

Oldways Cheese Coalition Commends FDA for Reevaluating Raw Milk Cheese Criteria

BOSTON, MA (Feb. 9, 2016) — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Feb. 8 that it will reevaluate its controversial policy for testing and limiting nontoxic microorganisms in raw milk cheese. This comes after a year of growing concerns over regulatory efforts threatening raw milk cheese production. The FDA's current policy requires both pasteurized and raw milk cheeses to contain no more than 10 MPN/g non-toxicogenic *E. coli*. ("Most *E. coli* are harmless and actually are an important part of a healthy human intestinal tract," according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Source here.](#))

The [Oldways Cheese Coalition](#) (OCC) commends the FDA for responding to widespread consumer concerns, which the OCC has gathered and communicated to the FDA and legislators. The OCC also supports the FDA's recognition of artisanal cheesemakers expressed in its statement, and for its willingness to review the growing scientific body of evidence on the benefits of raw milk cheese.

When the FDA requested comments and scientific data on raw milk cheese in August 2015, the OCC worried this action suggested a possible hardening in policy for this artisanal product. The Cheese Coalition immediately took action. With support from its members and partners, the OCC conducted a first-of-its-kind national survey and partnered with researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to draw conclusions from the information generated to submit comments to the FDA. The 2015 Raw Milk Cheese Consumption and Attitudes Survey found that **90 percent of cheese lovers in the U.S. believe they should be able to choose raw milk cheese, and more than 50 percent of cheese lovers prefer raw milk cheeses and purchase them regularly.** [See complete survey results and infographic here.](#)

The OCC followed its comments to the FDA with a [Petition to Protect Raw Milk Cheese](#) which was coordinated with cheesemakers and gathered **3,470 signatures** and **more than 1,700 individual comments**. The petition supported a [letter](#) sent to Michael Taylor, Deputy Commissioner for Foods and Veterinary Medicine at the FDA, from the Vermont Congressional Delegation and other U.S. Senators and Representatives. The letter was signed by 24 members of Congress and submitted on December 3, 2015 to the FDA.

In a final action, the Oldways Cheese Coalition partnered with the Massachusetts Cheese Guild in January 2016 to send the MA Congressional Delegation a request for clarification from the FDA on its new standard of nontoxic microorganisms. As the FDA's February 8 announcement

demonstrates, the efforts of the OCC and many others who care about traditional cheeses are successfully educating elected officials and regulators alike on issues affecting traditional cheesemakers and consumer rights.

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The Oldways Cheese Coalition is a strong proponent of raw milk (unpasteurized) cheese, advocating for consumers' right to decide whether or not to consume raw milk cheese, and for access to resources needed to make an educated decision. Join the Oldways Cheese Coalition to celebrate Raw Milk Cheese Appreciation Day on April 16, 2016. Learn more at oldwayscheese.org; learn about food and nutrition nonprofit Oldways at oldwayspt.org.

Contact: Ashley Owen, Oldways PR & Media Manager: ashley@oldwayspt.org, (617) 896-4888

