

Raising Chickens in City Backyards: the Public Health Role

Sue Pollock MSc, MD, FRCPC
Field Epidemiologist, Canadian Field Epidemiology Program
Public Health Agency of Canada

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National Collaborating Centre
for Environmental Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
en santé environnementale

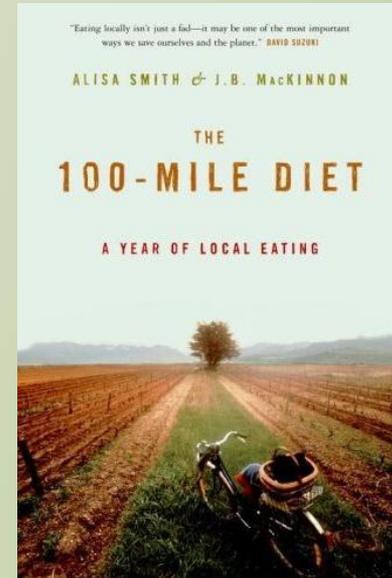


BC Centre for Disease Control
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority



Urban agriculture

- Urban agriculture movement
 - Local food production
 - Fruits and vegetables
- Urban livestock
 - Rabbits, goats, guinea pigs, ducks, geese, pigeons
 - Chickens



Urban backyard chickens

- Regulations vary
 - By jurisdiction
 - Companion animals (e.g. dogs) viewed differently
- Increasing calls for approval
 - **Approved**
 - Vancouver (2010); Guelph (1944)
 - **Not approved**
 - Waterloo (2009); Halifax (2008)

Objectives

- To determine whether public health should take a position on urban backyard chickens
 - Risks vs. Benefits
- To develop a public health approach

Methods

- Environmental scan
- Key informant interviews
- Literature review

Why raise chickens in urban backyards?

- **Benefits**
 - Social
 - Economic
 - Nutritional
 - Environmental



Ref: www.istockphoto.com (Jason Lugo)

National Animal Health Monitoring Survey 2004 (USDA)

- Surveyed U.S. owners of backyard flocks on reasons for raising birds
 - **#1: Fun/Hobby**
 - Family tradition
 - Lifestyle
 - Food



Ref: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/meckleychina>

What are the concerns?

- Infectious diseases
 - Avian Influenza
 - Enteric diseases
 - *Salmonella*
 - *Campylobacter*
- Pests & Predators
- Nuisance factors
 - Noise
 - Odor



Ref: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/joeshlabotnik>

Summary of the Evidence

- Limited data from urban backyard flocks in North America
- Difficult to assess risk
 - Probability of exposure difficult to predict
- Analogies
 - Backyard flocks in Asia
 - Commercial flocks
- Anecdotal
 - Jurisdictions with experience

Should public health take a position on whether to allow urban backyard chickens?

- Currently not enough evidence of public health risk or benefit
- Decision left to the jurisdictions
- Further research needed into health effects of urban backyard chickens in North American context

Urban backyard chickens:

What is a public health approach?

Development of risk mitigation strategies

- Collaborative
- Promote health and prevent disease in humans **AND** chickens

Public health approach

- Education
- Regulation
- Economic

Education: human health

- Ask about history of animal exposures
- Vulnerable groups
- Hand hygiene
- Food safety
- Waste management
- Pest and predator control

Education: chicken health

- **Care of chickens by public**
 - Access to poultry health experts
 - Knowledge of waste management
 - Knowledge of bird health promotion and disease control strategies

Education: chicken health

- **Care of chickens by veterinarians**
 - Minimize contact with commercial flocks
 - Training of urban vets in poultry medicine

Regulation

- Prohibit chicks and roosters
- Licensing/registration of birds
- Limit number of hens allowed
- Specifications on coop, waste management, food storage

Economic

- Free registration
- Access to educational materials
- Place to drop off unwanted hens
- Affordable disposal of waste
- Veterinary services

Conclusions

- Raising urban backyard chickens is similar to keeping any companion animal
- Collaboration between public health and animal health professionals to mitigate risks
- **Healthy animals = Healthy people**

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Thank-you



Ref: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/drslippers>