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Statement on the Expansion of Raw Milk Sales
House Agriculture Committee
Thursday, March 19, 2015

Every veterinarian in the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) takes seriously the veterinary oath to "use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through ... the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge." We feel it is imperative that you are aware of the conclusions of a recent study concerning raw milk availability and disease outbreaks.

In January 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a study that looked at not only disease outbreaks due to raw milk occurring between 2007 and 2012, but also at the legal status of raw milk sales during that time period. Below is a summary of the key findings of the study.¹

- From 2007-2009, 30 disease outbreaks in the United States were linked to consumption of raw milk.
- From 2010-2012, that number had increased by 70% - to 51 outbreaks.
- The number of Campylobacter infections (the most common pathogen in raw milk) nearly doubled from 2007 to 2012. E. coli & Salmonella caused the nearly all the remaining infections.
- The average number of disease outbreaks each year from 2007-2012 was 4 times higher than had been seen from 1993-2006.
- Children were disproportionately affected: 38% of Salmonella victims and 28% of E. coli victims were under 4 years of age.

During this same six year period of increasing disease outbreaks, the number of states which allowed the sale of raw milk increased from 22 to 30. Additionally, states allowing the acquisition of raw milk through cow shares increased from five to ten. The study noted that 81% of the outbreaks occurred in states in which the sale of raw milk is legal. The concurrent rise in disease rates and availability of raw milk appears to be strongly correlated.

In Vermont, consumers, legislators, and even Governor Shumlin have expressed confidence in the fact that the law requires that raw milk vendors offer a farm tour to new customers. Unfortunately, the pathogens in raw milk that most commonly cause disease, e.g. Campylobacter and E. coli, live as normal inhabitants of the cow's intestinal system and cause absolutely no signs of disease in the cow.

The evidence is clear and incontrovertible that raw milk not only can but does cause disease. In order to safeguard public health, farm inspection, milk quality testing, and animal health testing provide the best means of oversight. Such oversight is similar to that required for producers whose milk is shipped to creameries. It is important that raw milk vendors in Vermont be able to demonstrate that each and every one of them has totally complied with such testing. Any further relaxation of testing standards or any omission of testing could be detrimental to the health of consumers. Disease outbreaks would be damaging to Vermont's dairy industry as a whole.

(continued)

¹Mungai EA, Behravesh CB, Gould LH. Increased outbreaks associated with nonpasteurized milk, United States, 2007–2012. *Emerg Infect Dis* [Internet]. 2015 Jan [date cited]. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid2101.140447>

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As practicing veterinarians, we feel we have already seen lack of compliance with regard to animal health testing and farm signage among raw milk producers. The production of a wholesome, nutritious food such as milk should be taken seriously and with all due care. The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association urges you to not consider any legislation that would relax the standards currently in place regarding milk quality and animal health for raw milk producers.