

## **Due to threatened Legal Action by the Agency of Agriculture Rural Vermont Suspends Raw-Dairy Processing Classes**

Rural Vermont regrets to inform the public that under pressure from the Agency of Agriculture Rural Vermont is temporarily suspending Rural Vermont's very popular Raw Dairy Processing Classes. Rural Vermont has been holding these popular classes since the enacting of Act 62, "The Raw Milk Bill" in 2009. Not wanting to place farmers at risk, Rural Vermont has put the classes on hold while pursuing discussions with the Agency of Agriculture.

The suspension of the classes came as a result of Rural Vermont obtaining a Notice of Warning from the Agency of Agriculture in which the Agency alleges that by teaching consumers how to make butter, yogurt, cheese, and other products at home, Rural Vermont and the farmer hosts are in violation of Vermont law. The warning centers around the Agency's interpretation of the 2009 Raw Milk Law, in which they claim that it is illegal for farmers to knowingly sell raw milk to customers who plan to do anything with their milk besides drink it. The raw dairy processing classes are an important part of Rural Vermont's campaign to educate consumers on raw milk and to gain exposure for farmers trying to sell raw milk directly to the community. The warning threatened legal action to Rural Vermont and our farmers. Not wanting to put our farmer members at risk, Rural Vermont has temporarily suspended the classes until we have solid understanding of the Agency's official policy.

Rural Vermont believes that the Agency of Agriculture should be engaging farmers in ways to expand markets. In the past month, Rural Vermont testified to the Legislature's Committees on Agriculture that in 2010 raw milk generated approximately one-million dollars in revenues directly to Vermont farmers. Farmers are already faced with enormous pressures from the commodity milk market that the Agency should be looking on ways to expand on-farm sales. A "Renaissance" in agriculture does not start with a "Prohibition" in agriculture. Vermont should focus on achievable steps to meet the demand for safe, healthy local food and farm products. While we cannot change the global economy in which Vermont must operate, we can open markets to Vermont farmers.

Rural Vermont stands ready to open a new chapter in the history of farming in this state. Whether doing so requires protesting in the streets, advocating in the halls of the legislature or litigating in the courts, we are prepared to work tirelessly for economic justice, a strong local agricultural system and vibrant communities in Vermont. Rural Vermont is a nonprofit advocacy group founded by farmers in 1985 that advocates, activates, and educates for living soils, thriving farms, and healthy communities.