

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1131 – Raw Milk Products Bill

LeAnn Harner  
701-516-0707  
[goat@harnerfarm.net](mailto:goat@harnerfarm.net)  
Oliver County

My name is LeAnn Harner. I operate a small goat dairy, mostly as a share program, 25 miles northwest of here in Oliver County and am proud to support HB 1131. There is an increasing demand for raw milk products, especially from consumers who have moved here from raw milk states. Many of us have waiting lists.

**This legislation is important because dairy products are a vital source of nutrition.** Raw milk products have enzymes that make them easier to digest than pasteurized products. There are many people seeking goat milk products in particular because they are allergic to the proteins in cow's milk. Yet we don't have any commercial goat dairies in the state or any processors willing to handle goat milk products. **Homestead production is the only way we can help these families obtain yogurt and cheese.** We can do this safely and have proven it as part of our share programs.

**People choose goat milk products for a variety of reasons, but most start this journey because they have trouble digesting commercial dairy products.** The fat globules in goat milk are one-fifth the size of those in cow's milk. This gives raw goat milk a very smooth texture with the same mouth feel of homogenized milk without that process. Good goat milk from healthy goats, handled properly and kept in stainless steel or glass containers, should have no taste of "goatiness." **Raw milk and raw milk products from a good farm tastes and smells completely different from what you can find in stores.** For those of us who are cheese aficionados, every farm produces a slightly different taste of cheese, due to what the animal is consuming. It's fun to compare.

**How many foods do you eat that contain cheese?** Now imagine you have a child who can't consume cheese. How many foods are denied them? A world without pizza or lasagna or cheeseburgers would be pretty strange to most of us. When I convert a family's milk to cheddar cheese and they can all sit down to a meal together without concern that Johnny has to pick off the dairy, it's a true blessing. That's what this bill does.

**Our customers are often very educated** about the product. **Organizations** like the Weston A. Price Foundation, Farm-To-Consumer-Legal-Defense-Fund and the Raw Milk Institute do a good job educating consumers and dairy owners about safe handling of raw milk and dairy products; producing books and providing websites like RealMilk.com.

**Most dairy owners producing raw milk products consume their own products every day.** We constantly monitor our products and animals. Through the Dakota Goat Association we've provided information on raising healthy goats and proper handling of milk in newsletters and in special classes and conference sessions. We've held Dairy Days, milk testing and cheese classes. The last couple of years, we've made a concerted effort to invite people with small cow dairies to join our events as we discuss hand milking versus mechanical milkers, cooling methods and testing for disease.

**Foodborne illness is always a possibility** with any food item. The same nutrients that nourish our bodies also feed bacteria that cause illness. I have the foodborne illness reports from the Department of Health for 1988-2022. While many of the illness-causing food items are never identified, in over three decades of reports, only 12 people became ill from suspected raw milk. In that same time period, 24 people became ill from contaminated water. You can see the report here: <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/DOH%20Legacy/NDEntericDxOutbreaks1988-2022.pdf>

When **pasteurization of milk** first became normal, we didn't have the same handling techniques and certainly not reliable refrigeration. While people in town, who had milk transported to them in unrefrigerated trucks and stored in various ways, got sick from unpasteurized milk, those in the country, who were close to the dairy animals and understood the handling were healthy. We've learned a lot about disease transmission from animal to humans and have a variety of testing options not available in the earlier part of the last century. Times have changed. So should our laws.

**Ultimately, all the inspections, regulations and testing in the world can't make a food 100% safe.** We're "harvesting" our product every day. We as producers have to do our very best to produce a safe, healthy product. We believe we've shown the raw milk law is a responsibility we take seriously. It is our risk. We're not asking you to let us feed the world. **Instead, we want the opportunity to feed local people products they desire and may need for their own health.**