

October 23, 2009

Texas Department of State Health Services
1100 West 49th Street
Austin, Texas 78756-3199

Dear Council Members:

The undersigned organizations represent farmers and consumers across the State of Texas. On their behalf, we urge the Texas Department of State Health Services to amend the Grade A Raw for Retail regulations to remove the restriction that sales of Grade A raw milk must be “at the point of production.” This change would allow Grade A licensed farmers to deliver product to their customers at their homes, farmers markets, and other locations. We propose that the revised regulations include a provision that the milk be kept at a safe temperature during transport and that it be clearly labeled as unpasteurized dairy.

Our proposed change is narrowly tailored to address the marketing barrier created by the current restriction on the location of sales. We are *not* recommending any changes to the extensive regulations placed on Grade A producers that address health and safety concerns. Moreover, under our proposal, the sales would remain direct farm-to-consumer (i.e. no wholesale sales). The direct farm-to-consumer nature of the transactions continues to ensure that raw dairy is only available to those who intentionally seek it out and that they know their source.

Our proposal will not reduce the safety of raw dairy. To the contrary, by ensuring that raw dairy is kept at a safe temperature during transport from the mostly rural farms to the population centers, the recommendation *improves* food safety. Moreover, by having the farmer make a single trip to serve multiple customers, rather than having each customer drive to the farm, the proposal would significantly reduce the vehicle miles involved in these transactions. This in turn will benefit air quality, traffic congestion, and public safety, while also improving the biosecurity of the farms. The change would also allow the elderly, disabled, and others who are unable to travel to obtain raw milk if they so choose. Lastly, direct farm-to-consumer sales of raw milk can mean the difference between a net loss on a farm and the ability to provide a reasonable income for the farm family. By promoting local sales, raw milk can significantly benefit rural economies.

Raw dairy is often an unfamiliar issue for many people. For that reason, we are providing a fact sheet that highlights the existing regulations, the economic aspects, and some of the safety and health benefits of raw dairy. This packet also includes samples of letters, drawn from the more than 450 letters we have received to date, from Texans supporting improved access to raw dairy.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund
Slow Food—Austin
Slow Food—Dallas
Sustainable Food Center
Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Weston A. Price Foundation

