

Submitter: Melissa Ward

On Behalf  
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and  
Water

Measure: HB2616

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, and members of the committee,

My name is Melissa Ward and I'm excited to write in support of HB 2616.

As a responsible raw milk producer, I want to make sure that Oregon's dairy industry follows the best possible standards across the board, especially around raw milk. Unfortunately, Oregon's raw milk regulations are falling behind — it is time to revisit and upgrade our outdated raw milk laws.

Since the uncertainties in the food supply that were precipitated by the Covid -19 pandemic, people in Oregon have been reaching out to farmers such as myself to provide them with a fresh and local product that both nourishes them and connects them to the land. Nearly every day I get a phone call from someone asking if we can provide them with milk.

You heard opposing testimony from the Oregon Farm Bureau saying that they were in opposition to raw milk. However, their 2022 rule book rule 10.4100 states: " Raw milk production for sale should be regulated for food safety registration and inspection requirements. We oppose proposals that would require the pasteurization of all milk to be used in fluid or processed form." I believe that we are asking for requirements that meet that threshold in this bill.

Additionally, in December of 2022, the Wisconsin Farm Bureau (America's second highest producing dairy state after California) voted and changed their stance regarding raw milk deciding to support its sale with some regulation oversight.

If passed, HB 2616 will ensure that Oregon producers are able to meet the growing demands for raw milk in our state safely and effectively, by implementing nationally-recognized testing, safety and risk mitigation measures and giving cow dairies the same opportunities that goat and sheep dairies already have.

For licensed dairies, raw cow's milk is currently off the table. Oregon allows the retail sale of raw milk from sheep and goats, but not from cows — no other state makes this distinction in the retail market. It's time to fix this discrepancy and improve the safety, testing and training standards for raw milk production across the board — whether you're milking goats, sheep or cows.

For smaller licensed-exempt producers, HB 2616 offers critical upgrades as well. If passed, this legislation will give small cow dairies new possibilities to grow, expand their business and reach more consumers in this growing industry. HB 2616 will also allow small producers more flexibility in how they get their products to their consumers — eliminating the burdensome requirement that sales transactions take place on-site. These small, common-sense upgrades will help both Oregon's farmers and the customers they serve.

Allowing raw milk to be delivered to a drop point would help battle climate change and traffic on our rural roads. Currently, I am unable to sell milk off property. I live rurally, and many miles of commute are required in my community to access local raw milk. Taking my milk to a farmer's market could allow better access when people plan on coming to town for other things on farmer's market days.

A few years ago, Oregon voted to decriminalize hard drugs on our streets. Right or wrong, the fact remains that currently if I were to deliver cocaine to downtown Portland, I would not face any civil or criminal penalty but if I were to deliver a gallon of properly chilled raw milk to a farmer's market in Portland, I could face a hefty fine and jail time.

Oregon's raw milk policies are out of date and it's time for a change. This legislation will raise the raw milk standards in Oregon and ensure better transparency, access and accountability across the board.

I urge your support for HB 2616.

Thank you,

Melissa Ward