

TESTIMONY FOR HB 1255 – Definition of Milk

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Ag Committee,

My name is LeAnn Harner and I operate a small goat dairy 15 miles northwest of Mandan in Oliver County. I'm sorry I can't be with you in person today to thank Representative Holle and the other sponsors for being willing to recognize all the four-legged, hooved mammals as producers of milk. When you look at that list of species, I believe you'll agree that we humans love our milk.

The 2017 Census on Agriculture reports in 2017 there were 164 farms in North Dakota with a total of 1,849 dairy goats. (I know of at least one producer who also had dairy sheep, though I'm not sure she's still in business.) While the vast majority of these goats feed bum lambs, calves, or foals, many producers also use the milk for their families.

In the past, North Dakota has had commercial goat dairies and processors to purchase goat milk. Sadly, with the demise of so many processors, that avenue isn't available for goat owners right now. Instead, those of us interested in providing milk to the public are using the shared animal ownership law. Our customers purchase a share in one of our dairy goats, then pays us a boarding fee for their share of the animal. It's been a great way to encourage people to raise dairy goats and spend the many hours it takes to care for and provide a product.

A share program allows a producer to get familiar with raising goats and with the dairy lifestyle – because it is a lifestyle. Milking twice a day, every day, is a challenge, especially if you are the sole milkmaid in the family. For those of us who love this life, selling shares is a great way to get our feet wet in the industry and decide if it is feasible to take the next step into a commercial dairy and processing unit.

People choose goat milk for a variety of reasons. First, the fat molecules in goat milk are one-fifth the size of fat molecules in cow milk. This gives raw goat milk a lightly sweet, smooth texture with the same mouth feel of homogenized milk. Good milk, kept in glass or stainless steel containers, should have no hint of "goatiness." One of the reasons I helped found the Dakota Goat Association was to provide information to goat owners on raising goats and proper handling of milk. We've held Dairy Days, with tours of a dairy operation and management discussions, cheesemaking classes and Dairy Herd Improvement Association milk testing classes.

I hope you will give favorable consideration to HB 1255.