



History MA MRP Defence

Student: Lydia Kinasewich

Date: Thursday, April 16, 2026

Time: 10:00am – 12:00pm

Place: email histacademic@uoguelph.ca for room number.

“Got Raw Milk? Pasteurization Policy and Consumer Resistance among Alternative Health and Immigrant Foodways in British Columbia, 1954-1991”

Abstract

During the mid-20th century, provincial governments began to entrench pasteurization as the standard for milk across Canada. Long praised for preventing childhood illness, pasteurization was a way to prevent health crises caused by contaminated milk. Therefore, it was surprising when these policies were met with resistance from consumers and small-scale farmers. In B.C., there was a particularly strong vein of resistance. This paper examines how a fringe, yet vocal, movement emerged in support of raw milk in the 1960s, born out of a desire for a more “natural” food product direct from farms and untainted by processing at large dairy plants. By the 1980s, small-scale rural dairy farmers throughout the province began to feel persecuted by the milk marketing board. The motivations of raw milk “bootleggers” ranged from beliefs in the health benefits of unheated milk, while others felt restricting unpasteurized milk infringed on the rights of Canadians. On the consumer level, those purchasing milk likewise had a range of reasons for seeking out raw milk. Purchasers included health food-faddists, rural customers wanting to support local agriculture, and immigrant consumers from India and European countries who desired raw milk for cultural and religious reasons. This research traces the attempts of producers and consumers to retain raw milk distribution rights and the tension between government agencies aiming to prevent health crises, and consumers and producers who viewed policy enactments as a freedom of choice crisis. Ultimately, this paper argues that the voices opposing pasteurization are indicative of a trend toward individualism within health and diet choices during the 1970s.

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