

# Waste Not, Want Not: The Costly Aftermath of Michigan's Raid on Nourish Cooperative

Analysis by [Ashley Armstrong](#)

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Nourish Cooperative was raided on May 28, 2024, leading to a cease and desist order on \$90,000 worth of raw dairy products by the state of Michigan
- › The seized products, including raw cow kefir and raw goat yogurt, were left in fridges and freezers for over two weeks, causing spoilage and storage issues
- › On June 8, Nourish Cooperative requested permission from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) to remove the spoiled products from their fridges. MDARD inspectors arrived on June 13 to oversee the disposal of the raw dairy products, but denied requests to repurpose the products for personal use or animal feed
- › The disposal process involved removing lids, boxing the products, and transporting over 25 large cardboard boxes to a dumpster, resulting in significant waste
- › Nourish Cooperative has had to stop selling all raw dairy products except raw cheese, but continues to sell other farm products like grass fed meats and raw honey. You can support the cooperative with donations and/or by contacting MDARD to advocate for the sale of their products

This is a follow-up report from the government raid at Nourish Cooperative (which is a farm cooperative that provides farm-fresh food) on May 28, 2024. [Link to full story posted last week, here.](#)

Briefly, on May 28, 2024 (the beginning of the nationwide fearmongering around avian influenza in raw milk), Nourish Cooperative was raided, and over \$90,000 worth of raw dairy products were put under “cease and desist” order by the state of Michigan.

Meaning, all of that nutrient-dense food was “under seizure,” just sitting in our fridge and freezers. For over two weeks.

It is pretty expensive to just pay energy bills to keep products in fridges and freezers that we can't sell. Plus, we do not have endless fridge and freezer space to put new product in (that we are able to sell like raw aged cheese and meat).

So, on June 8, after it was pretty clear the government was not going to let us sell this product, we emailed MDARD (Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development) asking if we can please remove this product from the fridge. We needed the space, and well, product was starting to sour, and kefir glass bottles were starting to explode. (That is to be expected as kefir continues to ferment, more and more gas is created). The fridge needed to be cleaned out ASAP!

 **Brandon Embree** 6/8/24  
Re: Follow Up Question [Details](#)  
To: [REDACTED] (MDARD) & 1 more

Hi [REDACTED],

I was wondering, what's the soonest you could have someone come out to the farm so we can clear out the dairy in the fridges? All of that product is starting to sour, and I need to get it out before it starts to stink. I plan on just dumping it into 5-gallon buckets and feeding it to our animals, but if I remember correctly, you said I need to have one of you come out and witness it.

-Brandon Embree

*Email asking MDARD if they can please let us remove product from the fridge on June 8 so that Nourish Cooperative could continue to stock new products that we are allowed to sell.*

## **Some of the Healthiest Food on Earth Tossed in the Dumpster**

Six days later, on Thursday June 13, MDARD finally was able to get two inspectors to our property to witness the product disposal (after several email requests – business must go on!) Hilary and the other inspector, Christopher, the lead feed inspector at MDARD, showed up to the farm around 2:30 pm ET. Their job was to witness the destruction of raw dairy products in our fridges.

We asked Christopher and Hilary whether we could keep some of the product for personal use and dump the rest into a large bin so that we could feed it to our animals. They called an unknown connection at MDARD, who denied this request. There was no reason provided.

The product had to be thrown in the dumpster. But as government employees, they can't throw anything away. So, they forced US to do it. The first step was to get a count on all the products in the fridge under seizure, to ensure that none of the products had been used or sold since their last visit. All products were removed from the fridge and then counted. The pet food supplement products included:

Raw cow kefir	Raw cow cream
Raw cow Greek yogurt	Raw cow maple Greek yogurt
Raw cow vanilla Greek yogurt	Raw goat kefir
Raw goat yogurt	Raw sheep kefir
Raw sheep yogurt	Lightly pasteurized cow skyr yogurt

Once all products were accounted for, it was time to discard them in the dumpster. And we couldn't just put the jars in the dumpster, the required process involved taking off all lids of each product, throwing the lids away, stacking the products into cardboard boxes, and then utilizing the tractor forks to move over 25 large cardboard boxes to the dumpster.

The lids were removed from the jars to ensure the product would spill into the dumpster, and thus not be able to be picked out afterwards and utilized. The glass shattering would've taken care of this, regardless, as that created quite a safety hazard.



Once all the products had been discarded, Christopher documented a few pictures of the dumpster and Hilary recommended we “ask the dumpster service to come sooner otherwise it may start to really smell here.” Then the two inspectors left the farm. Hillary and Christopher, to their credit, were very cordial during the visit; after all, they were just “doing their job” under current MDARD policies.

Sarah Armstrong recorded all videos and was a witness to the food destruction. She described her mix of emotions from the day as: disheartened, sickened, disgusted, angered, saddened, and repulsed. How wasteful!

## **What Is Next for Nourish?**

This is certainly not an easy time for us here at Nourish. Since May 28, we’ve had to stop selling all raw dairy products (except raw cheese which is again available for sale after

an initial eight-day seizure because they couldn't read the plant number on our label, even though Brandon read it to them off the label on the day of the raid) and other products seized by the government due to label misunderstandings.

In addition to raw cheese, we are still able to sell 100% grass fed and needle-free meats (beef, yak, lamb), and corn- and soy-free, low-PUFA chicken and pork, as well as raw dog food, pure Michigan maple syrup, raw honey, and a few other products [on our website](#). We are still figuring out how we can move forward – and we are hopeful we will be able to fully back in business soon selling all products.

## **Help Out Nourish and Fight for Your Right for Nourishment by Sending an Email of Support**

One way to help the fight for food freedom is to send a short email to MDARD (directions on how to do this below).

\*Please understand that the raw dairy is being sold as a pet food supplement as raw dairy is “illegal” to sell for human consumption. Our labels were submitted as such, but Nourish customers are certainly free to do whatever they want to do with these pet food supplements.

However, at this point in time, MDARD is telling us that it is illegal to sell raw dairy as pet food supplements even though there are numerous pet food stores around the state that sell and ship raw dairy. There are also numerous companies that ship raw dairy as pet food into the state of Michigan (including Amazon!).

Please help us get this “cease and desist” order removed so that we can continue to sell raw dairy as pet food and support our farm partners (who currently do not have a market!).

We would very much appreciate if you sent a short email to Tim Lyons, who is the head of the pet food department in the state of Michigan, with an example email template below that you can slightly tweak if you would like. We ask that you please remain

respectful with your email, even though the process has not been respectful to your pet's right to have nourishing food.

**SAMPLE EMAIL SCRIPT to send to [tlyonst1@michigan.gov](mailto:tlyonst1@michigan.gov):**

*Hi Tim,*

*I am emailing you to request that you reconsider the cease and desist order on Nourish Cooperative. We very much need the Nourish raw dairy products as pet food supplements for the continued health of my dogs.*

*I am able to purchase a variety of raw dairy brands at countless other pet food stores throughout the state of Michigan, but none of those brands compare to the quality Nourish Cooperative provides.*

*Best,*

*\*insert your name here\**

Send email to: Tim Lyons (Feed Safety Section Manager)

- Email: [tlyonst1@michigan.gov](mailto:tlyonst1@michigan.gov)
- Phone: 517-719-1696

You can also contact the following individuals:

- Wendy Powell
  - Email: [powellW2@michigan.gov](mailto:powellW2@michigan.gov)
  - Phone: 248-369-5136
- Abbie Rowell
  - Email: [rowella@michigan.gov](mailto:rowella@michigan.gov)
  - Phone: 616-813-9207

If you would like to financially 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.

[Donate to Fundraiser](#)

Alternatively, you can buy a t-shirt with our current motto – “[Fight for Your Right for Nourishment](#)” – and a small percentage of that sale will go to our business. Any effort to support is greatly appreciated, we are determined to not let this be the end of Nourish, and we’ll do everything in our power to ensure we can keep moving forward.

## **About the Authors**

Ashley and Sarah Armstrong co-founded [Nourish Cooperative](#), which ships low-PUFA pork, beef, cheese, A2 dairy and traditional sourdough to all 50 states.