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SUBMISSION - Proposal P1007 - Primary Production & Processing Requirements for Raw Milk Products (Australia only)

I would like to register my support for an amendment to the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* to allow the production and sale of raw milk cheeses, bringing Australia into line with other major cheese manufacturing countries.

I am the Manager of the GPO Cheese & Wine Room, one of Sydney's most respected speciality cheese retailers, and its premier cheese & wine dining venue. My profession gives me exposure to a wide range of speciality Australian and European cheeses, and I am passionate about championing the best of our local artisan products with my customers.

I receive weekly requests from customers for raw milk cheeses, and most are surprised to know that local producers are prohibited from making any kind of cheese from raw milk, and that imports are limited to the "hard-cooked" varieties and Roquefort.

My objections to the current standards that prohibit the production and sale of most cheese made from raw milk in Australia are as follows:

1. The standard is highly discriminatory. It provides for international exemptions such as Roquefort and Swiss cheese but denies Australian cheese makers a choice of making similar cheese from raw milk. Australian artisanal cheese makers deserve to have the opportunity to expand their cheese-making expertise in this area, and to develop a significant point of difference in the market.
2. The standard denies consumers the choice of cheeses made from raw milk. Many raw milk cheeses from artisan and farmhouse producers are recognised as having an infinitely superior flavour and regional character when compared to similar cheeses made from pasteurised milk. Consumer interest in artisan and farmhouse cheese production is growing significantly and it is my experience that many consumers would like that choice.
3. The purpose of the Standard is to guarantee safe cheese – however the assumption that pasteurisation as a single step will guarantee safety is not scientifically valid. Rather, it is my understanding that the single critical control point that guarantees safety for all cheese varieties is starter culture activity (as acknowledged by other major cheese producing parts of the world, eg, European Union (EU), USA, and Canada).
4. The standard is anti-competitive and does not encourage world best practice in cheese production in Australia.
5. There is no reason why cheese made from raw milk should represent a greater

degree of risk than those produced from pasteurised milk, provided recognised international guidelines are adopted in Australia.

In summary, I believe that specialist cheese-makers and speciality retailers in Australia should be allowed the opportunity to demonstrate that raw milk cheeses can be developed, packaged, labelled, transported and sold to consumers with no greater risk to public health than cheese made from pasteurised milk. With recognised international guidelines in place, from on-farm production through to retail sale, producers, retailers and consumers in Australia should be allowed to make an informed choice to produce, sell and consume raw milk cheeses.

Sonia Cousins | **Manager, Cheese & Wine**

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