

# Raising Chickens in City Backyards: the Public Health Role

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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



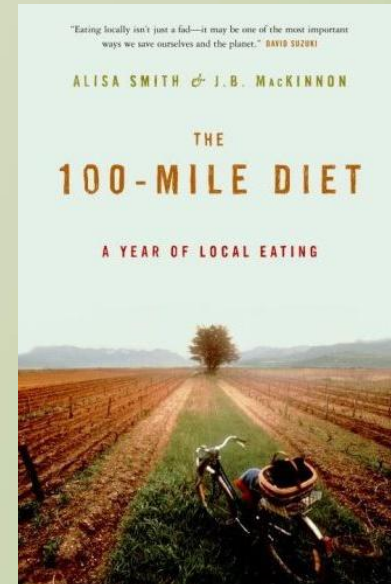
# Urban agriculture

## “ 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](http://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>