

Care of food-producing animals

Part 3 of 4

September 2022

☀ Backyard Chicken Farming

In 2013, the USDA predicted that by 2019, there would be 13 million US households with “backyard chickens” (BYC), which has become the standard term for this practice. The USDA’s pre-Covid statistic was confirmed by the American Pet Producers Association in 2018 which estimated 10 million or approximately [3% of all US households](#) have BYCs. Industry observers quote a higher concentration since the onset of Covid-19.

☀ Canadian data and perspective

The CFIA website does not provide resources to BYC farming proportional to that of the USDA. The Agency’s focus is on safety, providing guidance on [How to prevent and detect disease in small flocks and pet birds](#).

☀ Ontario references US leadership

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs website directs DIYer’s to the Mississippi State Extension Service for guidance on [poultry houses](#) and to the US-based [Backyard Poultry Magazine](#).

☀ Urban agriculture in the EU

In 2017, the European Parliament published a report on the [patterns, challenges and policies](#) of this growing interest. No volume or scale data was collected. The practice itself is not new, having been applied before, during and since periods of crisis and food shortages, such as the two world wars. What is new, is the wide range of factors beyond the household budget and local food availability, such as family lifestyle, hobby farming, convenience, environmental footprint, food safety concerns and personal preferences.

☀ Meet BYC Polly; check out the egg shells

Michigan State University advises that egg shell colour is determined by the breed (genetics) of the hen. Leghorn chickens lay white-shell eggs; Orpingtons lay brown shells; Ameraucana lay blue shells; and five chicken breeds each lay a particular hue of green-shell eggs.



☀ Municipal regulations - and quarrels

Throughout North America, BYC are governed by municipal legislation. Taking one of the EU definitions “In general, urban agriculture is performed on land that is not agriculturally zoned.” into account, it is reasonable to expect conflict. Some cities (Edmonton, AB) do not issue permits during the winter months; this year, Vancouver, BC has mandated annual renewal of BYC permits; Kitchener, ON has banned roosters and home slaughter; Toronto, ON has extended its 2018 Urban Hens Pilot Program to 2023. Defiant and radical pro-BYC groups abound, such as [CLUCK](#) (Canadian Liberated Urban Chicken Klub).

☀ Meanwhile, back on the farm...

Chicken Farmers of Canada report that the [current 2022 avian flu outbreak](#) is the largest ever seen in Canada. Half of all reported cases, but only 0.5% of affected birds, are BYC.

☀ Why the chicken crossed the road

To get to the SPCA. Last year, the Montreal, QC SPCA issued a warning to BYC’ers to [Care for your clucking hen!](#) regarding abandonment of urban hens once they surpass their laying-life. The British Columbia SPCA has published an advisory, cautioning that the undertaking requires significant assessment, planning and ongoing effort: [Thinking of keeping backyard chickens?](#)

☀ Social Engineering 101

One aspect to consider is flock size. A solo hen is inadvisable as chickens are social animals; the hen will get lonely. Proper breed selection is required to avoid aggressive and bullying behaviour (aka pecking order) which can result in not only physical attacks but compromised egg-laying due to psychological factors.

☀ All for one and one for all



The USDA’s [Defend the Flock Resource Center](#) addresses the health and welfare of all poultry, and all ages of poultry farmers, whether urban or rural. **FF**

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