

Government Raid Seizes \$90,000 of Healthy Food Grown by Nourish Cooperative

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Global Research, June 11, 2024

[Mercola](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

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Nourish Cooperative is a farm cooperative that provides fresh, whole foods, such as low-PUFA eggs, raw milk, and "needle-free" grass fed and/or corn- and soy-free meat

On November 3, 2023, 15 of their corn- and soy-free, low-PUFA hogs were seized due to a misunderstanding on processing

On May 28, 2024, the cooperative was raided, and over \$90,000 worth of product was put under "cease and desist" by the state of Michigan

The raid took place over the course of about four to five hours, and started with four government employees arriving in a government marked car, including a human food inspector, an animal food inspector and two dairy inspectors

Nourish Cooperative is fighting back to protect traditional foods and the right to access these healing products from small farms

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There is a lot of fearmongering circulating in mainstream media about the "Avian Influenza". In parallel to the fearmongering, there has been a large increase in the number of inspections and surveillance. Creating fear would certainly help better maintain control of the food system, wouldn't it?

On Tuesday, May 28th, our farm co-op was randomly "inspected" (raided), and over \$90,000 worth of product was put under "cease and desist" by the state of Michigan, including all raw dairy. As this is an evolving story, I will share what we know to be true thus far.

Nourish Cooperative is a farm cooperative that my sister, Sarah, and I started with a few other first generation regenerative farmers in September 2023. After several years of a steadily increasing demand for our farm fresh products (such as our raw milk, sourdough, and “needle-free” grass fed and/or corn- and soy-free meat), we simply could not keep up with the demand ourselves, which led us to create a “cooperative” (co-op) of several small, local regenerative farms.

Our goal is to produce the highest quality food possible while working with Mother Nature through the use of regenerative agriculture practices. This cooperative grew faster than we could ever imagine, and with that, I suppose, more problems arose, inevitably. If interested, you can read more about Nourish Cooperative [here](#).

First, 15 Hogs Stolen — ‘Their Lives Went to Waste’

Our first stint with the government happened last fall on November 3, 2023 when 15 of our corn- and soy-free, low-PUFA hogs were seized right before my eyes due to a misunderstanding on processing. I was forced to put the 15 hog carcasses in the back of our pickup truck, pour used motor oil on them, and then drive them to a nearby landfill and pay to dispose of 2000+ pounds of hog carcasses.

I will never forget the smell at the top of that landfill! This was devastating — not only was thousands of dollars worth of product *literally* destroyed, but the lives of these animals went to waste. We could have used them ourselves, donated them, or fed them to our animals.

That’s a huge issue for us — we take pride in the methods in which we (and all of our farm partners) farm — rotationally grazing our animals to fresh pasture near daily, living as Mother Nature intended so they can express their innate instincts ensuring they have the closest to “natural” lives they can possibly live during their time on earth.

To know that they lived and died for no reason other than to sit in a landfill so the government could make a point — that hurt. And it hurt our spirit for a period of time, too. Thinking: Is this even worth it? Are we in over our heads?! There seems to be a block at every step of the way, when you’re trying to raise food traditionally, organically, and unadulterated.

But we persevered, which is how Nourish Cooperative expanded to carry not only various different types of meat and unique products (such as gelatin-rich bone broths and traditionally made sourdough products), but various types of raw dairy as well, including sheep, goat, and A2A2 cow dairy products such as raw milk, cheese, kefir, cream, butter, yogurt, and so on.

Most of us in the health space are familiar with the troubling laws around raw dairy, and we’re aware that raw dairy sales are heavily regulated, even illegal, in most if not all states.

This is where things get super confusing, as the laws differ by state, and in Michigan, where our co-op is located, the law states that one way to sell raw dairy is to establish a herd-share and require customers to pick up their dairy from your farm. Another option in Michigan is to sell your raw dairy as a pet food supplement, which is the route we decided to take.

All Raw Dairy — \$90,000 Worth of Product — Seized

Raw cheese is actually a little simpler. One thing all states do have in common is that raw cheese, made in a legitimate, inspected facility, that's aged for at least 60 days, is legal to sell and buy ([7 CFR § 58.439](#)). This is why you can buy raw cheese in stores such as Walmart and Meijer. It's not illegal, yet, on May 28th, around 1 PM EST, all of this came into question for us.

During the raid of our cooperative, all raw dairy was placed under seizure — in total, over \$90,000 worth of product. What this means is that these products (all milk, cheese, butter, etc.) were counted and tagged, and that we are not allowed to sell, use or even move these products without a government official present.

So no using these products for our personal use, no giving these products to our animals — simply put, these products have to remain where they were, unless we choose to discard of them, and in that case, a government official would need to be present to ensure we discarded of them appropriately, to their standards (which basically means, they'd need to go to literal waste). Remember the pig situation I mentioned ...? Talk about déjà vu, in the worst way possible.

Keep in mind, this was a Tuesday, the day after Memorial Day, and business was going as usual. We had over 350 orders to pack up and ship out to our cooperative members and their pets, the majority of which included raw dairy (sold as a pet food supplement).

The raid took place over the course of about four to five hours, and started with four government employees arriving in a government marked car, including a human food inspector, an animal food inspector, and two dairy inspectors.

The inspectors spoke to the highest in the chain of command available at our farm, which was Brandon, our head of operations (and Sarah's fiancé). Brandon informed the government employees that he did not feel comfortable showing them around the facility since it was not his place, and gently pointed towards the farm's "NO TRESPASSING" signs.

However, since Nourish Cooperative has a "Food Warehouse License" in Michigan, they notified us that they're allowed to show up and inspect at any time, and requested to be shown around our facility.

Five-Hour 'Inspection' Leads to Cease and Desist Letter

What began to unfold over the next four to five hours was these four inspectors, going through our fridges and freezers, tossing products around, and deciding that all of our raw dairy and a few other products were placed under seizure. Including the raw cheese.

The issue they had with the raw cheese was that the plant number was "not identifiable" on the label. However, Brandon read off the plant number to the inspectors directly from the label in front of them, and this information was also given to the main human food inspector the week prior verbally during a phone call.

So, we provided the plant number where our cheese is made ... but they said they couldn't read it on their own. Even if the font size was too small, why did the product have to be put "UNDER SEIZURE"?



Figure 1. Nourish Cooperative cheese label.

UPDATE = the cheese was released from seizure eight days later on Thursday, June 6th after the plant number was again communicated and the legality of raw aged cheese for human consumption was proven through [7 CFR § 58.439](#).

As for the other raw dairy products (like milk and butter) sold as a pet food supplement, we were told that the entire situation started as a label miscommunication. We were told that there were some issues with our labels since we did not specify what pet the product was for, and did not include serving suggestions. (For example, for dogs, feed two tablespoons.)

Our labels were submitted in March and our check was cashed for a pet food license. But, instead of going back and forth with us to help us get our labels approved, there was the surprise inspection, and immediate seizure of all products.

We have made the suggested changes, and resubmitted the labels for approval the evening of the inspection, but now we are all of a sudden being told that it is illegal to sell raw dairy as pet food.

“Michigan does not permit the sale of raw milk for human or animal consumption, therefore relabeling the products will not fully correct the (label) violations cited.”

Hmmm I am not so sure about this. For example, in the past week I have called over 10 pet food stores throughout the state of Michigan who sell raw goat milk for pets.

Talk about selective enforcement? Despite this being an unannounced “regular inspection,” this group of government officials arrived with a pre-prepared Cease and Desist letter

(unless they printed it in their car), and asked Brandon to sign this letter. Brandon declined saying he was not in the position to sign.

Truthfully, we are kind of in limbo right now and have no information on how to proceed forward (despite making the suggested label changes).

We cannot touch any of the products (raw milk, raw butter, raw cream, raw cottage cheese, etc.) that are still under seizure (only the raw cheese cease and desist order was removed). We can't eat it ourselves. And we can't feed it to our animals. All of this product will go to waste!

The most unfortunate part of all of this is that for many of our farm partners, our co-op is their only market — they rely on our market to make a living. So, how are they supposed to pay their bills? What do they do with all of the product?

We've been able to help dozens of small farmers improve their farming practices, expand their operations, and make enough income to actually be farmers and quit their off-farm jobs. (Did you know that 96% of farm households derived some of their income from off-farm sources in 2019?¹ Meaning, many farmers require other jobs to support their farm.)

You Have a Right to Access Real, Healing Foods

As a co-op, we shouldn't have to black market real, healing foods (which, to be clear, we are not doing — we have attempted to comply with the law and regulations every step of the way) or, as consumers, have to bend over backwards to try to source these products. Starting Nourish allowed these farmers to focus on farming (the right way), and actually make a living doing so. We hope to continue to provide this opportunity to other small farmers as the co-op continues to grow.

Just as unfortunate, our co-op members rely on us for these foods. Many of our members have food allergies or sensitivities, or other health conditions, that require them to source pure, unadulterated foods. Or they just choose to source the highest quality food available because it makes them feel good, and they want to support regenerative agriculture and small farmers.

While these members are buying the raw dairy for their pets, they obviously can do as they please with these products. It is not up to us to decide what someone does with their dairy.

Our members are upset, and they're fired up at the same time. The support that's rolled in from members of Nourish and beyond is incredible to see; more and more people are choosing to source their foods from small farmers, raising food the traditional way, and we don't see why there should be so many obstacles to do so.

(Well, we do understand, as Big Ag spends millions of dollars each year on lobbying to ensure the rules and regulations make it so that it is very hard to be a small farmer or co-op in their centralized system.)

Regardless, we must work within the framework we are given, and even though it may not make sense to us, or to our co-op members, there are ways in which we can move forward — and we are hopeful we will be able to fully back in business soon.

Since May 28th, we've had to stop selling all raw dairy products (except raw cheese which is again available for sale) and other products seized by the government, but we are still providing grass fed meats (beef, yak, lamb), and corn- and soy-free, low-PUFA chicken and pork, as well as raw pet food chubs, pure Michigan maple syrup, raw honey, and a few other products [on our website](#).

Fight for Your Right for Nourishment

We ship these products all across the United States. While the website shows we are currently closed and not taking new members, we are diligently working on opening up more spots for incoming members, so if you would like to join Nourish, please reach out to our customer service [by clicking here](#) with a request to make your membership active, or with any other questions you may have.

If you would like to support our co-op during this challenging time, to help us recover from the \$90,000 product loss, and help us cover our mounting legal fees, we have an ongoing GiveSendGo fundraiser in which you can support us by clicking below.

[Click to donate.](#)

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Ashley Armstrong is the cofounder of Angel Acres Egg Co., which specializes in low-PUFA (polyunsaturated fat) eggs that are shipped to all 50 states ([join waitlist here](#)), and [Nourish Cooperative](#), which ships low-PUFA pork, beef, cheese, A2 dairy and traditional sourdough to all 50 states.

Note

¹ [USDA September 7, 2021](#)

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