# La. Raw Milk Fight Pits Choice Against Public Safety

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Dustin Soileau of Lafayette drinks a glass of raw milk after speaking to the House Agriculture Committee on Thursday, April 24, 2014, in Baton Rouge, La. Soileau was supporting a bill to allow Louisiana farms to sell raw milk to consumers. **(AP Photo/Melinda Deslatte)**

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Arguments of choice versus public safety are heated in a fight about whether to let Louisiana farmers sell raw milk to the public.

The full state House will consider a bill that would allow sales of unpasteurized milk, after it was advanced in a 9-6 vote Thursday by the House Agriculture Committee.

Approval came despite opposition from Agriculture Commissioner Mike Strain, who said farmers couldn't guarantee that unpasteurized milk would be safe because it doesn't go through the heating process designed to kill harmful bacteria. Louisiana's state health officer, Jimmy Guidry, told lawmakers he wouldn't allow his family to drink raw milk.

Supporters of raw milk say pasteurization takes away some of milk's nutritional benefits.

Rep. Stephen Ortego, D-Carencro, and Rep. Mike Danahay, D-Sulphur, said legalization of raw milk sales would give let people make their own decisions. They said their bill includes safety measures modeled off other states.

"We should have the freedom to decide what to feed ourselves and our families," said Audry Salvador, of Sulphur, describing the measure as helping small farmers

and rural economies.

Rep. Robert Johnson, D-Marksville, questioned why the bill would absolve farmers of liability if a safety problem develops.

"They made that choice when they go to the farmer," Ortego said.

Johnson replied: "Why are we doing that if this is so safe?"

Rep. Simone Champagne, a supporter of the bill, said she enjoys raw oysters, and she noted that they come with a disclaimer about people eating at their own risk.

"I don't really see a difference, in my opinion, between the two," said Champagne, R-Erath.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration doesn't allow the sale of unpasteurized milk for human consumption, so raw milk cannot be sold across state lines. The FDA warns that "raw milk can harbor dangerous microorganisms that can pose serious health risks."

Thirty states allow people to buy raw milk [1], according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The laws vary on where and how it can be sold.

Danahay said the proposed change for Louisiana would allow people to buy raw milk directly from a farmer, not at a grocery store.

The point of sale must carry a sign that includes a statement warning that the milk has not been pasteurized, that the farm and the milk haven't been inspected by the state and that the buyer assumes all liability for health risks.

"This is safe enough for my family, and it's safe enough for yours," said Sierra Majors, who has a small dairy farm near Melville.

Guidry, medical director of Louisiana's health department, said states that allow sales of raw milk have seen more disease outbreaks. He disputed claims that raw milk is healthier, saying no medical studies verify that.

Marguerite Constantine, who operates a licensed goat dairy farm that sells pasteurized milk, said the bill would put people at risk.

"I would no more ask my granddaughters to drink raw milk because it is like playing Russian roulette with them," she said.

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