In response to the state’s ban on buying and selling raw milk and the continued demand for raw milk, a practice has emerged in Michigan referred to as cow-sharing. A cow share is an arrangement in which Michigan residents who are not dairy farmers can buy a partial ownership interest in a cow that produces milk. Such an ownership interest entitles participants to a certain percentage of the milk the cow produces each week.

These arrangements are usually crafted carefully so that they do not violate the state’s prohibition on selling raw milk. For instance, partial owners generally will pay an initial fee to obtain one “share” of the cow, plus a monthly fee to compensate the farmer actually raising the cow to cover boarding and feed costs. Monthly boarding fees are usually fixed and are often paid on a set date each month that is not a day when the partial owner picks up his or her share of the milk so that the payment will be considered payment for the cow, not the milk. Because it is legal for Michiganders to drink milk from cows they own, cow-shares have been successful in providing a legal source of raw milk to residents who wish to consume it.