Right-wing influencers attempt to convince followers that drinking potentially virus-carrying raw milk provides “benefits”?

According to James Fitzgerald, PhD, associate professor of security studies at Dublin City University, whose research focuses on conspiracy-led violent extremism, post-truth politics, and disinformation, the consumption of raw milk is the latest in a long line of social and political markers that sets the extreme right apart, giving it a distinct identity as an alternative way of seeing and raging at the world. Other examples include alternative diets, self-help, and bodily improvement trends.

While drinking unpasteurized milk isn’t illegal, it does go against the official guidance of federal agencies like the CDC and FDA, as well as mainstream medical expertise, as we saw with extreme-right and conservative resistance to vaccination during the Covid-19 pandemic, Fitzgerald tells Rolling Stone. It provides individuals with a sense of agency, freedom, and control: one of the reasons why the topic taps into broad support among individuals who may not otherwise support far/extreme-right causes.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other “disruptive” innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

While several recent public health advisories have focused on the presence of H5N1 avian influenza virus in raw milk, Dr. Celine Gounder says that people who drink unpasteurized milk also risk contracting E. coli, Salmonella, and Campylobacter bacterial infections, which are often accompanied by unpleasant symptoms like fever, diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. These bacteria are present in the feces of cattle, and the undersides of cattle are highly contaminated with them, she explains.

Given the potential risks of drinking raw milk, why are right-wing extremists, wellness influencers, and anti-establishment leaders encouraging others to guzzle it down? One reason, according to Fitzgerald, is that it helps to bolster other far- and extreme-right conspiracy theories, like the Great Reset—based on the idea that a globalist elite is pushing an agenda to remove meat and dairy products from modern diets, and replace them with plant-based and lab-grown alternatives. At a minimum, this would infringe on individual freedom of choice, he explains. At worst, it would allow liberal globalist elites to contaminate new sources of food with chemicals and additives designed to pacify the masses, who would become apathetic to political change.

Lastly, drinking unpasteurized milk also provides another way for the extreme right to embrace idealized aesthetics of the past, alongside traditional gender roles, and policies that maintain and promote the status quo of white supremacy. The consumption of raw milk like the tradwife aesthetic, which is also leveraged by the extreme-right is a lifestyle choice that harkens back to a better, simpler
time when traditional social hierarchies persist, Fitzgerald explains.