



June 14, 2011

To: the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture  
From: MA Farm Bureau Federation  
RE: HB 1995 An Act relative to the distribution of raw milk

The Massachusetts Farm Bureau is the largest farm organization in the Commonwealth representing over 6,000 members and their families. On behalf of our members we would like to express our strong support for HB 1995, An Act relative to the distribution of raw milk.

This bill benefits farmers, consumers, and public health:

- Farmers benefit because they earn significantly more income by selling milk directly to the public, than to a processor. In the summer of 1981 the USDA price paid to farmers was \$1.20 per. In the summer of 2006 it was \$1.15 per gallon. In contrast, farmers sell raw milk directly to consumer for between \$5 and \$10 per gallon. Massachusetts vegetable and fruit farmers have thrived by selling directly to the consumer, and cutting out the middleman. Raw milk sales represent one of the few opportunities for dairy farmers to take advantage of the benefits of direct sales.
- There are an increasing number of consumers who want to purchase and consume raw milk. Presently, they may only purchase it from the farm on which it was produced. With fewer dairy farms and increasing gas prices, it is difficult for many to get to the farm.
- Because of the difficulty consumers have in reaching the farm we have seen a proliferation of buying clubs. Buying clubs are where consumers, or third parties, pick up milk at the farm and deliver it to consumers or a central pick-up location. The legal status of buying clubs, particularly those run by third parties, is nebulous. Further, buying clubs operate without any regulatory or public health oversight. There is no assurance that milk is stored or transported at proper temperatures, or in sanitary conditions. This bill would provide a clearly legal alternative to buying clubs and would allow for the oversight of transportation.

We understand that many are concerned with the risk of illness with raw milk. We understand and appreciate these concerns. In response we would offer the following.

- While we would agree that risks are higher with raw milk than with pasteurized, a simple increase in risk does not mean that the risk is unacceptable. Overall, risk with raw milk consumption is relatively low (see below relative to Massachusetts) when it is produced and sold under regulatory oversight. If one were to look at injury statistics for people who have automobile accidents while driving Mini Coopers, we suspect that they would be higher than for those driving Hummers. Yet no one is suggesting that we ban or severely restrict the ability of people to drive Minis. Risk from raw milk, as with driving a Mini, is relatively low.

- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) estimates that there are more than 9,000 deaths annually in the Commonwealth attributed to smoking (2001 SAMMEC figures). A recent public records request to DPH revealed three occasions during the last 15 years where people became sick from raw milk consumption. One was due to illegal imports from Pennsylvania. Presently you can purchase cigarettes at literally thousands of locations throughout the Commonwealth. However, you can only purchase raw milk from the farm? It defies logic that tobacco can be so widely purchased, where raw milk sales are so heavily restricted.

We understand that given the current fiscal situation that legislators may have some trepidations with giving additional duties to agencies. However, we do not believe that passage of this bill will require DAR to expend a significant amount of additional resources. DAR has a statewide network of inspectors. DAR already inspects both dairy farms and trucks used to transport milk to pasteurization. There are approximately 25 farms in Massachusetts which sell raw milk. The amount of workload associated with the passage of this bill would be relatively small. The Commonwealth has lost more than 620 dairy farms in the last 25 years. Given the significant number of dairy farms which have gone out of business in the last few years, we think it reasonable that DAR shift *existing* resources to cover the provisions of this bill.

We urge you to pass this bill favorably from Committee.

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