

Date: 7 May 2013

To: The Maine State Legislature Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
in the 126th Session of the Maine Legislature

RE: LD 1287 “An Act to Deregulate Face-to-Face Transactions Between the Public and Small Farms and Small Food Producers;”

and

LD 1282 “An Act to Help Farmers in Selling Raw Milk and Homemade Food Products”

Thank you for holding this hearing. I want to make sure you know that the Maine Cheese Guild opposes the adoption of these two bills primarily because it conflicts with our established Quality Statement (<http://www.mainecheeseguild.org/?p=328>), adopted and published in 2009, which reads:

The Maine Cheese Guild believes that cheese of the highest quality can be made only with a thorough and regularly refreshed knowledge of food safety.

The Maine Cheese Guild promotes and sponsors regular opportunities to learn about best practices for cheese making. The Guild also believes that the best way for professional* cheese makers to guarantee the quality of their product is by being appropriately licensed by the Maine Department of Agriculture, as only licensed cheese makers are legally allowed to sell cheese to the public, and only licensed cheese makers receive feedback from the dairy regulatory unit through regular testing for contamination and facility inspections. This feedback is critical, together with on-going education, in maintaining the high quality of award-winning Maine cheese.

* professional = selling cheese to the public

This year the Maine Cheese Guild is organizing or co-sponsoring several workshops devoted to elevating the cheese making skills and quality in this state, including a Sanitation Workshop being held on May 16th at the University of Maine at Orono campus. We have encouraged all of our membership to go, and anyone else who has expressed to us an interest in making quality cheese. However, this is the limit to what the Guild can do – create and offer opportunities for cheese makers, and then to encourage cheese makers to take advantage of those opportunities.

The Guild cannot inspect every cheese maker's facility at least once a year, and the Guild cannot test each cheese maker's water supply every year, the Guild cannot test product samples ten times a year, and the Guild cannot provide a consultant to work one-on-one with any person who is interested in making cheese commercially at the same cost to the producer as the Department of Agriculture currently provides these services. For many licensed cheese makers this licensing cost is as low as \$25/year. Ultimately only our state regulatory agency has the resources and the ability to do this important work. Work that, as our Quality Statement succinctly states, is necessary to help a cheese maker make good cheese and other dairy products.

In the Guild's opinion, if regulatory oversight were optional for commercial dairy processors, those commercial processors who chose not to take advantage of these important and economical resources risk lowering the overall quality of dairy products being sold in this state, which would reflect badly on

all dairy producers, not only those who chose to ignore all the services available when licensed. If Maine's reputation for making high quality cheese were harmed, that would adversely affect an entire industry that has been growing steadily over the past ten years.

The availability of high quality licensed raw milk in Maine has been a tremendous advantage to the Maine cheese and dairy processing industry. However, municipal efforts to allow for the sale of raw milk by un-licensed producers have put all Maine raw milk sales at risk. Over the past few years insurance companies have become less and less willing to extend business liability insurance to licensed raw milk producers. The continued efforts to exempt raw milk and other foods from licensing and state regulation calls into question the state's ability to regulate all food producers, including those who have been licensed, and could negatively impact insurance companies willingness to continue to insure any raw milk producers. Without business insurance, Maine's licensed raw milk producers will no longer be able to securely sell their product.

Quite simply put: the Guild is convinced that these bills are bad for Maine's dairy economy, and that the municipal adoption of similar legislation has already hurt Maine's dairy industry. Maine cheese makers -- and more importantly Maine agriculture -- cannot afford to lose more dairy farmers in this state.

--Eric Rector
President, Maine Cheese Guild
Monroe, Maine