

January 28, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Committee:

My name is Laura Ginsburg, and I am the owner of The Golden Yoke Farm and Creamery in Saint Ignatius. I have many years of working in the dairy industry, on farms in Vermont and Montana, wrote my master's thesis on Montana dairy policy, and received a Fulbright to study dairy policy in New Zealand during 2014.

While HB-245 does have its merits, it also raises some concerns. I have three primary issues with the bill as it is currently written.

First, the number of animals allowed is excessive under what is being called a small herd exemption. For example, my cows, who eat primarily pasture, produce upwards of 5 gallons of milk per day. If I were to milk 15 cows, I could produce 75 gallons per day or 525 gallons per week.

Second: the permit fee for services rendered is too low. Raw milk producers can easily sell their milk for \$8 a gallon or higher. A quick search on Craigslist shows that this is already happening in Montana. With my 15 cows making 525 gallons per week, my small herd exemption could gross \$4200 per week, or \$180,600 for an industry standard 305 day lactation. That is not a small herd; that is a dairy business and should be licensed and inspected as such, just like all the other dairy producers in the state. Raw milk producers should carry the burden of paying for the work the Department of Livestock is being asked to take on, it should in no way fall on the shoulders of the Grade A producers who already pay significant sums so that they can stay in operation.

Third: Production of processed raw milk items adds another layer of complexity and cost to this bill. Raw milk products are not low risk; every time raw milk is handled and brought above 45 degrees, the chance of contamination is increased. Creameries in this state, such as Kalispell Creamery and Lifeline Dairy, pay inspection and operational fees in order to sell products. Small herd exemption permit holders should be no different.

I strongly recommend the following changes:

-Reduce animal numbers to no more than seven cows or 15 sheep or goats. During the writing of this bill I suggested two levels of management to Representative Ballance, which many people involved with raw milk support. One level, with no more than three cows, would be totally exempt under a family cow permit. People with 4 to 7 cows could apply for the small herd exemption as described in this bill.

-Increase permit fees to reflect the actual cost to the Department of Livestock. As a dairy producer who is interested in selling raw milk, I would gladly pay up to \$1000 per year if it covered the cost of the services I would be receiving.

-Remove the ability to sell processed products unless it is done in a certified and inspected facility.

Montana needs a good raw milk law that balances the concerns of public health, what raw milk producers and consumers want, and the involvement of the Department of Livestock. I urge the committee to make some changes to HB-245, and give Montanans a bill that provides safe access to raw milk.

Thank you.

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