

History of the Michigan Fresh Unprocessed Whole Milk Workgroup

Background

In October 2006, the question of access to raw milk came to a head in Michigan when the Michigan Department of Agriculture (now known as the Michigan Department of Rural Development (MDARD)) initiated an investigation and legal action against a food cooperative for, among other things, the distribution of unpasteurized milk and milk products. As a result, Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS) and Michigan State University (MSU) met with MDARD leadership to talk about the action and how to address a desire among some Michigan consumers for access to raw milk while minimizing health risks.

It was decided that a workgroup would be formed and the first meeting was held in January 2007. The workgroup members represent an array of perspectives, relative to the issue at hand and the group's purpose: which was, consumers who seek to ensure access to raw milk. Also represented: producers who want to provide a healthy source of raw milk; a Grade "A" milk industry representative and food safety regulators who are looking to balance access and choice issues with protection of the food supply. MIFFS and MSU served as facilitators and resource providers to guide the dialog and deliberations of the workgroup.

The group agreed to use the term Fresh Unprocessed Whole Milk (FUW Milk) to describe the product intended for direct human consumption since "raw milk" is used to describe milk intended for pasteurization. The group agreed to address the question **"Where do we want to be in 3 to 5 years on access to fresh unprocessed whole milk?"**

The Michigan FUWM Workgroup met to identify the issues and questions it had regarding access to FUWM. The workgroup reached consensus on the goal: **"The group desires clear direction with clear public policy regarding access to fresh unprocessed whole milk and adjusting the law accordingly, if needed."** The group decided to reach this goal using a question and answer format. Over 60 questions covering 10 topic areas were initially identified by the workgroup. Since early 2007, the group has met almost monthly in face-to-face; usually three-hour sessions to discuss the questions, share resources and expertise, and develop answers to the questions. An additional five-hour meeting was held with herd-share farmers to solicit their views, needs and ideas. The group invited guest speakers to share information and expertise, which aided the development of answers to the questions. The Michigan FUW Milk Workgroup's answers to the questions were developed after thorough discussion, deliberation and consensus among the group's members. As time went on, some of the topics and questions originally developed were removed from the workgroup's consideration because they were no longer relevant to the goal.

By agreement, the group's discussions have been kept confidential. However, as each topic was completed, the consensus summary was posted on a website made available by MIFFS.

The workgroup's discussions and resulting recommendations are focused on the state of Michigan. The questions, answers, recommendations and additional reference information are included in this report.

Since 2007, some members of the workgroup have retired while other members have joined the group. Over this time, workgroup members have celebrated milestone birthdays, wedding anniversaries, graduations and births of children and grandchildren. The workgroup members have especially enjoyed the opportunity to get to know each other and understand differing perspectives on the subject of consumer access to access to FUW milk.



