

The sale of raw milk in Humboldt has become an issue once again so what's the fuss about? Well, we have an interesting situation where more than 39 million Californians, who live in 55 of California's 58 counties, have easy access to licensed raw milk from stores and farmers' markets. You can drive up 101 from San Diego to Crescent City and legally buy licensed raw milk in every county along the way with one exception, Humboldt! Licensed raw milk is a legal, highly regulated product in the State of California.

All licensed raw milk can only be produced in approved, licensed dairies, which are monitored by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. They must have their own on-site creameries and the finished product must meet the same standards required of pasteurized Grade A milk. The rules that established the standards for licensed raw milk were put in place a decade ago by the state legislature.

Our local Health Department has a mindset that, alone, among all other foods, milk in its raw state should not be consumed by anyone, anytime, for any reason, period - end of discussion. The public health authorities believe that they are protecting us; they believe we should trade our right to choose to drink raw milk in exchange for government protection against the very small possibility of getting sick, and they believe this is a small price to pay. But when it comes to our health, we should be in charge, not local government officials. We're not a community that is used to being told what we can think and certainly not what we can eat or drink - especially if it is a legal product in the state.

The war against raw milk began early in the last century, about a hundred years ago, as a response to widespread illness and deaths from milk produced under incredibly inhumane and unsanitary conditions. As our knowledge about sanitation and animal husbandry

has improved, raw milk has become much safer. But the public health community continues to view raw milk as a mortal danger and treat it as if it were the same kind of threat it was a century ago. What I find really, really ironic is that when I visit my relatives in Europe I can purchase raw milk from a vending machine.

There are presently half a dozen dairies that are licensed by the State of California to sell raw milk for human consumption. One of them passes through here weekly on their way to Crescent City, after making deliveries to Ukiah's Natural Foods Co-op and the Mariposa Market in Willits. Local grocery stores, including Murphy's Markets, Wildberries, Chautauqua, North Coast Co-op and Eureka Natural Foods would also like to sell licensed raw milk to their customers. That represents 11 local stores, which is a pretty good indication that demand exists from Garberville to Trinidad. It seems to me that there is an economic opportunity waiting for the right local dairy. Oh, I almost forgot, that would be illegal in our county.