



CONSIDERATIONS IN RAISING SMALL BACKYARD FLOCKS OF POULTRY

During these times of economic challenge many people are considering raising a few chickens in the backyard to augment their food supply. This has raised numerous questions ranging from how to feed chickens to addressing local animal-keeping ordinances. Most of the answers are a work in progress for many communities. The following considerations should be taken into account.

1. Science-based education is critical

Be cautious of advice from self-proclaimed “experts” or people with informal training who attempt to fill a perceived educational niche. Many would-be poultry raisers are novices or first time owners. Learning how to do things correctly from qualified science-based sources is paramount in order to be successful. Optimal decision-making must be based on facts – not hearsay or folktales. Utah State University Cooperative Extension offers research-based education in small flock poultry raising. Fact sheets are available on line

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/AG_Poultry_2008-01pr.pdf

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/AG_Poultry_2008-02pr.pdf

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/AG_Poultry_Health_Biosecurity_01.pdf

County agents throughout the State are here to offer assistance. The USU faculty also includes an Extension poultry specialist who has advanced training in poultry health and management who is available to educate groups and community leaders in science-based poultry issues.

2. Effects on the Utah economy

The commercial poultry industry contributes a significant and vital part to the agricultural economy of the State. Anything that jeopardizes the viability of this industry also jeopardizes the economic health of Utah. It is important that these commercial flocks be protected from serious diseases that would decimate this sector of Utah’s economy. An upsurge in number of small backyard flocks – particularly if not properly managed – might significantly increase the probability of disease exposure to the commercial industry. Past history has shown that diseases such as Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) can become present in the hobby poultry community. Exotic Newcastle Disease can

cause tremendous poultry death in both the small backyard flocks and in large commercial poultry operations. The discovery of END, for example, will have devastating economic consequences from both death loss as well as the loss of trade with other countries.

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/pub_190530.pdf (English and Spanish)

3. Community impacts

The local community may experience unanticipated impacts from an abrupt unregulated increase in backyard poultry keeping. Any potential negative repercussions can be minimized through recognition and well thought out planning to ensure that all remain good neighbors.

Noise: Hens are quieter than males – particularly in smaller groups. There is no way to humanely make a rooster unable to crow. It takes experience and knowledge to properly identify the gender of young chicks. Your local farm implement store may not be able to provide this service reliably when chicks are purchased. Be prepared to cull roosters as the chicks mature. Chickens will be able to lay eggs without a rooster present.

Number and types of poultry: What other types of poultry other than chickens, such as ducks, geese, Guinea fowl, or turkeys will be allowed? How many? As a rule of thumb, eight laying hens will provide four to seven eggs/day.

Zoning: Some municipalities do not allow the raising of poultry or have strict ordinances that restrict this activity. Check with your city or county office to determine if there are specific regulations or restrictions that might preclude keeping poultry on your property. Along with city or county ordinances, some communities or subdivisions have rules or “covenants” that restrict the raising of poultry. Be sure to check if your domicile is in one of these.

Animal movement: Chickens are no respecters of property lines. They are prone to wander at will into neighbors’ yards and gardens. Remember chickens can also fly. To minimize the impact on neighbors, enclosures should be considered that properly restrain poultry and confine them to your property.

Animal waste: In most instances, used chicken litter can be incorporated into the garden soil or composted; however, improper composting or storage may create excessive odor and fly problems.

Human health: Although chickens pose a relatively low risk of giving disease to humans, there are a few bugs that can be transmitted back and forth. Proper care and handling of eggs and processing of poultry carcasses are critical to avoid problems. Appropriate disposal of dead birds and used litter are also important. Where there is feed, there are rodents. Mice thrive in areas where chicken feed is improperly stored

and excessive spillage occurs. Rats could become a problem in excessively wet areas or where water leaks occur.

Enforcement of noncompliance: If some type of local poultry permitting program is practiced, will there be sufficient funds and personnel to carry out the program? Does the community have the adequate resources and personnel to deal with people who break the rules or handle poultry in cruel or inhumane ways?

4. Animal welfare

Proper care and feeding: It is imperative that poultry owners understand and implement proper care of their birds. Inhumane practices such as denying poultry access to water or a protected coop during hot days or during inclement and cold weather are intolerable. Birds are to be provided with a proper diet at all times and not left to fend for themselves. Enough space must be provided to adequately accommodate the number of birds kept.

Protection from predators and disease. Enclosures should be netted or fenced over the top to avoid wild birds from entering that might be carrying disease. Adequate confined protection, such as a coop, must be provided to minimize weather stress and to protect against predators.

Disease transmission. Chicks must be purchased from sources certifying that they are free from specific diseases. Certain species of poultry can carry organisms that may do little harm to them but could cause devastating disease in another species. Mixing of species, such as ducks and chickens or chickens and turkeys increases the potential infection and spread of avian influenza (bird flu). Raising chickens and turkeys together could cause devastating disease in the turkeys. It is important to understand the nature of poultry diseases and how to deal with them.

Avian Influenza http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/factsheet/AG_poultry_2005-01.pdf

For more information contact Dr. David D. Frame, USU Extension Poultry Specialist at (435) 283-7586; or Dr. Kerry Rood, USU Extension Veterinarian at (435) 797-1882.

Also visit these web sites for other important information:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/birdbiosecurity/
<http://ag.utah.gov/divisions/animal/health/index.html#avianHealth>