

Below is my testimony to the Ag committee on April 6th 2021 on LD 574 (An Act to Clarify the Maine Food Sovereignty Act)
It applies the same to LD 1823 or LD 1947 (An Act to Amend the Maine Food Sovereignty Act) (May 22, 2023).

My name is Jean Koons and with my husband Peter, I own and operate Kennebec Cheesery- a farmstead goat dairy and cheese operation in Sidney Maine.

We have been licensed since 2008 and sell our cheese and yoghurt by retail at Farmers Markets and wholesale through CSA's, stores and distributors. We strongly feel that licensing and product testing is a must for our expanding artisan cheese industry in Maine.

Milk is an incredibly nutritious substance, for both us and microbes. I have always been thankful when the state testing has detected an issue with our products before it develops into a larger problem. I am sure that most Maine dairies and cheesemakers have had microbial problems surface and see the state testing lab as a real help to our industry.

Dairy animals produce a lot of manure and E.Coli, Listeria, Champylobactor and Salmonella are forever present. Infants, pregnant women, the aged and immune compromised are at risk from these food-borne pathogens. In 2017, 8 people in the North East were hospitalized and 2 died from Listeria tainted cheese from a small NY creamery. Two 10 month old infants were hospitalized in Tennessee in 2022 with kidney failure from E.Coli contamination of raw milk from a cow share program.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7217a4.htm>

The costs of licensing and testing in Maine are minimal. The inspectors are informative and helpful.

It has taken years to gain the confidence of Maine consumers to trust buying local foods at either Farmers' Markets, farm stands and other retail outlets and our concern is that one incidence of a food-borne illness will destroy that hard-earned trust. This act removes all oversight of production- by both consumer and State and increases the probability that tainted dairy products will reach the public. Such an event would be catastrophic to our small business and the growing local food movement.

We urge this committee to vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS on LD 1947.

- We object specifically to pg 1, Definition 1. Direct producer-to-consumer transaction- the removal of “at the site of production...”
- Sec 6 283-A. Advancement of food sovereignty principles paragraph “The Legislature finds that advancingwill further the preservation of rural life... Is there any evidence for this statement?
- During the 2021 testimony against the Food Sovereignty expansion (LD 574) it was obvious that many of the representatives on the committee did not realize that there are no restrictions to selling vegetables, apples, foraged foods etc.
- The state is not going after bake sales and church suppers as folks understand where those have been produced and accept the risk. The Dept of Ag. Conservation and Forestry oversees the licensing for home kitchens and dairy processors, and we wish for more help with testing, not less! The public that is buying these foods has to trust that there has been basic food safety oversight.
- Our fear is that the FDA will come and shut us down if Maine is not going to be responsible for food safety regulations, just as they threatened to do when meat products were included in LD 574.

Jean and Peter Koons