

September 17, 2008

Dear Congressman Sestak,

I live in Havertown, PA, and am the organizer of a buying group of about forty families who purchase products from Hendricks Farm in Telford, PA.

Hendricks is a farm that is state-licensed to sell raw dairy. The reason I chose to deal with this particular farm was that they're known for their meticulous methods and high integrity.

Rachel Hendricks is a nurse and her father is a pathologist, so I know that these people are really careful when it comes to germs. In fact, Trent (the husband) is the one who convinced me never to buy from an unlicensed farm because they usually don't do bacteria counts.

In the seven years of their operation, Hendricks has had his milk tested twice as frequently as mandated by the state and has been inspected regularly. His milk has never tested positive for any pathogen in that time.

Nevertheless it seems that the PA Department of Agriculture, particularly Dennis Wolff and Bill Chirdon, is determined to give Trent a bad name, thereby effectively shutting him down.

There have been a number of cases of gastrointestinal illness in the general area of the farm (but not limited to that area). Immediately the raw milk was blamed. A few people who are Hendricks customers became sick but they were away on vacation at the time, nowhere near their raw milk. Since the illness usually develops quickly after consuming a tainted product one would think that no one would finger the milk as the culprit. The health department and PDA did just that. The other cases were just as tenuous. The main case is that of a woman who says she bought milk at Hendricks (no proof at all of that) and became sick. The PDA took the milk out of her refrigerator after it had been sitting in there open for at least two weeks. It was way past the recommended date for use, it had been opened and in that time could have been contaminated by anything, even unwashed hands on the cap.

The PDA came to the farm to check things out and took samples of all dairy products to be lab tested. Trent Hendricks took identical samples and sent it to another independent lab. That's fair but what happened next was not.

Before the samples even got to the labs for testing the PDA suspended Trent's license to sell raw milk. Then they issued a damning press release which was distributed to every radio station, TV station and newspaper in the area. It was also printed out and distributed in at least one college to student nurses.

Here's the press release. Keep in mind that this was issued with no proof whatsoever and in spite of a seven year spotless record:

PRESS RELEASE - Health and Agriculture Departments Warn Consumers About Raw Milk Sold in Montgomery County

HARRISBURG, Pa., Sept. 12 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- State Health Secretary Dr. Calvin B. Johnson today advised consumers who purchased raw milk from Hendricks Farm & Dairy of Telford, Montgomery County, to immediately discard the raw milk and any items made with the raw milk due to potential bacterial contamination. Raw milk is milk that has not been pasteurized.

Recently, individuals who consumed raw milk purchased from the dairy were found to have gastrointestinal illness due to *Campylobacter*, a bacterial infection. Since September 1, a total of seven confirmed cases of *Campylobacter* infection have been reported among raw milk drinkers in seven unrelated households in Pennsylvania and a neighboring state. Other individuals in these households have also experienced similar gastrointestinal illness. The investigation is ongoing.

The Department of Agriculture today suspended the farm's raw milk permit and instructed the owner to stop selling raw milk for human consumption until the permit is reinstated. The Department of Agriculture will require two raw milk samples drawn at least one day apart to be tested negative for bacterial pathogens before raw milk sales may resume.

Other action to ensure the safety of the public will depend upon the results of pending laboratory tests and the joint investigation by the Health and Agriculture departments.

The shelf-life for raw milk is about 14 days but can be longer if the milk is frozen. Freezing of the milk will not kill the *Campylobacter* bacteria.

Individuals who drank raw milk or ate other raw milk products purchased from Hendricks Farm & Dairy and became ill are advised to consult with their physician. If no illness occurred, it is not necessary to seek medical attention.

Campylobacter is a bacterial infection that affects the intestinal tract and can sometimes affect the bloodstream and other organs. It is one of the most common causes of gastroenteritis, which can include diarrhea and vomiting. Approximately 1,300 confirmed cases of *Campylobacter* are reported each year in Pennsylvania.

Onset of illness usually occurs in 2 to 5 days after swallowing the bacteria. Patients often do not require specific medical treatment unless they become severely dehydrated or the infection spreads from the intestines. People with severe diarrhea may require rehydration, often with intravenous fluids.

The media picked up on this and the number of “illnesses” grew with each broadcast; scary headlines sell.

A couple of days later the lab tests came back. All were negative for pathogens (with the possible exception of that opened two-week old bottle of milk which may not have come from Hendricks at all). No one got sick from these products because there was no disease - causing bacteria in them.

The right thing to do would have been to immediately reinstate Trent’s license since there was no violation, and issue a retraction to the public “indictment”. Instead the PDA has given one excuse after the other for not giving the man his license back and the scary “tainted milk” stories are being endlessly repeated in the media.

An honest, hard-working man’s name is being dragged through the dirt needlessly. And he’s losing his livelihood. Business is off 75%. He may not be able to make his payroll this week. He has five small children, a staff whom he treats like family and a group of other small farmers who depend on him to sell their products. All will suffer if he goes out of business.

Then there are the customers like myself and the forty families I represent. All of us are unbelievably upset by this. Many of the people have health issues and depend on this farm for food they can actually digest. No one has ever gotten sick from these products; they’ve gotten healthier.

Anything you can do to help resolve this issue would be greatly appreciated.

What we’d really like to happen is:

1. Immediate reinstatement of Hendricks’ raw milk license
2. A public retraction of the original press release, thereby clearing Hendricks’ name

Thank-you so much.

Sincerely,
Deborah
Havertown, PA