

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

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

As a responsible consumer, 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 Unfortunately, Oregon's raw milk regulations are falling behind — it is time to revisit and upgrade our outdated raw milk laws.

For years, I have been consuming raw milk in the free states of Washington and Alaska. When I came back to my home state of Oregon in 2020 I was thrilled to find a raw milk producer close to me so I could simultaneously continue eating nutrient dense food and support a local, environmentally conscious business. However, in December my farmers had to abruptly discontinue their sale of raw milk due to their farm insurance's refusal to cover their home and business for the sole reason that they were producing raw milk.

Last year I became pregnant and decided to pasteurize my raw milk (heating to 165 degrees), just to err on the side of caution while in a heightened state of vulnerability. This milk was a staple in my diet, and helped to keep me optimally nourished while gestating my baby. A day after my delivery my partner drove 20 miles (while I was still in the hospital!) to get our weekly milk share so I could guzzle down that fresh raw milk I needed to be in good nursing shape. This is how important their milk is to me. I looked forward to the time when I could introduce cow's milk to my baby, knowing that it would be the best possible milk available. While he was still young, I would again pasteurize the milk at home for my small child.

I understand the risks of raw milk for vulnerable populations, which is why I chose to home-pasteurize. I still knew that the product I was buying was substantially better than anything I could get in the store, because standards are so much higher when it comes to raw milk production. The consumer still has the option to pasteurize at home, without destroying the nutrient profile of their food. Politicians need to step in and protect our right to high quality local food our future generations depend on. It is not lost on me that in this beautiful state, hard drugs are legal and unenforced, while raw milk has been deemed the enemy.

Before I was pregnant I drank raw goat's milk. I switched to cow before conceiving because of the increased amount of folic acid present, an essential nutrient for fetal development.

What we need is *more* access to raw milk, not less. With the advent of higher quality in cleaning, processing, and raising cows there is a very small risk to consuming raw milk, especially if you are not in a vulnerable population. Our Oregon farmers are passionate, knowledgeable, and keep to the highest standards and we as the consumers are desperate for access to their beautiful product.

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.

As a consumer myself, I am thrilled to see this bill before your committee. If passed, this bill will help me continue to have access to the best possible food available to me and my family. If the last three years have taught us anything, it is that we need more of our goods and services produced close to home, and food is the most essential part of that.

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,
Gina Bono