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The Dairy Debate - a Snapshot of Raw Milk Legislation

April 9th, 2009 by [Bree](#) · No Comments

The national debate over food safety and the right to choose what you eat continues, and as it has been for the last few years, raw milk is right in the thick of it. Raw milk is milk from cows, sheep, or goats that has not been pasteurized or homogenized. Pasteurization kills the bacteria in raw milk and homogenization prevents milk fat from separating out of milk products.

Fans of raw milk maintain that it is healthier and tastier than pasteurized milk. Some of those who favor raw milk [say it lessens milk allergies](#), allowing those who are lactose intolerant to enjoy it, while others favor it because it doesn't contain antibiotics.

The [Federal Drug Administration](#) does not recommend the ingestion of raw milk and warns that consuming raw milk is done at your own risk. According to the FDA, over 1,000 people became ill from drinking unpasteurized milk between 1998 and 2005.

Currently, thirty of the United States allow customers to buy raw milk. In most of the states, raw milk can only be purchased directly from farmers. Because state law varies on this issue, the federal government restricts interstate commerce of raw milk for human consumption. Connecticut and California have the two most liberal laws, allowing the product to be sold with a warning label in supermarkets. Several new proposed state laws as well as a bill in the US Congress might soon change that.

In Connecticut, where seven people became ill from raw milk last year, the state legislature is considering allowing farmers to sell raw milk to consumers. At the center of the debate is whether an individual's right to eat and drink whatever they want outweighs the potential health risks. A 2008 case in Connecticut highlights the argument for stricter raw milk standards, as a couple of children who had not consumed raw milk became sick from one who had.

In Connecticut the debate also revolves around economics: some farmers say they would suffer without being able to sell to grocery stores because they do not have the room, capital, or time to put in a store on their farm, whereas other farmers believe the bill would actually help them by reducing the transportation costs of bringing raw milk to the supermarket.

Connecticut's legislature is also considering enforcing more safety testing on raw milk and requiring the farmers who produce it to pay for the testing, which many would not be able to afford. The end result is that if a bill passes to limit the sale of raw milk, at least [14 farms in Connecticut will be affected](#).

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Moving in the other direction, Maryland's state government is considering passing a bill that would [allow farmers to sell and consumers to buy raw milk](#), which are both currently illegal.

On the national level, Representative Ron Paul has introduced a bill in Congress that would [allow raw milk to be transported across state lines](#) for sale.

What do you think? Should raw milk be sold in grocery store or banned completely? Should there be more safety testing and if so, who should pay for it?

Bree Shirvell graduated in May 2008 from George Washington University with a degree in political science in journalism. She is currently a freelance writer in New York, and has written for La Cucina Italiana, OZOLife, ToTheCenter, and PG Media.

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