



Washington  
State Department of  
Agriculture

Washington State Department of Agriculture Food Safety Program presents:

## The Truth About Raw Milk Sales

There are many misconceptions about the sale of raw milk in Washington State. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions we receive.

### Q: Is it safe to consume raw milk or raw milk products?

**A:** Raw milk is a potentially hazardous product. While some people regularly consume raw milk products with no ill-effect, illnesses and deaths associated with the consumption of raw milk occur every year. Those most at risk are children, the elderly, pregnant women and anyone with a compromised immune system.

Some organisms that can occur in raw milk and cause illness include Salmonella, E. coli 0157:H7, Campylobacter jejuni and Listeria monocytogenes. Pasteurization destroys these harmful organisms. Because of this risk, all retail raw milk products sold in Washington must bear this label.

***“WARNING:** This product has not been pasteurized and may contain harmful bacteria. Pregnant women, children, the elderly and persons with lowered resistance to disease have the highest risk of harm from use of this product.”*

Washington’s labeling requirement is intended to warn purchasers about known hazards associated with the consumption of raw milk so that they may make informed choices about buying these products.

### Q: Is it legal to sell raw milk in Washington State?

**A:** Yes. Washington State allows the sale of raw milk but **only** by licensed producers and processors. Raw milk may be sold for three purposes: for further processing, for human consumption, or for animal feed. Each purpose requires a license from the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

- **Milk Producer license:** allows a farmer to sell raw milk to milk processing plants, food processors, or into the general milk pool for further processing.  
*License fee: none.*

- **Milk Processing Plant license:** allows a person or company to sell raw milk directly to consumers for human consumption. There are additional requirements that must be met for raw milk, such as bacterial and animal health testing and labeling requirements. *License fee: \$250 annually.*
- **Animal Feed license:** allows a farmer to sell raw milk for animal feed. As required by Chapter 15.37 RCW, Milk and Milk Products for Animal Food, this milk must be labeled that it is “not for human consumption” and has been “decharacterized with harmless food coloring.” *License fee: \$25 annually.*

All raw milk sold in the state must meet the requirements for Grade “A” milk set out in state law (Chapter 15.36 RCW, Milk and Milk Products).

### Q: What is a “Cow Share” and is it legal?

**A:** A Cow Share, or Farm Share, agreement is a marketing approach some farmers use to sell their cows’ milk. The consumer purchases a “share” of a cow (or goat or sheep) and in return receives a portion of the milk produced. This constitutes a sale of milk as the definition of sale in state law is:

*“Sale” means selling, offering for sale, holding for sale, preparing for sale, distributing, dispensing, delivering, supplying, trading, bartering, offering a gift as an inducement for sale of, and advertising for sale in any media. (RCW 15.36.012)*

A Cow Share agreement is legal in Washington as long as the producer is properly licensed with the Washington State Department of Agriculture. A Cow Share may not be used as a means to avoid meeting state requirements for milk producers and milk processors, including obtaining the required license.

### For more information, contact the WSDA Food Safety Program:

**WSDA Food Safety Program**

P.O. Box 42560

1111 Washington Street SE Olympia, WA 98504

[agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal](http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal)

360-902-1876

**Consumer Complaint Hotline: 1-800-843-7890**