

Expert overstates safety of pasteurization

By Karen Selick

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In your article about Pam Killeen, the raw milk drinking friend of Michael Schmidt, you quote Dave Pavletic of the London-Middlesex Health Unit as saying: "When you pasteurize a product you're ensuring that the pathogens are killed."

This is a common misconception. Scientific studies have shown that pasteurization does NOT inactivate the shiga toxins released by e.coli O157:H7 (the toxin that killed people in Walkerton). Furthermore, other bacteria that are implicated in Crohn's disease also survive pasteurization.

Government records on food poisoning include many, many outbreaks of illness arising from pasteurized milk. Generally such outbreaks are huge, affecting thousands of people at a time. Some have affected more than 100,000 people. Contrast that with a cow-share operation serving 150 families. The risks of the latter are confined and easily identifiable.

Over the past two months, 15 Americans have died from eating contaminated canteloupe, but nobody has suggested that all canteloupe be outlawed.

The rational response, both for canteloupe and milk, is to recall suspect products, make those responsible pay for the damage they have caused, let them suffer the consequent damage to their reputation (which may force them out of business), and continue to allow consumers the freedom to deal with those whose record shows they can produce food safely.

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