

Our Town

[snip] **What do you get when you cross an artist and an engineer?** Maybe somebody like Natalie Jeremijenko of the University of California at San Diego. According to *Sierra* magazine she's invented robotic toxic-sniffing dogs, masks for bicyclists that detect what's

in the air they're breathing, and a "printer queue virus" that counts the number of pages consumed by a printer and spews out a cross section of a tree stump when it's used up a tree's worth." —**Harold Henderson | hhenderson@chicagoreader.com**

Chow

Do You Like It Raw?

Health nuts and foodies alike want to buy fresh, unpasteurized milk. Small farms are finding a way around laws that prevent it.

By Nicholas Day

On land just west of Madison, Wisconsin, Kristina Amelong and her husband, Tim Cordon, graze 30 goats and have a pair of Jersey cows on the way. Their milk is fresh, creamy, and silken with fat, but it's sought after for what it isn't: pasteurized.

In a trend that delights devotees and disturbs public health officials, raw milk is increasingly popular. In Wisconsin, however—as in Illinois and almost all other states—the sale of it is illegal. So Amelong and Cordon, whose farm is called Cress Spring Whole Milk Dairy, have created a goat-and-cow-share program, an end run around pasteurization laws that was devised a decade ago.



Since milk, unlike, say, marijuana, isn't an illicit substance, it's legal for someone to drink unpasteurized milk from his own animals. The government only intervenes when someone besides the owner—a consumer—is implicated. Cow-share programs sell shares in livestock to the public, making them part owners and therefore legal consumers of the milk. Strictly speaking, no one is buying or selling milk: Amelong's

goat, Funny-Funny, and her kids are communally owned, and many of their 40-plus owners happen to be people who live nowhere near their pasture. What can make such a situation tricky is that the interstate transport of raw milk has been banned by the Food and Drug Administration for years.

Because the legality of cow sharing is often unclear and more explicitly commercial programs are clearly ille-

gal, it's difficult to get an accurate picture of how many shareholders there are. As Dennise Wright of Liberty Family Farm in Hart, Michigan—which promotes its goat-and-cow-share programs at the Green City Market—says, "I know a lot of people probably do it under the table." But it's clear that raw milk is coming in from the fringe: there are now at least four farms that openly deliver to the Chicago area.

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[snip] "The model for [Karl] Rove's conservatism ... is liberalism," writes Andrew Sullivan in the *New Republic*, noting that the federal government now spends around \$22,000 per household per year—up from a little under \$19,000 in 2000. "The difference is merely how government directs its vast power, and for whom." —HH

(Amelong and Cordon's isn't one of them; they declined to discuss how their shareholders get their milk.)

Evanston resident Leslie Kosar gets raw milk twice a month from separate farms in Wisconsin and Michigan; she picks it up from local health food stores that have quietly agreed to serve as distributors. "I was against milk completely when my two children were born," she says. But after reading about raw milk on the Web site of the Weston A. Price Foundation, a Washington nonprofit that advocates against pasteurization, she changed her mind.

Her story would dismay Marlena Bordson, the chief of the food, drugs, and dairies division at the Illinois Department of Public Health. Raw milk can carry tuberculosis, listeria, salmonella, and other diseases and bacteria, she says, and

is particularly unsafe for children or the elderly. "We always advise against it," she says. That said, there are no laws against cow sharing in Illinois—provided that the dairy respects existing laws against raw milk. No advertising's allowed, and customers must bring and fill their own containers at the farm. Deliveries are illegal: if the dairy delivered the milk, that would mean the dairy was bottling it, which would make it an illegal milk-bottling plant. Wisconsin and Michigan, where almost all raw milk in Chicago originates, have harsher laws: Wisconsin has intervened to shut down cow sharing in the past; Michigan bans everything but has tended in practice to look the other way.

A farmer who coordinates a multi-farm program in southwestern Michigan that delivers to Chicago,

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Detroit, and Ann Arbor requested anonymity when contacted. "I've been warned in the past," he says. "If you go real public with it you get into trouble." His customers find him by word of mouth. "Almost every person who comes on board does it for the health benefit," he adds.

This is the singular irony of raw milk: it's restricted for the health risks it presents but sought out for its purported health benefits. Depending on who's talking, it can cure cancer or cause fatal illness. The two sides' claims are so divergent that after hearing them pasteurization seems less like a scientific process and more like a public health Rorschach test.

Almost everyone agrees that the high temperatures involved in pasteurization destroy the natural enzymes in milk. But no one agrees

on what that means. Raw milk advocates say these enzymes are critical digestive aids that help break down lactose and flush toxins, and that pasteurization also destroys the good bacteria in milk and denatures its protein components and healthy fats. Public health officials respond that no scientific study has ever shown a nutritional difference between raw and pasteurized milk. Without pasteurization, they say, there's no way to ensure that bacteria like *E. coli* do not invade milk, which is so naturally nutritious that it attracts any hungry organism.

Sally Fallon, president of the Weston A. Price Foundation, says that milk protects itself against disease: "If you put [bad] bacteria in raw milk, the next day it'll be gone." Scott Rankin, professor of food sci-

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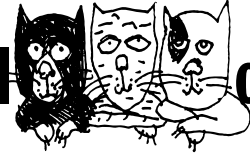


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Our Town

[snip] **“Support for a health plan covering all Americans and financed by taxpayers can vary depending on question wording,”** reports the nonpartisan public-opinion monitor Public Agenda, “a typical warning sign that views on this issue may be unstable.” That’s

the polite adjective. “About two-thirds go so far as to say the government should guarantee health insurance for every American.... But 51 percent say they would not be willing to pay either higher taxes or higher insurance premiums to cover more of the uninsured.” —HH

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ence at the University of Wisconsin, disputes this: “If I put bad bacteria into raw milk, is it capable of killing bad bacteria? Yes. Does it always happen? No. A preponderance of evidence shows that, in general, raw milk is routinely a source of pathogens.”

What’s inarguable, however, is that raw milk tastes better: there are no defenders of the gastronomic superiority of pasteurized milk (although dairy scientists will point out that raw milk can carry the taste of whatever a cow has eaten, good or bad). Louis Pasteur, who originally invented his process for beer and wine, held that it altered the taste insignificantly. No one would agree today, and people may eventually feel the same way about pasteurized milk. Even when it’s gently heated to the lowest possible temperature, it’s next to impossible to avoid altering the taste. The food writer Edward Behr has written that dairy professionals separate milk into categories of “heated,” “cooked,” and “scorched”—all degrees of caramel flavor.”

Setting aside the larger debate, a look at raw milk’s recent history suggests that if it’s treated conscientiously and consumed locally, it’s safer

than restrictions on it imply. Raw milk is legal for retail sale in California, Pennsylvania (whose Amish population drinks only raw milk), and Connecticut, and those states have reported few incidents. (Raw milk is also legal in Oregon and Florida, but only if labeled as pet food.) A cow-share program in northern Wisconsin was shut down in 2001 after being implicated in a local campylobacteriosis outbreak, but the farmer, Tim Wightman, denies the connection, saying that his tests showed the milk was safe and that state officials refused to show him their results. He has since restarted his program without problems.

Choosing to drink raw milk is a matter of conviction and desire. Even Rankin, the food scientist, says, “It’s sort of like oysters. They’re routinely full of bacteria. We put lots of things into our bodies that are bad for us.” And ultimately the movement may be as much about small farms like Amelong’s as it is about the health claims. After all, any agricultural model that directly connects farmers and consumers is so old that it looks new again. “We want people to be able to come to the farm,” says Sally Fallon. “Milk is the absolute best way to do it.” ☐

Public Displays

Never Mind LimeWire

Is there a mix tape in that tree stump?

By Jessica Hopper

It would be easy to assume the two figures hanging out in a vacant North Avenue lot on a recent rainy evening are up to something nefarious—possibly illegal. He’s holding a plastic stencil in one hand and a can of silver spray paint in the other, while she consults from a few feet away.

“No, the other side, to the left.” She peers back at traffic to see if anyone’s noticed them, then looks back.

“Yeah, there. Perfect.”

The man quickly stencils a slanty drawing of a cassette and an arrow onto the side of a tall tree stump and slips a cassette tape, in a plastic case, into the hollow of the stump.

Aay Preston-Myint, a student and tour guide at the Art Institute, and Ilana Percher, an applications engi-



Aay Preston-Myint and Ilana Percher

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[snip] **I'd be happy to bike to work ... in Amsterdam.** The Worldwatch Institute reports that "on a per-kilometer and per-trip basis, U.S. cyclists are twice as likely to die on the road as German cyclists, and more than three times as likely as Dutch cyclists. While cycling fatalities

in all of these countries have fallen in the last 25 years, U.S. cycling deaths have declined largely because of a drop in cycling ... [whereas] in the Netherlands and Germany investment in infrastructure that makes cycling safer accounts for much of the decline." —HH

neer, are the founders of the Chicago Tapes Project, a participatory art endeavor launched in April as part of Version>05. Part secret Santa, part public-space reclamation, the project has so far planted at least 30 anonymous mix tapes around the city.

The pair start by creating tapes around varying themes—Preston-Myint's recent batch of 90-minute dubs is organized around "Songs about the sea or sky"; Percher is halfway through a showcase of "male singers with high voices," though she's stalled out temporarily because she can't find a copy of A-Ha's "Take On Me."

Once completed, the mixes are installed in one of 20-odd public "tape stations," which range from a spot just inside the doorway of

Quimby's to a stone wall in Bridgeport to the ceiling of the Rogers Park art space Mess Hall, where a Chicago Tapes Project display was part of the recent Open Source/Open Ear exhibition. Each is just big enough shelter the tape from the elements and is flagged by a small arrow-and-cassette sticker or stencil. Inside every cassette case are brief instructions and a stencil and sticker—to help finders set up their own stations. Information and downloadable stencils can also be found at illcutyou.com/tapes.

The project got off to a rocky start. "The first tape and tape station I made," says Percher, "I went back two days later, and found that the place had been demolished with a bulldoz-



er. That one did not work out so well."

But tonight, as they make the rounds of the three stations just west of Wicker Park, they're giddy with excitement. "Aay found a tape today. Our first one back," Percher says. "I'm not sure if this is the first time it's happened, like, if some people have found other people's tapes in the stations, but today was a triumph—it

was the first time either of us found one placed by someone else."

The tape, says Preston-Myint, was found under the Bloomingdale viaduct at Western, in a hole in one of the supports, about a foot off the ground. "I haven't listened to the whole thing," he says, "but it's kind of experimental, a guy talking or reading over sounds. Or maybe people having a meeting. I'm not sure."

"My fantasy is that I one day discover a tape station that I had nothing to do with," says Percher. "I would love to see people taking tapes and putting tapes in, people making friends or secret, anonymous pen-pal-ships. For the station to be something people are using; for it to become part of the neighborhood it's in." ■

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