

To the Health and Government Operations Committee:

Dear Sirs and Madams,

As one of the few Maryland dairy farmers and on-farm processors I would like to briefly comment on the proposed raw milk bill. I am not in favor of this bill. I am not sure of the rationale behind it- Maryland dairy farmers are a minority that need to be better protected by the State of Maryland. This bill, I fear, will open up farmers to legal action as the inevitable health issues occur. Marylanders, unfortunately, have been led to believe that there is no option to preferences with milk and dairy. Yes, there is a demand for less processed, hyper local, and breed specific milks in Maryland but a minimally pasteurized, non standardized, non homogenized- a Fresh from the farm Option, already exists thanks to our operation and a handful of others like us in the state.

This bill will force such legitimate operations to make hard choices in an already challenging farming and business climate. Do we incorporate a potentially hazardous version of our milk to our product lines for the public or not? Not doing so would force us to be left behind.

Maryland's professional and experienced Division of Milk Control is against this bill- for good reasons. From my conversations with these health professionals, sanitarians, and their federal counterparts over the years they say the dirty secret for states that permit raw milk sales is that the regulators spend an inordinate amount of time chasing down raw milk concerns than focusing on steady state dairy oversight. I would suggest you listen carefully to the milk chief and her team to how challenging this will be for her already over burdened department.

Finally, if Maryland wants to help a truly underserved minority in this state, this body and the Governor should adopt policy and programs geared specifically for Maryland Dairy Farmers and those interested in taking on this most noble, but challenging, agricultural pursuit. The Department of Agriculture should showcase Maryland Milk and ALL on farm dairy processors. Specific low interest funding sources through Maryland's Department of Agriculture and MARBIDCO should permanently be made available exclusively for Maryland dairy farmers. Many dairies are in desperate need for infrastructure improvements, modernization, and even establishing more on farm processing. These specific policies along with other fiscal relief, would be a win-win for Marylanders and Dairy Farmers without risking public health.

I would be happy to discuss with any legislature further for more detail on my stance on this bill and how they can help MD dairy farmers.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Miller

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Advisor, Maryland Dairy Industry Oversight and Advisory Council