

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

CPHA Centennial Conference
June 14, 2010-Toronto, ON



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



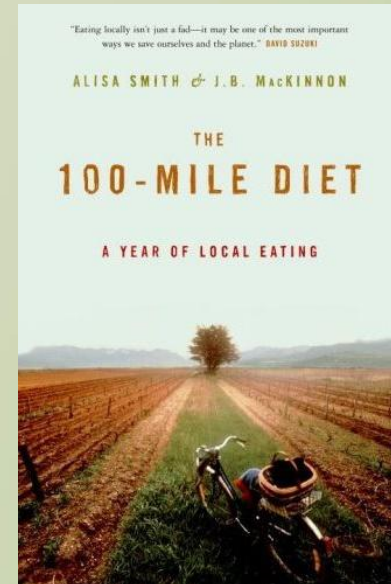
Urban agriculture

“ 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

Acknowledgements

- “ BCCDC Environmental Health Services Division
 - . Dr. Tom Kosatsky
 - . Dr. Brian Radke
 - . Dr. Catherine Elliott
- “ National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health
 - . Mê-Linh Le
 - . Karen Rideout
 - . Prabjit Barn
- “ Centre for Coastal Health
 - . Dr. Craig Stephen
 - . Dr. Carl Ribble
- “ Abbotsford Animal Health Centre
 - . Dr. Bill Cox
 - . Dr. Vicki Bowes
 - . Dr. Mira Leslie
- “ University of Guelph Ontario Veterinary College
 - . Meghan Shewfelt
- “ UBC School of Population and Public Health
 - . Dr. Nataliya Skuridina
 - . Linda Vrbova

Thank-you



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