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March 2, 2026

Attn: Representative Susan R. Donovan, Chair, House Health and Human Services Committee and Committee Members

Testimony in Opposition to H 7924

An Act Relating to Food and Drugs- Milk Sanitation Code- Sanitation in Food Establishments
Before the House Health and Human Services Committee

Rhode Island Farm Bureau is an independent, non-governmental grassroots organization of farm families united to enhance and strengthen the lives of rural Americans, and to build strong, prosperous agricultural communities. Today our over 1000 members are not only large farmers and small farmers but also those engaged in agricultural industries, teachers of agriculture, and consumers.

Rhode Island Farm Bureau opposes H 7924 which would permit and legalize the sale of raw milk.

American Farm Bureau policy supports only pasteurized fluid milk being sold or distributed for human consumption. We take no issue with the production of raw milk or raw milk products for personal consumption or consumption by immediate family members, however, we do not support the sale of raw milk to the public. **As defined in this very Chapter, in 21-2-2.9, pasteurization exists to “destroy bacteria capable of transmitting disease to people.”** Without this step, those consuming raw milk could easily be exposed to these unhealthy bacteria.

In 2025, several raw milk outbreaks were reported in the US, with significant illness totals but no direct, widely reported fatalities, according to CDC and state health data. Major 2025 incidents included a California Salmonella outbreak (171 cases), a Florida E. coli outbreak, and Washington state E. coli infections tied to raw cheese.

- **California Salmonella Outbreak (July 2025):** 171 cases of Salmonella Typhimurium were linked to raw milk and cream from a single dairy, with 22 people hospitalized. This was one of the largest such outbreaks in recent U.S. history, impacting mainly children.
- **Florida E. coli Outbreak (August 2025):** At least 21 people fell ill, including E. coli cases, linked to raw milk from a single Florida dairy farm. Raw milk has not been heated to kill harmful bacteria. Like many states, Florida allows farms to sell raw milk as long as it is labeled as pet or animal food. The Florida Department of Health says this labeling limits regulation of sanitary practices on the farms that produce it. The number of people who were sickened by raw milk in this incident shows the label is not being followed.
- **Washington State E. coli (May/Dec 2025):** Multiple outbreaks of Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) were linked to raw milk and aged raw milk cheese, resulting in several hospitalizations.

- **In November 2025, the Illinois Dept of Public Health** identified an outbreak of eleven cases of Campylobacter infection that appear to be linked to consumption of raw milk from a common source; the producer is taking steps to notify customers and is cooperating with the investigation. Campylobacter is a bacteria that can cause diarrhea (which can be bloody), fever, and stomach cramps. In more severe cases, the infection can lead to irritable bowel syndrome, arthritis, and Guillain-Barré syndrome. IDPH recommends that anyone who has consumed raw milk and begins to exhibit those symptoms to contact their medical provider.
 - **Illinois raw milk rules** require testing for temperature, antibiotics, and certain signs that could indicate infection within the product. However, specific pathogen testing for germs like Campylobacter or other disease-causing agents like E. coli or salmonella is not required.

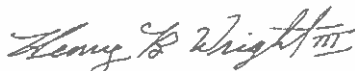
In March 2024, the USDA announced that 4 U.S. dairies had cattle that were infected with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Two years later, the USDA has confirmed infections in 1,088 dairy herds in 19 states, with the most recent detection being December 2025. Of the 71 confirmed total reported human cases of H5N1 HPAI in the United States, 41 are people who had exposure to infected dairy cows. In a September 2024 letter to Dairy Processors, the FDA and USDA again stated that they are confident that “pasteurization is effective at inactivating H5N1 in raw milk as it is for the pathogens against which we began pasteurizing raw milk 100 years ago. Based on the information currently available during this outbreak, our commercial milk supply is safe. We respectfully request that you consider educating your customers that the pasteurization process, used for decades to kill harmful pathogens, is also effective in inactivating H5N1 in raw milk”.

The cleanliness of a dairy and its animals does not guarantee the safety of its raw milk. Even dairy farms with very good safety practices can be affected. Because of these concerns, it is often recommended that producers avoid feeding raw (saleable or non-saleable) milk even to calves. Healthy animals can carry illness-causing germs, such as Brucella, Campylobacter, Cryptosporidium, E. coli, Listeria, and Salmonella, all of which can contaminate milk. Even if tests on a batch of a farm’s raw milk come back negative, it is no guarantee that the next batch of milk will be free of harmful germs. RI Farm Bureau supports small-scale pasteurization for small farms that wish to sell their own milk from the farm. State-level grants to support these small dairy farms’ efforts would be welcome to help this process.

We would be willing to consider this legislation/change at such time that the RI Dept of Health not only sets up an inspection program for raw milk, but requires TB and Brucellosis testing for dairy cows, and the equipment used at the farm is tested using the same guidelines any licensed RI milk producer shipping raw milk to a licensed producer must follow. Please see the attached list of guidelines from one of the large milk co-ops regarding what licensed dairy farms must adhere to ensure consumer safety and animal welfare. Other co-ops have similar if not the same standards.

Both Connecticut and Massachusetts allow for raw milk sales. Please see the attachment for an overview of these states' guidelines.

The Rhode Island Farm Bureau asks that you oppose **H 7924** to help preserve the safety of our RI food system and protect the health of those consuming milk in our state.



Henry B. Wright III
President, RI Farm Bureau