

**Testimony to the
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources
February 12, 2020**

Chairman Kerschen, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, my name Steve Strickler. I am a third generation dairy farmer from Iola, proudly proclaiming that title since I returned to the family farm in 1978! I happily gave up a wonderful career as a journalist to pursue my real loves of cows and family, wishing to do that in my home town near my parents and brothers—a small town I swore I would never return to once I graduated high school.

I am appearing before you today in reference to SB300. Honestly, I have mixed emotions about this bill. As a person who grew up drinking raw milk from our own dairy cows, knowing the procedures under which it was procured and which cows produced the best quality milk, I have no problems with other dairymen consuming their own unprocessed milk. However, knowing what I know now about the science—as well as the misinformation—about the adverse effects of drinking raw milk, I feel impelled to speak against selling that raw to others.

Nineteen states in the U.S. have similar laws to SB 300 that prohibit selling raw milk off the farm. Thirteen more states allow raw milk sales only where the milk is produced. At my dairy I probably get a couple calls a month from people wanting to buy raw milk. I've always thanked them politely for their inquiry but declined to sell them milk after we've had an “educational” talk about the possible dangers of drinking non-pasteurized milk.

Education is key. The smartest man I ever knew, my dad Ivan, had a saying. Actually, he had lots of them! But I'll never forget when he told me nearly 40 years ago, “It's not the animal rights people or the environmentalists we have to worry about. It's educating the consuming public. Everyone is getting so far removed from the farm they don't have a clue about where their food comes from!”

Of course, he was right. The majority of people today think their food comes from the grocery store. Even those here in Kansas. Our neighbors. When I have extra time I like to go to our only grocery outlet and just stand by the dairy case, waiting for someone to make their selection. However, I always take my grandson with me so they don't think I'm a stalker!

When they reach for something I start the questioning, always in a respectful manner but genuinely wanting to know why they selected one product over another. I'm always amazed at the misinformation they spout. After talking with them I bet 70% of them change their choice, which is not bad considering 20% of them already have their mind made up.

That's kind of the way I feel about people drinking raw milk. Most are operating on false information they got on an internet fringe site, hearsay, or from a doctor who wasn't even required to take a nutrition class while in medical school. Instead of relying on peer-reviewed science they will put themselves and their family in jeopardy because someone told them pasteurization cooks all the "good stuff" out of milk.

One quick story. In 2014 the Durant, WI high school football team was getting ready to play for the state championship so a bunch of the boosters threw a big dinner for the kids on a Thursday night before the big Friday game. Unbeknownst to any of those attending, a local dairy farmer had supplied the milk that was served and used to cook. Raw milk. 60 people attending that dinner fell ill, 38 of them being players and coaches! 11 had to be hospitalized. Needless to say they were unable to field a team and had to forfeit the game.

Extreme example? Maybe, but I sure wouldn't want to be known forever as the guy that caused my local football team the chance to play for a state championship. Just by supplying tainted milk! I'm not a lawyer but that whole incident had "liability lawsuit" written all over it in today's litigious world.

As you know Mr. Chairman, I could tell more stories (and probably will) if given enough time during testimony and questions. Thank you very much for your attention.