallon on his Quarryville farm.

He's one of about 40 farmers in Lancaster County trying to fill consumers' growing demand for raw milk.

Some health professionals say the milk — which is not pasteurized or homogenized — is unsafe and should be prohibited.

But some farmers and consumers want the government to loosen limitations on raw milk sales.

"No one's being forced to drink it," Wentworth said. "If someone wants it, it should be available for them."

At stake, raw milk proponents say, are consumers' personal freedom to choose their food and some farmers' ability to enhance profits in an increasingly difficult farm economy.

Some Plain-sect farmers even fear their religious beliefs are threatened by the requirement to get a permit to sell raw milk.

The Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee held an informational hearing on raw milk Sept. 18 and received comment from 43 consumers, health professionals, raw milk advocates and farmers.

Sen. Mike Brubaker said the committee will determine if changes should be made to current law to allow the production and sale of a broader range of products, including soft cheeses, butter and ice cream made from raw milk.

Pennsylvania law requires farmers to obtain permits to sell raw milk and hard cheese made from it. Sales of other raw milk commodities are prohibited.

Kristin Ebersole-Crawford, executive director of the Senate committee, said the staff is crafting a bill to expand allowable sales of raw milk products.

"If and when the legislation is introduced, there will be plenty of time for more debate on the issue," she said today.

About half of the states in the country do not allow sales of raw milk, including most states adjoining Pennsylvania, she said.

Michael Nuff of the state Department of Health said raw milk has a higher risk of harboring pathogens such as salmonella and E. coli than pasteurized milk does.

Pasteurization dramatically decreases the number of pathogenic organisms present in milk and does not appreciably alter the nutritional content, he said.

Nuff said the increased handling and processing, as well as the longer shelf life, of products made from raw milk increase the possibility for bacteria to be introduced, and that is why they are prohibited.

Dr. Bhushan Jayarao, professor of veterinary public health and extension veterinarian with Penn State University, said that with the emergence of new diseases and antibiotic-resistant bacteria in raw milk, it is "absolutely essential" that milk sold to the public is pasteurized.

But advocates of raw milk dispute those health risks and say it

Photos/Media



Rob Wentworth holds a jug of raw milk at his ... (more)

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actually contains many [health](#) benefits.

A retired [dairy farmer](#) told Wentworth he drinks raw [milk](#) because he fears a link between homogenized [milk](#) and heart disease.

A neighbor said her son is lactose-intolerant and gets a bellyache from pasteurized [milk](#), but not from raw [milk](#), Wentworth said.

A new customer this past weekend told him her husband's a body builder who believes raw [milk](#) increases his muscle mass more than regular [milk](#).

Many of Wentworth's customers come from Maryland and Delaware; they learned about his business online.

Every two weeks a pharmacist from southern Maryland drives five hours to buy four or five gallons of raw [milk](#) for her family, he said.

"The majority have researched raw [milk](#), discovered [health](#) benefits and seek us out," Wentworth said. "But as far as the state is concerned, with raw [milk](#), you are guilty until proven innocent."

Patrick Kocher of Gordonville buys raw [milk](#) for his family from a nearby [farmer](#).

Kocher says the most important aspect of the raw [milk](#) issue does not concern [safety](#) but individual freedom and responsibility.

If raw [milk](#) is a deadly poison being marketed to unsuspecting customers, than prohibit it, the 25-year-old father of two children said. But if it is simply a matter of preference, like ordering a rare steak or smoking a cigar, the fact that there are risks does not authorize the [government](#) to interfere with consumers' decisions.

"We feel more comfortable getting as much food as possible from [farmers](#) we trust than from off store shelves where only God knows where it has been," Kocher said.

An Amish [farmer](#) in Quarryville said demand for raw [milk](#) products is growing fast.

The [farmer](#), who asked to not be identified by name, said that besides the 16 county [farmers](#) with permits to sell raw [milk](#) and hard cheese, there are 25 to 30 here who don't have permits.

"They're popping up all over," he said. "I don't think the [government](#) has any idea."

He sells raw [milk](#), cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, cream, butter and kefir, a cultured [milk](#) drink.

The [farmer](#) has a raw [milk](#) and cheese permit.

"The permit process for the [government](#) is a joke," he said, adding that inspectors don't enforce regulations and they tell [farmers](#) ahead of time when they are going to visit.

The [farmer](#) said some Amish fear that if they get raw [milk](#) permits, they will one day be required to participate in a national animal identification system.

He added that marking animals on [farms](#) gets uncomfortably close to "the mark of the beast" referred to in the biblical book of Revelation.

In 1987, Rob Wentworth, 44, and his wife, Bonnie Wentworth, moved their 85-cow [dairy](#) operation from Amherst, Mass., to a 148-acre [farm](#) along River Road, Quarryville.

Last September, they started selling raw [milk](#).

Wentworth still sells the majority of his [milk](#) wholesale.

He can generally sell [milk](#) wholesale for \$1.25 to \$1.50 a gallon. This year's high price has pushed it to about \$2 a gallon.

But he sells raw [milk](#) for \$3 a half gallon, or \$5 a gallon.

Wentworth did not have to pay for his customer container permit to sell fluid [milk](#).

But he pays for extra testing of his [milk](#), herd and well.

His whole herd was tested for tuberculosis and brucellosis — not required of wholesale [milk](#) sellers.

The tests cost \$3 or \$4 per animal, per test.

An independent laboratory worker goes to Wentworth's [farm](#) to test [milk](#) twice a month and a state inspector tests it every three months.

Well samples are studied twice a year. On Wentworth [Dairy farm](#),

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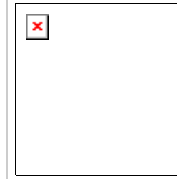
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milk goes from the registered, purebred Ayrshire and Jersey cows through pipes and a filter to the milk tank, which cools it to below 40 degrees.

Wentworth taps his raw milk straight from the tank, so it is all whole milk.

Customers buy plastic milk containers of the milk from a refrigerator on a porch. Wentworth will also fill special containers if requested.

Last month, he sold 100 gallons of raw milk.

Wentworth said he wishes the law would allow him to make and sell ice cream, yogurt and butter made from raw milk.

He said customers appreciate that his family, who milks the cows, also drinks the milk.

Customers also see how the dairy farm looks every time they pick up their milk.

The close relationship drives him to produce the best possible product.

"I know where my milk is going," Wentworth said. "It keeps you on your toes."

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Goldilocks
 10-17-2007

QUOTE(JussyOzric @ Oct 17 2007, 05:14 PM) [snapback]329897[/snapback]

After milking the cows, we would go into the cooler room, grab a cup and dip into the cold milk. Nothing better in the world. The milk today just doesn't compare -

amen to that! I grew up on a farm, our whole family lived on fresh, unpasteurized milk, and you just can't beat it for taste!

Dittos. I was raised on a Dairy Farm and I never drank pasteurized milk until after I was married. My mother would turn the agitator off on the bulk tank for a few hours, allowing the cream to rise to the top, than she tapped the milk from the drain at the bottom, and we had skim milk.

One disadvantage with raw milk, was that it doesn't work to use it in instant puddings. Gave the pudding a "soapy" taste.

citizen-too
 10-17-2007

Don't mistake RAW milk with HOMOGENIZED milk. Milk should be Pasteurized to kill the bacteria and diseases. Homogenization suspends the fat particles within the milk. The old Cream Top milk was fantastic compared to today's milk but, it was Pasteurized. Raw is raw. It still has all the living organisms in it.

I don't know if there is any relationship but, how many of the Amish tuberculosis cases stem from drinking raw milk?

usedmeat
 10-17-2007

My dad was raised on a farm and when on to the Penn State College of Agriculture where he earned his Masters Degree in Agricultural Biology. He was never a fan of raw milk but then what did he know? He was only raised on a farm and had a degree. Then there's the milker who puts down the gutter shovel and starts to hand milk without washing his hands.

That being said raw milk is good for feeding calves, they make use of the protiens and enzymes that are degraded during pasturization.

mimi45
10-19-2007

So, where in Lancaster can you buy raw, pasteurized milk? Hopefully, I stated that correctly.

solitary
10-19-2007

QUOTE(Goldilocks @ Oct 17 2007, 07:30 PM) [snapback]329903[/snapback]

One disadvantage with raw milk, was that it doesn't work to use it in instant puddings. Gave the pudding a "soapy" taste.

Skim milk was probably the cause.

QUOTE(citizen-too @ Oct 17 2007, 09:06 PM) [snapback]329930[/snapback]

I don't know if there is any relationship but, how many of the Amish tuberculosis cases stem from drinking raw milk?

I don't think you can get TB by eating it. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/tuberculo...0372/DSECTION=4>

QUOTE(usedmeat @ Oct 17 2007, 11:33 PM) [snapback]329975[/snapback]

Then there's the milker who puts down the gutter shovel and starts to hand milk without washing his hands.

That's why I think there should be permits or licenses which can be suspended upon investigation. If you want to be able to buy it and plan to ingest it yourself (not for consumer consumption), I think you should be able to.

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