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Time is running out for 'raw' milk

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THE Campaign for Raw Milk has urged the Government not throw away what they describe as 'a real business opportunity for small farmers'.

Within two months the Irish Government will ban the sale of 'raw' (unpasteurised) milk direct to consumers. The move is being taken despite the fact that, according to campaigners, the product represents a valuable opportunity as a niche market for small, specialist dairy farmers. Repeated attempts to convince the Government of this have fallen on deaf ears. In other countries where the product is legally available, consumption is increasing. The Campaign for Raw Milk is comprised of food industry organisations as well as food businesses and consumers.

Currently, farmers selling milk to co-ops get approx 35c/Litre. The average cost of processed milk in supermarkets and convenience stores ranges from approx €1.19-€1.60/Litre.

Farmers selling their raw milk direct to the consumer are receiving approx €1.50-€2.00/Litre. Furthermore, the sale of raw milk in this way establishes a direct link between farmer and consumer, another important divergence from the unprofitable commodity production which typifies Ireland's heavily consolidated dairy industry.

David Tiernan, a raw milk producer from Co Louth says, "I am really proud of my milk and am delighted at the feedback from customers; it would be a real shame for everyone if this ban went ahead".

Campaigners claim that 'misleading information' as to whether or not a public consultation was held in 2008 has passed between the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health. They further claim that DAFF has enlisted The Department of Health to expedite the introduction of the new legislation.

Campaigners claim that in correspondence, DAFF alleges that it conducted a full public consultation on this issue in 2008. However they say Minister Coveney's written statement confirmed the consultation was only in relation to the inclusion of goat and sheep's milk (less than 2% of liquid milk output and did not include consultation on cow's milk.

Commenting on the revelation, a spokesperson for The Raw Milk Campaign said, "At best this shows incompetence in communicating, at worst it illustrates a deliberate attempt by the Department of Agriculture to mislead the Department of Health."

In his statement Minister Coveney commented that regulating the sale of raw milk through competent specialist dairies instead of an outright ban would be, "much more complicated and would impose very significant extra cost on my Department."

Other European States including France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden as well as England (whose national herd has a similar incidence rate of TB to the Irish herd) have all successfully implemented effective regulation and labelling protocols to enable the safe supply of raw milk.

More and more consumers are choosing to drink raw milk for its potential health benefits and in light of this demand, The Campaign for Raw Milk asks the Government above all to begin a public engagement process before closing the door on raw milk forever. It is estimated that 100'000 people in Ireland currently drink raw milk. A meeting has been requested with Minister Simon Coveney.

"The Minister says the ban is imperative as the risk of an outbreak would be a potential threat to our reputation as a dairy producer. However, what does this ban say about the standards of our dairies? What does it mean for our reputation if we can't trust our own milk?" stated a spokesperson for the campaign.

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