

# Raw Milk in California's Humboldt County, Part 2

By Cindy Ashy

## A REVIEW OF PART 1

Humboldt County is one of only three counties in California that currently ban the sale and production of raw milk. More than twenty-five hundred Humboldt County citizens have signed a petition to rescind this ban. Moreover, many citizens took the issue directly to the Humboldt County supervisors, requesting it be placed on the agenda. When the issue of the raw milk ban came up, it drew a large crowd of people to the supervisory meetings on both August 24, 2010, and January 11, 2011. Many public comments were made and the majority of people strongly urged the supervisors to rescind the ban on raw milk. Raw milk advocates also put together a thick packet of educational materials about raw milk and submitted this to the Board of Supervisors. However, this packet has since disappeared from the public record.

Several of the larger dairy farmers in the county were vocally opposed to lifting the ban on raw milk. However, some of the Humboldt County dairy farmers and other entrepreneurs have expressed a strong interest in producing certified raw milk should the ban be lifted. One of them has spoken out publicly and has the knowledge and experience needed to get a certified raw milk dairy into production within six to eight months. The Humboldt County agricultural commissioner and several officials in the Humboldt County Health Department urged the supervisors to maintain the ban on raw milk. In the end, the supervisors voted to leave the ban in place but also publicly stated they were open to hearing more from the raw milk advocates.

After investigating the situation in more depth, it appears that the bankruptcy of Humboldt Creamery and the sale of the dairy at auction to Foster Farms, may have been the most important driving force behind the supervisors leaving the ban on raw milk in place, but the purported reasons given by the supervisors were "health concerns."

For more details on the forces behind maintaining the ban and the drive to rescind it, [see Part I in Wise Traditions, Fall 2015](#).

## TESTIMONIALS

It takes courage to stand in front of a crowded room in a public meeting and talk about the details of your own personal health issues, especially when your testimony is being televised to the entire community and video archived! In fact, most of us probably couldn't do it under these circumstances. Remarkably, however, this is exactly what several Humboldt County citizens did at the Humboldt County Supervisor meetings held August 24, 2010 and January 11, 2011. Each in his own way, these brave citizens described their long-time health battles and how drinking raw milk had helped them overcome them when nothing else, including traditional medicine, had helped.

Here are some of these compelling raw milk testimonials:

### NIEL GUNTON

“I’m not an activist or a representative of anybody. I’m just a consumer. I just want to make a couple of comments based on my own experience. My wife and I moved to Eureka last year from Medford, Oregon where I was able to obtain raw milk from a local farmer. And the reason I did that is I’ve had allergies my whole life, and particularly a post nasal drip which results in coughing and clearing my throat constantly, and it sounds silly, but it is actually quite a major impediment in your everyday life, when you’re having to do that. And I found for the first time when we moved to Medford that I was able to get raw milk. I had done some research and found out that (pasteurized) milk in general causes more mucus production, and during my research I found out about raw milk, and so I tried it, and lo, and behold, my allergies cleared up completely while I was on raw milk, and also my post nasal drip got much better. So, I’m just going from a purely pragmatic point of view since we moved down here whenever I try drinking even the organic local milk, I cannot sleep in my bed at night. I have to go sit up somewhere because if I lie down, the post nasal drip is so bad. And it is directly connected to (pasteurized) milk. I’ve not been able to buy raw milk since I have been here and that’s a fairly big impact on my life.”

## **DEEDRA THOMAS**

“About ten years ago, I lived up here for six years and I just moved back a year ago but I did spend four years in Michigan where I was introduced to raw milk. I’ve had ulcerous colitis for twenty years and one of the things I can’t have is (pasteurized) milk because I have the gas and the pain and all that and it aggravates the colitis. But when I drank raw milk I don’t have those problems. And also with all the people who are allergic to milk or lactose intolerant, it’s not necessarily the milk itself but the unnatural things that are being done to the milk or the cows that’s causing the problems...”

## **SUSAN MOSKALY**

“I’ve been living in Eureka since 2000. Raw milk came to my attention several years ago after becoming very very ill in 2002. I was eating the standard American diet and all of a sudden my digestive system just went haywire. I felt like I could not eat anything. It felt like my whole digestive system was coming to a halt. Whatever I ate I was allergic to. I was tired. I absolutely felt like I could not function anymore. I went to a million doctors. Nobody could figure out what was wrong with me. I spent thousands and thousands of dollars, had gall bladder surgery, nothing would help. Most people, when they get health problems where the traditional medical field can’t seem to help them, they start turning to other areas, and I started doing research on the Internet and I came across this raw milk movement, and I went, “hmmm.” People claimed to have had some wondrous results with their digestive systems so I did buy some (raw milk) from Organic Pastures (shipped in via UPS), and I tell you the truth, just like you probably, I was scared to death to drink any of that. I was absolutely scared to death to drink any of this raw milk. I’d take a little sip and say, “Oh my God.” I have to tell you when I started drinking (raw) milk, another reason I was scared is I used to get sick every time I would drink (pasteurized) milk. I would get constipated. I would get pains in my stomach. I would get gas. When I started drinking raw milk, none of this happened. And I have to tell you that since I added raw milk, and especially since I started seeing a doctor in San Francisco that actually prescribes raw milk, and I’ve added lots of probiotics eating pasture-fed raw egg yolks and other sources of probiotics like yogurt and sauerkraut, my digestion in the last four months has skyrocketed back to good health. It’s the best it has been in eight years.”

## **ALTERNATIVE HEALTH PRACTITIONERS SPOKE OUT TOO**

Traci Webb, an ayurvedic practitioner and director of the Northwest Institute of Ayurveda in Arcata: “As an ayurvedic practitioner, I have been prescribing raw milk since 2002 as use for medicinal food and this began in Southern California in Orange County where raw milk sale and purchase was allowed. I’ve seen amazing, and

what we might consider miraculous, benefits come from this very health promoting food. In Humboldt County I've been prescribing raw milk to clients on a daily basis. However, they have been having to purchase it out of the county, having it sent UPS to them for thirty dollars a gallon. This price is a little bit steep for some of these patients, especially since some of them are bed-ridden and disabled and aren't even employed currently, and they're relying on this food for their life and their well-being and their subsistence."

Dr. Scott H. Winkler, chiropractor in Arcata, Humboldt County, California: "I have been trained in what's been called alternative health but the difficulty with that is I think this is basic health as opposed to alternative health... one of the main problems with pasteurized and homogenized milk is it's basically a poison to the system."

In a 2015 interview, Dr. Winkler complained that people in Humboldt County were essentially being "forced" to buy pasteurized milk, and he described how it "messes up their biome." He again emphasized that pasteurized milk is a poison to the system and stated unequivocally that he would recommend raw milk to his patients if the ban on raw milk were lifted.

## **CITIZENS DEMAND FREEDOM OF CHOICE**

Many Humboldt County citizens have been very outspoken about the importance of being able to make their own decisions about what foods they consume. Here is what some of them said:

Kay Schaser of Eureka: "I wasn't even a raw milk drinker when this issue first surfaced. I got involved solely because I didn't think it was right for government to prevent people from drinking raw milk if they wanted to." Schaser goes on to describe how she has now learned about the health benefits of raw milk and then states: "I asked you in a previous statement if you would stop trying to protect me from myself. I'm a big girl and I can make my own decisions." Schaser received a hearty applause for this statement. In another meeting, Schaser stated, "Why would you want to continue standing in the way of your health-conscious constituents who simply want to legally drink milk of their choice? Some decisions are hard. This one is a no-brainer. Rescind the ordinance and move on."

Melissa Duey of Carlotta: "I'm a consumer and I do not want to be protected from myself. I find these regulations and statements offensive and demeaning."

Shelley Bjork also of Carlotta: "I would like to say that food choices are health choices, and I believe that the profit motive and the pressures that are on the agricultural industry are not always directing things in the best interest of the individual consumer."

Xandra Manns of Eureka first described how she had been drinking raw milk for decades and raised two kids on raw milk after reading an article about how pasteurization destroys the nutrients in milk. She then stated: "I was really disappointed when I moved to Humboldt and found I couldn't get raw milk, and I called a lot of the dairies to see if I could get raw milk from them. I found out they give their children raw milk to drink but we the public have to put up with pasteurized milk. I'm sure the county officials would just quake in their shoes if they saw what I do with raw milk. I feel like it's like any other food, like oysters or steak. We are allowed to buy these foods raw and do with them what we want. We can put raw beef in a dehydrator and make jerky. We are allowed to eat oysters raw or we can cook them. I mean, we're not stupid." In a private interview later, Manns described how she makes yogurt and kefir from raw milk where the only source of heat is a heating pad.

Liz Lux said: "I've done more research on raw milk than anyone I know who drinks pasteurized milk. You'll find that in the raw milk drinking community because we're passionate about our health. We're passionate about our rights to eat foods that we know are healthy."

Susan Moskaly of Eureka: “I also have degrees in zoology and accounting from Ohio State so I’m a little bit educated, and so hopefully, I’m allowed to make my own decisions about things after a reasonable amount of research.”

Louis DeBart of McKinleyville, with a small gesture toward the county health officials who had recommended to the supervisors to maintain the ban on raw milk after citing the FDA and associated research, stated: “I’m looking at a different thing than you people; I’m looking at freedom.” DeBart went on to describe how he had grown up drinking raw milk in Del Norte County (the county directly north of Humboldt County) where his mother was a county nurse, and how they sold raw milk from their farm with no one harmed. DeBart then stated: “For God’s sake, leave me the hell alone, I’ve got enough people telling me what to do and God bless you all.”

DeBart’s candid sentiment has been echoed by multiple Humboldt County residents in private interviews. It is apparent that a significant portion of the population not only wants legal access to raw milk in Humboldt County for health reasons but they are also angry about the fact that this basic freedom, held by most Californians, has been taken away by a county ordinance.

Several citizens have expressed a strong desire to vote out any Humboldt County supervisor who does not vote to rescind the ban on raw milk or who tries to block or delay this important issue from being placed again on the official agenda. In fact, one person who is not yet registered to vote is determined to register specifically to take on this issue. They also said they would encourage others to do the same.

## **FREEDOM OF CHOICE**

The freedom to engage in entrepreneurship and produce healthy local foods that many citizens desire has been stifled in Humboldt County due to the ban on raw milk. Several citizens spoke out on this issue specifically:

Jessica Bittner of Bayside: “I believe in Humboldt County, we are progressive and concerned for freedom of choice for its citizens and those interested in promoting healthy, locally produced food. You may have heard from dairies that they have concerns but you may not have heard from some of the small local dairymen who are struggling for profitability and would welcome the chance to operate a grade A raw milk dairy right here in this county. So I ask for raw milk sales and production to be legal in Humboldt County, and I ask that you folks make the highest authority the already existing state legislation. This should be your highest authority.”

Mike Fragga, a dairyman in Arcata, expressed a strong interest in producing raw milk on this farm: “Milk inspectors have warned me that I can’t even give the (raw) milk away. I can grow any crop on my farm and sell it but when it comes to (raw) milk, there’s this ordinance.”

In a 2015 interview, Fragga explained further that he has been told by inspectors that he could receive fines of one thousand dollars and actually go to jail if he sells, or even gives away, raw milk produced on his farm.

Daniel Pierce stated: “What you’re doing too is you’re stifling business. In India, they have this thing called paneer where you boil the (raw) milk and you add the lemon juice to it and you make a ball of cheese. It’s fresh cheese. Nobody’s making it here. You can’t take a barrel of raw milk around to someplace and do that. You’re stifling business and the reason this law was put in is because of what you heard here: we want all of your milk or none of your milk and that’s big business and that’s not fair. That has to change.”

Pierce’s comment, “we want all of your milk or none of your milk,” referred to an earlier comment by one of the

larger dairy farmers that once a dairy farmer has a contract with Foster Farm's Crystal Creamery, formerly Humboldt Creamery, they would not be allowed to sell any portion of their milk to anyone else. This issue seems to be a key factor in perpetuating the ban on raw milk in Humboldt County.

Kay Schaser of Eureka (in a written statement read publicly by her nephew): "Why would you want to stand in the way of industry by preventing Humboldt County dairymen from entering a growing niche market? Why would you want to stand in the way of commerce by preventing Humboldt County retailers from selling an otherwise legal product that their customers are asking for?"

## **HOW GEOGRAPHY MAKES THE SITUATION EVEN WORSE**

The geography of Humboldt County makes it really hard for a citizen to drive into another county to purchase raw milk. The county covers more than one hundred thirty miles from north to south on the main artery Highway 101. The population centers are located in the middle of this, right along the coast. For a resident living in Eureka, the largest city, the closest place to buy raw milk is the Wild Rivers Market in Crescent City, California. According to Google Map, this is a one-hundred-seventy-mile round trip taking more than three hours to complete!

So, for all practical purposes, this eliminates the possibility of purchasing raw milk in another county for most of the Humboldt County population! Thus, the only way these citizens can obtain raw milk legally with reasonable logistics involved is to have it shipped to them via UPS from Organic Pastures. Unfortunately, the shipping charge more than doubles the total price when shipped directly to the consumer!

It should be noted that according to Tom Boylan, the store manager of Wild Rivers Market, some Humboldt citizens are so desperate for certified raw milk, they actually do make the more than three-hour trek to purchase raw milk, most often a case at a time. Each case contains four gallons of Organic Pastures raw milk. Before making the long trip, customers are encouraged to call ahead to make sure it's still in stock, because they often sell out of it. They drink one gallon immediately but are forced to freeze the other three gallons to prevent spoilage. Although frozen raw milk is better than no raw milk, it is certainly not an optimal situation, especially after going to so much trouble to obtain it.

In contrast, for citizens living in Kings County California, where raw milk is also banned, the largest density of people live in or around Hanford. From there, it is only a fifteen-to-twenty minute drive into Visalia (Tulare County) to purchase certified raw milk legally.

## **ONLY FOR THE RICH?**

At the end of his public statement, Niel Gunton pointed out that he could have raw milk shipped via UPS from Organic Pastures but it was very expensive to do so and simply too costprohibitive for most people: "I think it's weird that I am actually able to buy organic milk from Organic Pastures at thirty to forty dollars per gallon (including shipping), and I think that is very biased toward the people who have the money to do that. I think that everybody should be able to buy this thing at the normal local rates from companies that are able to buy it in bulk, like the co-op or Eureka Natural Foods, because individuals cannot afford to pay thirty dollars per gallon but Eureka Natural Foods or the co-op could afford to get this stuff in at the bulk rate."

For the record, according to a telephone representative at Organic Pastures in August 2015, to ship one gallon of raw Organic Pastures milk to Eureka California, the total cost would be \$39.66. However, \$27.66 of that total cost includes the UPS shipping charge for the weight of a gallon of milk plus three ice packs to keep it cold. Thus, the price of the raw milk itself is only twelve dollars per gallon, affordable for most people who put a

priority on their health. Also, according to Mark McAfee, the owner and founder of Organic Pastures, the retail rate for a gallon of Organic Pastures milk usually ranges between twelve and sixteen dollars.

It is also important to note that raw milk can be purchased with food stamps from retail stores in all of California using a CalFresh EBT card except in the three counties that have banned raw milk. However, raw milk cannot be purchased with food stamps directly from Organic Pastures. This means that the poorest individuals and families in Humboldt County have no legal access to raw milk, even if their health practitioner has recommended it to improve their health.

One has to wonder whether the Humboldt County supervisors have seriously considered all the hardships put on their constituents who need and want raw milk to heal their body and maintain their health. One also has to wonder whether the Humboldt County supervisors truly understand the entrepreneurial spirit of Humboldt County farmers and consumers who want to support locally produced goods. It will be interesting to watch how this plays out in the next two election cycles.

## **References**

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*This article was first published in the Winter 2015 issue of Wise Traditions, the quarterly journal of the Weston A. Price Foundation.*