Raising Chickens in City Backyards: the Public Health Role

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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)
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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Ref: http://www.flickr.com/photos/drslippers