

Senator Edgecomb, Representative Hickman, and members of the committee, my name is Lisa Turner. My husband and I own Laughing Stock Farm in Freeport and I am here to testify against the sale of unlicensed raw milk as proposed in LD 229 and LD 312.

The last few years we have sold licensed raw butter, milk, and cheese that we purchased from other farms. Our farm insurance company does not insure raw milk sales, so we had to buy a separate policy from what they refer to as “excess lines” and it had a base price of \$600. If unregulated milk causes claims, I don’t know how much more the policy will cost, or if it will continue to be available at all.

We purchased two dairy goats last year, with the intent of getting a licensed milking parlor and licensed milk room by the time they kid this spring. We will have a neighbor with a licensed cheese room make the cheese. It will cost some money for the milking parlor and milk room, but we will get support from the state to make sure we provide adequate facilities, as well as ongoing testing to insure that we are providing a safe product. That will protect both our farm business and our friend’s cheese making business from liability, which is important for any business.

What really bothers me about this bill is the potential for how it can hurt existing businesses. I have many friends who have spent the money to build licensed facilities to be able to sell raw milk. If the rules are relaxed now, it seems to me to be unfair competition – farmers who are already in the market had to follow the rules, but now others will not have to, while existing businesses continue to pay off loans on the facilities they built to meet the regulations.

Rules about safety are not a bad thing. Imagine if I built cars in my barn instead of raising dairy goats, and had cars for sale with no seat belts, bumpers, or crash testing and people could just come to my farm and by the cars and use them on the road. I think I would be breaking some federal safety laws, and I don’t think that anyone would support my “right” to sell untested cars. I don’t see why safe milk is any different. Consumer safety is a good thing for government to do.

Our primary business is growing vegetables. Last year we had a customer ask if our spinach was safe. The first big spinach contamination happened in spinach grown in California in 2006, and our spinach sales at the farmers’ market dropped off dramatically. Eight years and several outbreaks later we still get questions about the safety of our spinach, even though NONE of the e. coli outbreaks happened on spinach grown in Maine.

The local food movement is new and should be handled carefully. Those of us who are in it are in it together, and we need to think collectively about protecting our businesses from liability and bad press, as well as protecting the safety of our customers. If we scare away the customers, we’ll all be out of business.

Lisa Turner