

# Chickens are In!

People, across the nation have a renewed interest in the production and processing of their food!

It seems like “backyard flocks” are springing up everywhere!

The growing concern over food contamination, and use of antibiotics and hormones in food production has spurred interest raising chickens.

For many, raising chickens for eggs and/or meat has become an educational experience in sustainability.



## Current Changes

Rules, put into place at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to restrict ownership of livestock within a city, are being modified by progressive communities who have embraced the “Back-to-Basics” way of life.

Many communities see the benefits of a backyard flock and have adapted their laws.



## Understanding the Benefits

The most common reason people present to their city council for amending long-standing rules concerning livestock to exempt small flocks of chickens is their desire for fresh, safe food.

However, very quickly, they add the educational value of the backyard flock and the need to understand the cycles of nature.

Others will express their interest in chickens as companion animals, creatures of beauty and the desire to develop responsibility for their children.

It is well understood that a small backyard flock does not have an economic advantage over the “grocery store” products, but does give a sense of connection between rural and urban people.

Some will also express the relationship of the backyard flock to their garden through the production of composted manure fertilizer.

## Considerations

Communities large and small across the nation have adopted amendments to “livestock ordinances” to accommodate the small backyard flock.

Health and public safety must be the highest priority. Requirements that outline sanitation are essential rodent control. The opportunity for direct transfer of chicken diseases to humans is very small.

However, owners must be aware of sanitation protocols after handling any animals or fecal matter. This creates an excellent learning opportunity for children.

City leaders also must consider nuisance issues. Chicken housing facilities must keep birds comfortable, yet restrained from roaming freely through the neighborhood.

Restrictions on number of birds, gender and age (young males and hens do not crow) will help reduce conflicts between neighbors.

Small backyard flock owners need comply with bird health requirements under the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) and obtain a Premise ID number from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

NPIP rules protect other flocks from Pullorum, while Premise ID allows for quick agency action to an animal disease outbreak.

Information on both can be obtained at the DATCP website <http://datcp.wi.gov/>.

# Background

People have been living with fowl and utilizing their benefits for thousands of years. Birds have provided eggs and meat as well as feathers, beauty and companionship since the beginning of time.

As communities organized into cities and villages, ordinances and laws were passed to limit one citizen's impact on a neighbor. Concerns for the safety, health and wellbeing of all citizens of a community have resulted in restriction of specific activities in densely populated areas.

Most municipalities in Wisconsin began restricting livestock (defined as: horses, cows, goats, sheep, pigs, chickens) within their boundaries at the time that the automobile replaced the horse. Note: President Wilson had a flock of sheep graze the White House lawn to provide wool for the soldiers of WW I.

As the food system between the farm and the city developed, it was decided to legislate the elimination of any nuisances, odors and vermin associated with livestock from the urban environment.



# Additional Considerations

Some communities have implemented an annual "Flock Permit." Limiting the number of permits granted will reduce the overall impact of backyard flocks on the community. The renewal process reinforces the owner's obligations. Non-renewal will eliminate those who fail to comply with the requirements of having a flock in the city.

The permit fee would be nominal, much like a dog or cat license. Proceeds from the permits can be designated to animal control or furthering poultry education through local schools.

Since chickens have unique behavior and housing characteristics, approving flock-friendly modifications in "livestock ordinances" will not set precedence for other species.

There are many communities that have adopted "flock friendly ordinances" to use as models. Legal counsel can provide advise in the development of final resolutions.



# Chickens in the Backyard



**Making your community a safe, friendly and a positive learning environment for People and our Feathered Friends**

Prepared By  
David R. Laatsch  
Dodge Co. UW-Extension



127 East Oak Street, Juneau, WI 53916  
(920) 386-3790 david.laatsch@ces.uwex.edu