

Connecticut State Grange

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE CONCERNING HOUSE BILL 6313, AN ACT CONCERNING RAW MILK

FEBRUARY 9, 2009

I am Gordon Gibson of Vernon, Legislative Director for the Connecticut State Grange. I am speaking today on behalf of the 4,000 Grange members throughout Connecticut partially in support and partially in opposition to House Bill 6313, An Act Concerning Raw Milk.

The Grange supports the provisions of House Bill 6313 that would require increased labeling of both the containers of raw milk and the cases in which the milk is displayed for sale. All consumers deserve to have clearly labeled products offered for sale so they can easily determine which products they want to purchase or avoid purchasing as the case may be. The retailers should take a lesson from history. When margarine, then known as "oleo margarine," first came on the market, retailers were required to post signs alerting the public that they were selling the oleo margarine so the public would not confuse it with butter. The retailers responded by prominently displaying signs that their store was a place where the public could buy this wonderful new product that cost much less than butter.

The Grange opposes restricting the sale of raw milk to only the farm where it is produced. The Department of Agriculture has advised us that the purpose of this proposed law is to make the milk traceable from cow to consumer. The raw milk that is sold through off farm retailers is sold primarily in smaller stores that cater to niche markets where the customers are frequently well known to the retailer. At least one retail store in Windham County is currently selling raw milk at prices between \$4.50 and \$5.00 per quart. Virtually no raw milk is offered for sale in large grocery stores where pasteurized milk is sold at prices per gallon comparable to what raw milk is being sold for in Windham County. The Grange agrees with the Department of Agriculture's desire to have a record of where the milk is sold from cow to consumer, but we believe this can easily be accomplished through the existing distribution and sales system. We see no reason to force the retail consumer to have to make an extra trip to the farm to purchase their milk, nor to place the burden on maintaining a retail sales room on the cost conscious farmer.

Section 2 of House Bill 6313 would require a significant amount of testing of both milk and fecal samples at the expense of the farmer. The Department of Agriculture has informed the Grange that they propose to request a modification of this section to reduce the amount of routine testing required unless a problem occurs and then require additional testing only at that particular farm. The Grange believes this is a reasonable compromise, but we would like to reserve further comment on this section until we see the proposed changes in the testing requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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