

ADVICE TO MINISTER

CONFIDENTIAL ISSUES NOTE	Watson - Raw Milk Cow Shares
Ministry: Health Services	
Date: June 27, 2008	
Minister Responsible: George Abbott	

KEY FACTS REGARDING THE ISSUE:

- Fraser Health is expected to take enforcement steps in early July against Gordon S. Watson, a Chilliwack farmer who is allegedly supplying raw (unpasteurized) milk, contrary to the Milk Industry Act and the Health Act. This may generate some publicity.
- Gordon Watson maintains a web page with details on how the cow share is set up, where to pick up the raw milk, and a convenient posting of his letters to and from government (MOHS and MAL), available at: www.freewebs.com/bovinity/.
- The provincial Milk Industry Act Section 6 (1) clearly states: "A person must not sell, offer for sale or supply any dairy product unless the dairy product has been pasteurized in accordance with this Act and the regulations."
- While it is illegal to sell or "supply" raw milk, a person is not prohibited from drinking raw milk from his own cow.
- Mr. Watson has allegedly sold shares in 16 cows to approximately 200 people, who now claim they are "owners" of the cows -- and therefore exempt from the Milk Industry Act. The group may also be preparing for a charter challenge.
- The main area of activity is Chilliwack/Fraser Valley, but the raw milk is apparently being distributed on the lower mainland as well.
- The health community generally considers raw milk unhealthy, unsafe, and by regulation under the Health Act, raw milk is included in the definition of a health hazard.
- Unpasteurized milk can contain bacteria that transmit diseases such as salmonella, e.coli and listeria that can cause serious human illness, especially among vulnerable populations, including the very young and elderly. There is no evidence to support the contention that raw milk is more nutritious than pasteurized milk.

ADVICE AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE:

- **In B.C., all milk and milk products sold to the public must be pasteurized – a process that raises the milk to temperatures high enough to kill bacteria.**
- I am aware Fraser Health is assessing the situation of cow shares and the supply of unpasteurized milk.
- The provincial health officer has confirmed that raw milk is, without a doubt, a health hazard.
- While I cannot comment on case specifics, regional health authorities are obligated to ensure action is taken against any health hazard such as distributing raw milk.
- Health officers are constantly working to ensure that only pasteurized milk products are sold to the public.

- **Government is committed to providing the highest health standards for all British Columbians. It is important that all British Columbians are aware of the serious health risks associated with food products that can transmit disease-causing bacteria to the public.**

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