

The Raw Milk Symposium in Madison Wisconsin

By Margaret Osha

Thursday, April 8th, 2010, we leave for Madison, Wisconsin for the 2nd Annual Raw Milk Symposium, Claiming Consumer Rights, sponsored by the Farm-to-Consumer Foundation. It is our first trip to Wisconsin known as the dairy state. We arrive late in the day at the Madison airport and are shuttled to the motel by a very nice young man that works at the Hilton where we are staying. Our 10th floor hotel room overlooks the Monona Terrace Convention Center and a panoramic view of Lake Monona. Cathy Raymond, whom many of you have already met at our January meeting, is already hard at work organizing the event. For those of you that do not know Cathy she is the administrator of the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund and is also the conference and exhibit coordinator for the Weston A. Price Foundation. Cathy is the coordinator for this symposium as well.

Cathy introduces us to several other key players from the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund, Tim Wightman, president of the organization and Pete Kennedy, the legal defense lawyer, to mention a few familiar names that we had not had an opportunity to put a face to.

Friday morning, April 9th, we walk downtown the air is crisp and the sky is crystal clear blue. The Wisconsin State Capitol dome building is the focal point of the city; a beautiful four winged building that serves as a visual compass for navigating the city. The building is visible throughout much of the city with dramatic views from many streets. The beautiful exterior stone is Bethel White granite from Vermont, making the exterior dome the largest granite dome in the world. The building consists of 43 types of stone from six countries and eight states. It is designated as a National Historic Landmark. Downtown Madison is located on an isthmus between lakes Mendota and Monona. The University of Wisconsin–Madison gives a college town feeling to the city. Madison is a clean, friendly city well suited for pedestrians and bikers. This is one of the nicest cities that Stuart and I have ever visited.

Saturday morning we enter the Monona Terrace Convention Center by way of an enclosed connecting walk way. The Monona Terrace was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and is built over the water. It is an astounding building, so different in design than anything we have seen before. The symposium begins at 8:30 with opening remarks from Tim Wightman, President of the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund. Incidentally, Wisconsin was not picked out of a hat for the site of the conference, this state was chosen because it is a raw milk hot spot right now. The current regulatory climate threatens the livelihood of small farms in this state. Next week Wisconsin legislators will decide whether or not raw milk will become legalized or remain illegal as it has been in the past. Wisconsin, known as the dairy state does not allow the sale of raw milk. An impressive number of 250 farmers and consumers are present at this symposium and the line up of speakers is equally as impressive. We hear about the role of raw milk from the international perspective of Dr. Ton Baars from Germany and Sylvia P. Onusic Ph.D from Slovenia.

Dr. Baar speaks about biodynamic farming versus conventional farming practices and the measurable effects those practices have on the nutritional value of the milk and the health of those drinking the milk. Sylvia P. Onusic PhD, is a nutritionist that received and practiced conventional nutritional wisdom, before becoming very ill. Dr. Onusic eventually healed herself through eating real and living foods. Her practice now embraces traditional and natural foods nutrition. We watch a wonderful Power Point presentation, showing us pictures of farms, farmers and their raw milk customers in Slovenia. In Italy and neighboring countries mobile raw milk vending machines can be found throughout the villages and cities...can you imagine this happening here in this country? Raw milk is still embraced as a traditional food of generations in Europe. It would appear that if raw milk is as dangerous as the FDA says that it is, we should have vanished as a human race centuries ago.

Ted Beals MS, MD, specializing in pathology and microbiology, speaks of his research and the safe handling and production of raw milk. He said that he considers there to be two kinds of raw

milk; raw milk destined for pasteurization and raw milk for direct consumption. Dr. Beal's story short; raw milk for drinking needs to be thoughtfully produced and handled and cows must be healthy.

An elegant lunch room provides us with Caesar salad and with a remarkably delicious dressing made from fresh orange egg yolks. A hearty bowl of soup that is packed with turkey and vegetables along with a fresh roll and homemade butter that I hear was smuggled onto our table. Stuart has a special salad plate prepared just for him, no onion and no garlic. We have a little time for a short walk and visit the Frank Lloyd Wright gift shop. A ceramic hot plate catches my eye revealing a price of \$122. Time to move on, we leave the gift shop empty handed and head up the architecturally unique space to the next session.

Sally Fallon Morell is the first speaker to begin the afternoon. Sally is an eloquent speaker and again speaks of the healing properties of raw milk.

Our next speaker is Michael Schmidt, a farmer from Canada. A few months ago Michael won a monumental court battle against him, for distributing raw milk. In Canada raw milk is illegal to sell, period. Michael distributes raw milk and raw milk products to families who own legal shares in the cows that he manages. Although Michael won the case, the battle is far from over, as his ruling has been appealed.

It is an inspiring afternoon as we hear from a number of farmers from around the country that are true pioneers; farmers that have put themselves and their farms on the line, to provide a food that they passionately feel can improve the health of their communities.

The afternoon wraps up with a social hour featuring local wines and mountains of incredibly delicious artisan cheeses donated from Wisconsin farms and beyond. This is an opportunity to meet new faces and gather feedback from the day.

The dining room that awaits us looks elegant, it is a large space set up to accommodate the 200 people attending this conference. The food is fabulous. Sally Fallon takes the utmost pride when it comes to the meals at these functions. If you have the opportunity to attend a function that Sally is involved with, know that food is the focus from selection of the finest ingredients to preparation and presentation. Our guest speaker this evening is Mark McAfee, a California farmer that has one of the largest raw milk herds in the country. Mark is a dynamic speaker sure to get the blood pumping and that he does.

At this point we are wearing down but the evening is not over yet. Tonight will be a debut of a new film called Farmageddon. We are especially interested in seeing this film because Linda and Larry Faillace, from Warren, VT, will be telling their story about the USDA's seizure and slaughter of their flock of sheep a number of years back; perhaps you might remember the incidence. The movie is chilling. When the movie is released we recommend that you see it. The director of the movie, Kristin Canty, is a talented and well-known media person. She is a raw milk drinker who believes it is her right to purchase raw milk and ultimately not the decision of the government. Kristin feels that this movie will build necessary public awareness regarding our future access to real food.

It is late; 10:30 pm, it has been a very long day, and we are both exhausted. We leave the conference center and walk back to our room looking forward to the bed that awaits us. Tomorrow we will head back to Vermont.

A short time after the conference, the Wisconsin Raw Milk Bill was successfully passed, but the governor of the state vetoed the bill.