



RURAL VERMONT

RAW MILK 101: WHAT CONSUMERS NEED TO KNOW

What is raw milk? Raw milk is not pasteurized and not homogenized like most milk available in grocery stores – it's completely unprocessed and natural. If harvested with care from clean, healthy animals, it is not only safe, it's a whole, nourishing, living food.

What's the story behind widespread pasteurization and the bias against raw milk? Around the beginning of the 20th century, industrial-scale dairy farms associated with alcohol distilleries started to appear in major cities. These were large, dirty factories where cows were confined in filthy conditions and fed only "swill," the hot acidic byproducts of distilled grain used in producing alcoholic beverages. Workers in these dairies, often sick themselves, sometimes contaminated the milk with human diseases. This "swill" milk was implicated in human illness and death, especially among children. Instead of cleaning up or regulating these dairies to ensure the safe production of milk, widespread pasteurization kept low cost, low quality milk on the market. Raw milk has been stigmatized by regulatory authorities ever since.

What's the deal with raw milk in Vermont? For almost fifteen years, Rural Vermont has been working with an extensive network of farmers and activists to advocate for common-sense, scale-appropriate regulations and laws governing the production and sale of raw milk. While it is legal to sell and buy raw milk in Vermont, there is an extensive and quite onerous list of standards and requirements that farmers are expected to meet, and that impact customers' ability to access raw milk.

The good news is that Rural Vermont has successfully advocated for a number of meaningful improvements to the raw milk law, the most recent of which went into effect On July 1, 2019.

Tier 1 & 2 Raw Milk Producers:

- The warning sign (for display at the farm and at farmers' markets) is reduced in size to 8.5 x 11 inches.
- The language on the sign has been modified to "Unpasteurized (Raw) Milk. Keep Refrigerated. Consuming raw unpasteurized milk may cause illness, particularly in children, seniors, persons with weakened immune systems, and pregnant women."
NOTE: The amended raw milk law requires farmers to display the sign created by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture. The "official" sign is available as a printable PDF file, downloadable from their website. The sign must be displayed in a manner that is prominent and easily readable by customers at all times.
- The required wording on the raw milk label has been changed to the same as the language on the sign.
- The law clarifies that Tier 1 producers can choose to meet the additional requirements for Tier 2 producers in order to sell or deliver to customers' homes and farmers' markets.

Tier 2 Raw Milk Producers:

- Tier 2 producers may sell directly to customers at farmers' markets. This eliminates the previous requirement that milk be pre-sold and only delivered to farmers' markets.
NOTE: All raw milk producers have to collect the complete contact information for their farmers' market customers and keep a record of the transaction as currently required by law.
- Tier 2 producers are required to verbally inform customers at a farmers' market to keep the milk they purchase cold (at 40 degrees or lower) until it is refrigerated.
- Tier 2 producers still have to notify the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets at which farmers' markets they will be delivering or selling their milk.

While this is exciting progress, there is still more work to be done! Many provisions of the raw milk law still create economic hardship and logistical nightmares for the farmer, as well as unrealistic and unworkable expectations of the customer. Here are a few examples:

- Most customers are driving significant distances to the farm each week, and customers can only pick up their own milk. **Customers can't share the responsibility of milk pick up with neighbors headed to the same farm in the same week!**
- Farmers offering home delivery must deliver to each customer's home. **No delivery to central drop-off locations!**
- Only fluid milk can be sold. **No raw value-added products (i.e. yogurt, butter, cheese, cream, etc.)!**



What can raw milk customers do to advocate for further improvements to the law? Rural Vermont continues to build a diverse, informed, and committed network of farmers and activists who support common-sense laws for raw milk producers and increased options and access for their customers.

You can stand by your farmer and stand with Rural Vermont when you:

- **Become a Rural Vermont member!** Membership dues support Rural Vermont's work to expose, educate, and organize around these and other unfair, absurd, and crippling economic policies. Dues begin at \$35 and are sliding scale – we also have a Working Member Program to keep membership accessible to all.
- **Join Rural Vermont's community of activists!** Our extensive network of citizen advocates act in solidarity at strategic moments to write letters to the editor, place calls to elected officials, attend hearings and/or testify at the State House, recruit other activists with urgent calls to action, etc.
- **Make a contribution to Rural Vermont!** Rural Vermont has a reputation for getting a lot done on a slim budget, so you can be confident that when you make an investment in Rural Vermont, your dollars will go a long way toward removing barriers that limit access to farm fresh foods.



Art by Phil Herbison

MORE PEOPLE + MORE RESOURCES = MORE GRASSROOTS POWER!



Where can I buy raw milk? The majority of the 100+ farms selling raw milk are permitted to sell from the farm only. Chances are good that someone in your area has milk for sale. You can find out who by asking your farmer neighbors. You can also contact Rural Vermont for suggestions – we gather information from farmers who let us know they have raw milk for sale. Rural Vermont does not make any recommendations on where to purchase raw milk.

What do I need to know about handling raw milk?

Always keep your milk cool (40 degrees or lower). Bring a cooler with ice to store your milk in transit, and then keep it in the main part of the refrigerator (not on the door). Don't let your milk sit outside the fridge.

- Keep in mind that raw milk is a rich, creamy and nutritionally dense food. As with any unfamiliar food, it's a good idea to start slowly, consuming small amounts so your digestive system has time to adjust.

- If the arrangement with your farmer requires that you provide clean jars, we recommend rinsing them first in cold water, then washing them with hot, soapy water and rinsing thoroughly. Remember – a dirty jar can contaminate even the cleanest milk!

How can I be a good customer?

- Find out the process for buying milk. Each farmer has a slightly different arrangement with their customers. Some questions to ask might be: Is pickup at the farm? Should I bring my own jars? What day/time should I pick up my milk? Where will the milk be stored? Do I pay weekly or monthly?



- Be reliable, regular, and respectful. Be considerate of the farmer's time by showing up when you say you will, purchase your milk on a regular basis, and be respectful of the property, the animals, and the farmer.
- Respect the law! Provide your contact info to the farmer, fill out the required transaction record, etc. And don't put your farmer in an uncomfortable position by asking them to act outside the law because it would be more convenient, less expensive, or easier for you.
- Ask questions if you want more information. Get to know the farmer, the farm, the animals, and how the farm and animals are managed.
- **And lastly, support your farmer by supporting Rural Vermont!**