

02/11/2019

## **Greek Orthodox nuns fined \$75K by dairy producers for allegedly selling cow milk**



**All the milk from the monastery's 2 Guernsey cows consumed by nuns and their guests, nuns insist.**

Nuns living in a secluded monastery in the Laurentians, northwest of Montreal, were shocked to discover they'd been fined nearly \$75,000 — over cows' milk.

The Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec (PLQ), the group representing Quebec dairy producers, accuse the Greek Orthodox nuns at the Virgin Mary of Consolatory monastery of selling milk products without a permit.

The monastery's administrator, Sister Macrina, said the nuns only own two cows, Guernseys which produce milk for the nuns themselves and their visitors — milk that is not for sale.

"It's not something we make business out of," she said. "Mistakes happen, we're human, but you can't fine me for that."

The nuns do make and sell goat milk products from the monastery, but that's not the problem.

Sister Macrina said she has tried to get in touch with the dairy producers' federation several times in the two years since the monastery got its cows to find out what its responsibilities are.

"For two years I've been making phone calls, asking questions, just to be enlightened about what the law is, because I know it's quite regulated," she said.

"For all this period of time, no one was communicating with me; no one was answering my phone calls. I was totally ignored."

Sister Macrina said she finally spoke with someone from the federation who asked her about the number of cows at the monastery, what the nuns do with the milk, and how many litres the cows produce.

She said she doesn't work directly with the cows, and as the call came as she was scrambling to make dinner, she got the information from one of the other nuns and gave the caller a figure.

"The next thing I see is, I open a letter and I see a fine of \$75,000 that I received from the PLQ," she said.

The letter states the monastery has produced more than 38,000 litres of milk without a quota, and that it had 10 days to pay its fine.

But Sister Macrina said she only saw the letter two days before the Aug. 29 deadline.

### **An unfair investigation, Sister Macrina says**

She said the federation's investigation was neither fair nor transparent: she did not know the phone call was being recorded, and she wasn't prepared with answers to their questions.

The nuns do not keep a registry of their cow milk production because they consume what the cows produce.

“I understand the point of view of the PLQ,” she said. “I understand they’re doing their job to keep control of abuse or misuse of the system, and I totally agree with them. But if you want to do something like that, do it respectfully.”

She said the nuns would accept the fine if she thought it was merited.

“If we wanted to abuse the system, I wouldn’t have been calling them over two years’ time,” she said.

She said the 26-year-old monastery is already struggling to stay afloat, and it doesn’t even have facilities for the nuns to have their own rooms.

“If, God forbid, we have to pay this amount, it’s ruining the monastery,” she said. “It’s destroying everything we’ve been trying to do for 26 years.”

“We’re trying to build something — a heritage.”

### **Federation ‘has a legal mandate’ to fine nuns**

PLQ spokesperson François Dumontier said the federation is just doing its job by fining the nuns. He said it has reason to believe the nuns have been commercializing the cow milk.

“The Quebec dairy producers have the mandate to apply the Quebec regulation on the milk marketing plan and on the dairy quota regulation,” he said. “We have a legal mandate to apply those regulations.”

He said quotas are critical to the supply management system and the collective marketing of Quebec dairy products.

Dumontier said he would not comment on the investigation into the monastery or what tipped his organization off that the nuns had been producing milk without a quota.

“Obviously, nobody is above the law, and those regulations need to be respected, so that is why action has been taken,” he said.

He also said he would not comment on the next steps, but said the federation has shown a willingness to negotiate with the nuns to help them comply with provincial regulations.

— Source: [cbc.ca](http://cbc.ca)