

## SUNDAY TIMES ARTICLE - Great news for Irish food!

### Ban on raw milk turns sour in Dail

Mark Tighe Published: 13 May 2012



James Reilly, the health minister, is opposing plans by Simon Coveney, the minister for agriculture, to ban the sale of raw milk. Acting on advice from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Coveney has been pushing for the restriction since last year on the basis that the risks from unpasteurised milk are too great.

Coveney said last October that a ban would be in place as soon as possible, but The Sunday Times has learnt Reilly prefers setting up a regulatory system to control the sale of the product. Reilly's intervention has been welcomed by the Campaign for Raw Milk, which is supported by the chefs Derry Clarke and Darina Allen.

Unpasteurised milk was banned in Ireland from 1997 to 2006, but this lapsed after a change in European Union legislation. Supporters say there are health and taste benefits to drinking milk that has not been pasteurised.

A letter obtained following a Freedom of Information request shows Reilly wrote to his fellow Fine Gael minister last November to say he did not consider a ban on the sale of raw milk for human consumption to be proportionate to the public health risks.

Coveney insisted there had to be a ban, as regulation would not eliminate the dangers. The agriculture minister said insurance for suppliers would be prohibitive and could lead to a liability issue for the state. Coveney says unpasteurised milk can contain human pathogens that cause serious illnesses. He said the Department of Agriculture is aware of cases where humans had contracted tuberculosis from drinking raw milk.

The agriculture minister said as Ireland exported "2 billion of dairy products and controlled 15% of the world's formula milk market for babies, any food scare associated with the sale of raw milk would have major implications for our dairy industry". He said in light of the campaign against the ban it was important they agreed a joint position.

Last week Coveney's spokesman said the proposed ban was still under consideration and the subject of discussions with Reilly and the Department of Health. He said following a public consultation in 2008 the department was satisfied the claimed benefits from drinking raw milk did not outweigh the known health risks. These include diseases such as tuberculosis, brucellosis, E. coli O157, campylobacter and salmonella, he said.

However, Reilly's office said the health minister still believed a ban was not a proportionate response. He had asked officials to consult the Department of Agriculture about setting up a system to control the sale of raw milk quickly.

Last week Elisabeth Ryan, from Sheridans Cheesemongers and the Campaign for Raw Milk, welcomed Reilly's intervention. Sheridans, established by brothers Seamus and Kevin in Galway in 1995, has led the campaign against the ban.

%We are hugely gladdened to see Reilly and his department have examined all the issues and have come to the conclusion that a blanket ban on raw milk would be totally at odds with the potential level of risk involved,+said Ryan. %We look forward to having the opportunity to work with the Department of Agriculture to develop sensible regulations.+

Clarke and Allen voiced their continuing opposition to a ban. %I believe it is utterly wrong to deprive people of freedom of choice when a growing body of peer reviewed research confirms the health benefits of raw milk,+said Allen of Ballymaloe cookery school. %We have just three Jersey cows, which we milk every day, so that we have access to organic raw milk.

%Unpasteurised milk from clean, well-managed herds is hugely beneficial to health, and we see people all the time that have dairy intolerances relating to processed pasteurised milk products who can drink our fresh raw milk.+