

# Backyard Chickens

## ARE BACKYARD CHICKENS FOR YOU?



Backyard chickens, or urban chickens, are increasingly a topic of debate throughout Canadian municipalities. Urban residents continue to show an interest in raising chickens in their backyard as a source of eggs and meat. Current regulations on this issue vary by municipality. Policies on urban chickens are still in the early stages of development. However, concern remains about the impact of changing regulations on stakeholders including egg producers, retailers, the public and the welfare of the hens themselves.

Many Canadians are lobbying their local government to amend by-laws to allow backyard chickens, with limitations to their numbers and regulating handling practices. Specific by-law ordinances consider minimum lot size, setbacks, cleaning requirements and allowance of roosters will have a significant impact on how municipalities will be impacted. This document provides some facts on the issue and things to consider before deciding to raise your own chickens.

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**Daily Caretaking** The amount of care and maintenance should not be underestimated. Daily feeding and cleaning of the chicken coop is required for well-being of humans and chickens.

**Know the Costs** There are many upfront and continual expenses associated with keeping chickens including constructing the coop, fencing, food storage, heating and cooling appliances for the coop, city permits, food costs, veterinarian bills, and cleaning equipment.

**Continual Pest Control** Chickens can attract a variety of pests and wildlife including insects, raccoons, and rodents, which may potentially impact neighbours as well.<sup>1</sup>

**Food Security** Backyard chickens can fulfill a demand for locally and sustainably produced food. This practice can reduce the high environmental inputs that many foods require including the impacts of agricultural land uses, transportation and energy inputs.

**Ethics** Backyard chickens may have greater access to space and sunlight than in most commercial operations.

# 5 Things You Didn't Know About Backyard Chickens

## 1. MOST HENS ARE ONLY ECONOMICALLY PRODUCTIVE FOR 2 YEARS BUT CHICKENS CAN LIVE FOR OVER A DECADE

Depending on the breed of chicken, egg production rates decline after approximately 2 years of production.<sup>2</sup> There is a point in this decline where caretaking costs associated with the hens are higher than the value of eggs they are able to produce. However, backyard chickens can live from 8 to 15 years.

## 2. THE NUMBER OF EGG PRODUCERS IN CANADA HAS DECREASED BY 44% SINCE 1985.

Between 1985 and 2007, the number of egg producers in Canada decreased by 44%, from 1,848 to 1,045 producers. However, the number of laying hens per producer in Canada increased by 76%.<sup>3</sup> This demonstrates the trend of farmers moving towards larger flocks.

## 3. VANCOUVER, VICTORIA, KINGSTON, GUELPH, LOS ANGELES AND NEW YORK ARE DOING IT

While some major cities in North America have moved to pass by-laws permitting urban chickens, the majority of municipalities in Canada still prohibit keeping of chickens in urban areas.

## 4. BACKYARD CHICKENS DO NOT PRESENT A GREATER RISK OF PATHOGEN TRANSMISSION THAN OTHER HOUSEHOLD PETS

Studies have shown that raising backyard chickens does not present a greater risk of pathogen transmission compared to other household pets.<sup>4</sup> While there are health concerns with chickens and humans living in such close proximity, risk of disease can be mitigated through proper hygiene and animal husbandry.

## 5. HENS ARE PERMITTED, ROOSTERS ARE NOT

Generally, Canadian municipalities that have regulated backyard chickens allow hens but not roosters. Roosters are considered to be noisy, aggressive and not appropriate for an urban setting, while hens are typically quieter, especially after sunset.

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### REFERENCES

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<sup>4</sup> Pollock, S.L. et al. (2012). Raising Chickens in City Backyards: The Public Health Role. *Journal of Community Health*, 37: 734-742.