Raising Backyard Hens
BC SPCA Views on Urban Chickens

The BC SPCA is supportive of urban consumers seeking alternatives to conventional eggs produced by hens housed in battery cages. However, the BC SPCA does not feel it is acceptable for individuals with little to no knowledge or experience in chicken care to keep hens in their backyards in an urban environment. Instead, consumers are encouraged to purchase eggs from SPCA Certified farmers and other certified cage-free farmers who have professional expertise in the humane raising of chickens.

BC SPCA concerns regarding the keeping of urban chickens

1.) Potential owners may not have knowledge or skills necessary to provide adequate care to their chickens. Such care includes:
   - The ability to recognize common symptoms of disease, injury, and parasitic infection in chickens, and knowledge of what to do to address such problems.
   - The ability to humanely euthanize a chicken, or access to someone who can (e.g. a poultry veterinarian or experienced chicken farmer).

2.) Resources necessary for good health of chickens may not be readily available in an urban environment. For example, access to suitable nutrition and veterinary care may not be readily available in the community.
   - Pet store bird feed may not meet the nutritional needs of chickens. Where will owners purchase the proper chicken feed in quantities suitable for a small backyard flock?
   - Will urban small animal veterinarians in your community allow a chicken into their practice?
   - Will owners know how to humanely handle and transport chickens to veterinary facilities?

3.) Hens can live for 8-10 years, yet their productive egg-laying diminishes significantly after the first year. Chickens may stop laying eggs well before they reach the end of their natural life. What will people do with birds that have gone beyond their egg-laying time-frame?

4.) Aspects of the urban environment are not compatible with keeping backyard hens. Examples include:
   - Risk of attack from urban wildlife such as coyotes, raccoons, birds of prey, and skunks.

- Risk of attack from domesticated dogs or cats roaming in the neighbourhood. This may have the unintended side-effect of encouraging aggressive behaviour in dogs.
- Attraction of rats to chicken feed or to baby chicks.
- Lack of adequate disposal options for chicken waste and carcasses.

5.) Vancouver's Animal Control facility and the BC SPCA's Vancouver Animal Shelter do not have suitable facilities to house chickens that are surrendered. Nor do they have suitable facilities to accommodate birds that are seized from individuals who contravene sections of the community bylaw or the BC Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

6.) There are risks associated with chickens contracting avian flu. If there is an outbreak, pet birds are at risk of being included in the cull of all nearby urban chickens.

For more information on this issue, please get in contact with your local community council or the BC SPCA.

BC SPCA Farm Animal Welfare

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