



MAINE CHEESE GUILD

An open letter regarding the Food Sovereignty Act

April 12, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

Maine cheesemakers are the envy of our colleagues around the US because we enjoy enormous flexibility when establishing and running licensed creameries as dairy processors while at the same time maintaining a history of safe and extremely high quality dairy products available to consumers. Our out-of-state colleagues are also amazed to learn how inexpensive it is to get licensed, and how helpful our Quality Assurance inspectors and regulators are when working with any licensed dairy who asks for assistance.

Recently a few food processors, including dairy processors, have insisted that they be allowed to sell unregulated food to their neighbors – from this idea was born the Food Sovereignty Act that was passed through the Maine Legislature in 2017. Under this Act if a town or municipality declares themselves "Food Sovereign" their residents are allowed to sell un-licensed food products from their farms in a face-to-face transaction. In this way the consumer is able to be their own food inspector. Un-licensed food producers are NOT allowed to sell their products at Farmers Markets or at Retail shops or distribute them by mail or other means. It is important to understand that un-licensed food producers are often NOT able to secure liability insurance for their products. Most farmers markets and retail shops require standard business liability insurance for all their vendors, which protects the consumer and the business owner in the case of any food borne contamination or illnesses. Consumers must accept 100% of the liability when they purchase un-licensed food from their neighbors.

The Maine Cheese Guild believes that cheese of the highest quality can only be made with a thorough and regularly refreshed knowledge of food safety. The Maine Cheese Guild promotes and sponsors regular opportunities to learn about best practices for cheese making and believes that the best way for professional cheese makers to guarantee the quality of their product is by being appropriately licensed by the Maine Department of Agriculture, as only licensed cheese makers are legally allowed to sell cheese to the public, and only licensed cheese makers receive feedback from the dairy regulatory unit through regular testing for contamination and facility inspections. This feedback is critical, together with on-going education, in maintaining the high quality of award-winning Maine cheese.

*Sincerely,
Maine Cheese Guild Board Leadership*

Holly Aker, President
Local Goods Gathered

Mark Whitney, Vice
President
Pineland Farms Dairy
Company Inc.

Jean Koons, Co-Treasurer
Kennebec Cheesery

Eric Rector, Co-Treasurer
Monroe Cheese Studio

Heather Donahue,
Secretary
Balfour Farm

Beth Calder, Ph.D.
University of Maine

Alexis Godin
Alice & Lulus

Annie Lampen
Gathering Board Maine

Amy Rowbottom
Crooked Face Creamery

Sarah Spring
Spring Day Creamery,
Durham

Maine Cheese Guild
c/o Jean Koons, Treasurer
795 Pond Rd.
Sidney, ME. 04330
mainecheeseguild.org