

The health benefits of raw milk have been widely documented. Yet in Humboldt County farmers and retail stores can't sell it, and consumers can't buy it. On the other hand we can drive to Del Norte, Shasta and Mendocino or any other county in California except Trinity and Kings and legally purchase certified raw milk. My question is why?

Humans drank raw milk long before the pasteurization process began. Most people don't know that raw organic milk from grass-fed animals was actually used as a medicine in the 1920's. The Mayo Foundation used a diet of raw milk as a remedy for heart failure, diabetes, kidney disease, chronic fatigue and obesity. Today, in Germany, successful raw milk therapy is provided in many hospitals.

The fuss about raw milk has to do with pathogens – organisms that can cause diseases such as Salmonella. But whether or not raw milk carries pathogens depends totally on the way the milk is produced, how the animals are fed, and the care that's taken to keep the milk clean during production.

An entire section of the US Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) website is devoted to warning Americans about the "dangers" of raw milk. There it states that more than 1,500 people in the US became sick from raw milk from 1993 to 2006.

This is just over 115 people per year, on average... Meanwhile, *other* foods are killing and sickening millions. According to the CDC, foodborne diseases sicken 48 million people each year, including 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths.

Is it possible to get sick from drinking raw milk? Yes! But it's also possible to get sick from eating a salad, a cheeseburger, pasteurized milk or a bowl of fruit. In fact, you're far more likely to be infected with a foodborne illness when eating any number of foods other than high-quality certified raw milk. Today, green leafy vegetables are the most frequent cause of food-borne illness in the United States.

Many consumers in Humboldt County want to buy fresh unpasteurized milk and county regulations shouldn't get between them and the farmer or retailer who wants to sell it. Given how many national food scares there have been involving large-scale producers, it just doesn't make sense to crack down on small, local farmers who are producing natural, raw milk or retailers who are meeting consumer demand and want to sell it. The enforcement of raw milk regulations in Humboldt County has been overzealous and needs to be reined in.

It has always bothered me that our county supervisors voted on January 11, 2011 to maintain the status quo and keep a half-century ban on raw milk in place. On the other hand their unanimous vote was essentially to take no action and any supervisor can revisit this issue if they choose. It is time to revisit this issue and get rid of this law that is stifling potential economic growth and consumer demand.