

WISCONSIN CAMPYLOBACTER OUTBREAK

At the Board of Health meeting on March 17, 2004, when the hearing on the proposed raw milk regulation was presented by Patti Klocker, Ms. Klocker was asked why the raw milk matter was being considered by the Department staff at this time. She reported that it was because of an outbreak of illness attributed to raw milk in Wisconsin. When asked exactly what the outbreak was she could not recall.. She was asked to provide the Board with the details. The outbreak was a campylobacter jejuni outbreak. It was reported to have been caused by raw milk. It was not. The actual facts are reported in the following:

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WISCONSIN CAMPYLOBACTER OUTBREAK FALSELY BLAMED ON RAW MILK

July 14, 2002—Public officials have falsely blamed an outbreak of Campylobacter jejuni, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps and fever in hundreds of people, on the consumption of raw milk obtained in a Wisconsin cow-share program.

According to a report issued by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and accepted without further investigation by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 70 of 75 persons confirmed with the illness drank unpasteurized milk from Clearview Acres Farm in Sawyer County. Clearview Acres disputes the official numbers, citing widespread cases of illness in Sawyer and adjoining counties. Independent reports gleaned from emergency room nurses estimate that campylobacter infection afflicted as many as 800 individuals--most of whom did not drink raw milk--throughout Northwest Wisconsin during the 12 weeks following November 10, 2001. Reports of illness continued for eight weeks after provision of raw milk to cow-share holders had ceased.

Clearview owners report that only 24 of 385 cow-share owners became ill--8 confirmed cases and 16 probable family members of the 8 confirmed. Most had consumed hamburger at a local restaurant. No illness occurred in the remaining 361 individuals consuming raw milk from Clearview Acres farm.

The discrepancy in government figures and those of Clearview Acres is due to interview tactics of local officials. Afflicted individuals admitted to Howard Area Memorial Hospital, serving Sawyer County, were questioned as to whether they drank raw milk. Medical personnel only tested those who had consumed raw milk. All others were given Cipro sent home with out further investigation. Reports of illness in other hospitals were ignored.

Clearview Acres is a Grade A dairy with an excellent history of cleanliness. In October 2001, Clearview Acres received the second highest rating of all farms receiving federal inspection. The rating was 99 out of a possible 100. The dairy regularly tests its milk for presence of pathogens. All tests, including those for campylobacter, have been negative.

Clearview Acres disputes DATCP claims that a test for campylobacter in State laboratories came back positive. Clearview Acres's requests for additional, properly performed tests were refused.

The Clearview Acres cow-share program began in June of 2000, with the blessings of DATCP, which suggested a format used by another state-authorized cow-share in Wisconsin. However, Clearview owners Gleta Martin and Tim Wightman were not satisfied with the two-page contract that DATCP suggested, finding that it did not contain enough provisions for testing and safety. Martin and Wightman revised the contract to allow for greater safety protocols and their program was soon supplying milk to 300 individuals.

Documents released in the court case involving Clearview Acres indicate that the state instituted an undercover operation shortly after the cow-share program began, with the express purpose of shutting down the operation. When state tests of Clearview Acres milk consistently came up negative, the state attempted to take away the farm's Grade A permit, but was stymied for lack of jurisdiction. Finally, DATCP blamed Clearview Acres milk on the local campylobacter outbreak and issued a cease-and-desist order.

Similar undercover operations and deceitful practices have been used against other raw milk dairies, notably Altadena and Steuve's dairies in California. Although there were no cases of illness caused by Altadena and Steuve's milk, the high cost of legal defense eventually prevented these dairies from supplying the product. However, raw milk, now supplied by two other dairies, continues to be sold in stores in California without reports of illness. During the same period, numerous outbreaks of foodborne illness have been caused by pasteurized milk, causing thousands of cases of illness and several deaths.

Many individuals seek out raw milk because of its health benefits, and because they are unable to tolerate commercial pasteurized milk. During the 1930s and 1940s, health officials recommended clean, certified raw milk as the ideal food for babies and growing children. A diet composed exclusively of raw milk was used with excellent results to treat a variety of diseases including cancer at the Mayo Clinic during the 1920s and has been used throughout Europe up to the present time. Studies have shown that raw milk is superior to pasteurized milk in preventing tooth decay, asthma, allergies, influenza and serious diseases like tuberculosis.

Farmers are turning to cow-share and direct milk sales as a way to save the family farm. In Wisconsin, four dairy farms per day go out of business, due to rising costs and reduced revenues for liquid milk. Consolidation in the dairy industry has allowed the major processors to cut payments to farmers, forcing many into bankruptcy. Cow-share programs are used in states where direct sales of raw milk is illegal. Such contractual arrangements, similar to those for bulls or race horses, are guaranteed by the US constitution.

For further information, see www.realmilk.com or contact the Weston A. Price Foundation at (202) 333-HEAL.

**A Campaign for Real Milk is a project of The Weston A. Price Foundation
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