

Raw Milk Warning
By Ora Emmerich
UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers
For Print November 23, 2011

Thinking about raw milk brings to mind bucolic images of happy cows in the meadow, fresh warm milk squirting straight into open mouths and vigorous health resulting from the unprocessed, natural liquid. Well, think again. According to the FDA, “While the perceived nutritional and health benefits of raw milk consumption have not been scientifically substantiated, the health risks are clear. Since 1987, there have been 143 reported outbreaks of illness – some involving miscarriages, still births, kidney failure and deaths – associated with consumption of raw milk and raw milk products that were contaminated with pathogenic bacteria such as Listeria, Campylobacter, Salmonella, and E. coli. ”

Although the FDA recommends pasteurization for all milk products, it does not regulate the sale or distribution of raw milk within the states. Raw milk sales remain legal in California, despite efforts a few years ago to require pasteurization of milk produced within the state. However, what is legal may not be good for you. Pathogens such as those listed above easily reproduce in raw milk, and pasteurization kills those pathogens. No matter how scrupulous the raw milk farm stays concerning cleanliness, many opportunities exist for contamination. The animals, equipment and containers all present ways to introduce bacteria into the product, and the results can be devastating.

According to the Colorado State University Extension, the practice of pasteurizing milk began in an effort to combat tuberculosis. Pasteurization raises the temperature of the raw milk sufficiently high to kill harmful bacteria. Rapid cooling after heating keeps the milk from spoiling. Those who enjoy drinking raw milk claim that the good bacteria and other nutrients may be destroyed along with the pathogens, but the FDA maintains “that there are no known significant nutritional differences between unpasteurized and pasteurized milk and that pasteurized milk provides all the nutrients found naturally in raw milk.”

As nutritional science advances additional information regarding raw vs. pasteurized milk may be found. For now, however, the devastating effects of foodborne illnesses indicate the prudent course of action. Pasteurization kills bad bacteria in animal milk used by people for food. Those wishing to steer clear of added hormones and antibiotics in milk products have a vast array of pasteurized, organic choices of milk products available, and the abundance of food varieties in the neighborhood grocery store insures plenty of choices other than milk for nutritional needs.

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our new Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpenews/>.