



Why I Support Raw Milk

**By: Senator Glenn Grothman
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In the final few weeks of this Legislative Session, over 100 bills landed on Governor Doyle's desk. The one that generated the most intense feeling is the bill that would have legalized the sale of raw (unpasteurized) milk if you had a Grade A license, maintain records for each sale, and have the milk tested for certain disease-causing microorganisms, including Salmonella. A farmer could not advertise except for signs on the farm. The farmer would also have to place warnings about unpasteurized milk on containers.

The state medical establishment, the public health establishment, the Dairy Business Association, and the Farm Bureau all opposed the bill. The only supporters were a handful of farmers who sold unpasteurized milk, a vocal minority of medical professionals who prescribe raw milk, and the thousands of citizens who drink it. Yet, despite overwhelming odds, this bill passed the State Senate 25 to 8 and the State Assembly 60 to 35. Governor Doyle eventually sided with the medical establishment and dairy business and vetoed the bill.

While I personally am a city boy who drank less than 2 gallons of raw milk in my life, I became involved when the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture (DATCP) shut down a raw milk operation in Dodge County. I received complaints from quite a few customers who wondered why they couldn't get their raw milk and wound up becoming the Republican lead of the Senate bill which eventually passed the State Legislature. Senator Kreitlow (D-Chippewa Falls) and Rep. Danou (D-Trempealeau) were the authors.

Raw milk has been illegal to sell in the State of Wisconsin for the last 30 years, except for incidental sales. Nevertheless, DATCP, bowing to commonsense, largely did not enforce the law until 2009 when new bureaucrats got a toehold in the Division of Food Safety. During this time (and to this day), dairy farmers drank their own raw milk and gave raw milk to their employees and friends and relatives who visited them. Bodybuilders, people who felt raw milk tasted better, and people who felt it was better for their health also purchased milk from local farmers. For a short period in the 1990s (I'm told) the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture encouraged the sale of raw milk as a new niche market. They encouraged farmers to sell "cow shares" in which consumers would buy part of a cow so that the customer would only be getting his milk from a cow he owned to get around the prohibition.

In the late 1990s, DATCP determined cow shares were illegal but continued to not enforce the ban. Meanwhile, as the organic farm movement grew (raw milk does not have to be organic but it seems to attract many of the same consumers) more and more people came out to these farms to buy raw milk. Some doctors, as well as nutritionists and chiropractors were prescribing raw milk to their patients. A lot of people began to report raw milk cured allergies,

stomach disorders, reduced autism, helped diabetes, reduced obesity, and had other health benefits. It also was good for normally lactose intolerant people.

Also during this time, other states began to loosen restrictions on sales of raw milk. While it is regulated, people can buy raw milk in grocery stores in California. I'm told it's also legal to sell raw milk in food stores in Washington State. In some form or other, raw milk is sold in over half the states. In Europe, raw milk is sold in vending machines.

Opponents of raw milk claim that some people will get sick. They also argue that if people get sick, the entire dairy industry will suffer as people will panic and stop buying milk. I find neither argument persuasive.

While occasionally people get sick from all kinds of food, milk- especially raw milk- is healthier than ever. People alive today grew up drinking raw milk when farmers milked by hand into an open bucket in a barn next to cow manure and flies - that was the norm back then. Health testing of cows was a fraction of what it is today. Today, milk goes directly from the cow to the bulk tank and is immediately chilled. Just as raw vegetables may be healthier than cooked vegetables, a lot of very smart people feel raw milk is better than cooked milk. In my district, the people who drink raw milk are from the most well read and educated segment of society. I've heard of a lot of stories of people being healthier with raw milk.

As far as the concern that if someone gets sick, there will be a drop in milk sales- common sense will tell you this is not so. People very occasionally get sick from raw milk now. People also sometimes get sick from pasteurized milk (I'm willing to believe less so, but I also believe the health benefits are less.) Where is the drop in sales? Where is the drop in sales caused by the hundreds of thousands of members of dairy families, their employees, and visitors to the farms who drink raw milk now? There is none. The only danger to the reputation of milk is coming from the Dairy Business Association that is exaggerating the dangers of raw milk.

One legislator told me they never had raw beef until they lived in Wisconsin. I love raw beef. I'm sure someone got sick once. The beef industry has shown common sense in not forbidding me from ordering my hamburgers medium rare. I'm glad the commercial fishermen don't try to shut down all the new sushi places that are popping up. The dairy industry ought to back off and give advice as to what type of regulation they want for raw milk rather than ban it. For the first time in my life, there is a growing segment of society which (correctly) views raw milk as a food for upscale health conscious people and the dairy industry of all people is trying to kill it off. America should be a free country and your average person should be free to experience the benefits of raw milk just as farmers already do.

By forcing these sales underground, DATCP may wind up creating a health hazard. DATCP ought to go back to the "turn a blind eye policy" that existed before 2009 and suggest some common sense legislation everyone can live with for the next year.



Please let me know what you think on this issue. Contact me in Madison at 1-800-662-1227 or email me at Sen.Grothman@legis.wisconsin.gov.