

Bernadette Deplazes

As a critical step in increasing food security in Alaska, our state needs Food Freedom. As a Farmers Market manager in Kodiak, and (very) small farmer I believe that an important part of our food security problem is small producers' access to markets...or rather lack thereof. I personally know of people who wanted to have a food business but were stopped by insurmountable regulation requirements. One young woman comes to mind who was milking 11 goats but was afraid, because of regulation, to sell any of the milk. I was very interested in buying milk from her but she was too afraid to sell me any. She initially began milking goats because her children had issues with commercial milk and she was giving the milk to her (human) kids. I had no fear whatsoever about the safety of the milk. She was feeding the extra milk, and there was a lot of it, to her baby pigs so it wouldn't go to waste.

Cottage food regs. stop people who are growing vegetables from doing anything but a "first cut" for vegetable sales in most cases. While some fermented foods are allowed, most value added products for vegetables are prohibited.

Foods produced in homes and by small producers of all kinds are intrinsically safer than large scale commercially produced foods. Small producers have many fewer streams of possible contamination than large producers and since they make only small batches at a time, the possibility of making a large number of people sick is limited by their scale. The ability to track the source of contamination is much more straight forward and the trail of contamination is much clearer.

Because these small batches are probably made one at a time, the ability to find the source of contamination is much quicker. In 8 years of Food Freedom, I could find NO mention of a single complaint about food safety tied to Food Freedom in any of the states that have adopted it. A small producer who sells directly to the people who consume his product is massively more accountable to his customer. If I made someone sick from something I sold at the Farmers Market I would probably come face to face with that person over my table the next week; a level of accountability that no mass producer ever faces. I have had to tell many people who wanted to bring a value added food item to our Farmers Market that they couldn't unless they could make it in an inspected kitchen etc. thus depriving people who WANT to buy food from buying and people who WANT to produce a food from doing so. This wastes food, passion and talent that we could all benefit from.

I believe access to markets is a MAJOR obstacle in the ability of the people of Alaska to provide locally produced foods. I may, without any regulatory obstacles, give foods I have made in my home to anyone. It's only when money changes hands that I come under regulatory scrutiny. Is free food somehow intrinsically safer?

ON another note, I would like our Food Freedom Act, when passed to include, as it does in Maine, a constitutional amendment that protects my Right to Eat Food. I am a grown woman and I believe I have a God-given right to choose what I put in my body. While government can play a role in keeping unscrupulous persons from selling unwholesome products (which are rampant in the marketplace right now) it should not have a role in deciding if people can buy the foods they want to eat.

I know this comment is kind of all over the place but I have tried to touch on the points that I feel are most important. Thank you for trying to help local producers do their thing. I really believe that if an opportunity exists, people will take advantage of it. Here in Kodiak, in the past, we had local dairies, and farms that produced tons of vegetables. (I've seen pictures) and we could have it again if meaningless obstacles are removed. Sincerely, Bernadette Deplazes