

## Farmed Animals in Residential Areas: Executive Summary

Prepared by Mary A. Rooker, 804 Larch Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912 (301) 891-1288 [GreenTyrtil@gmail.com](mailto:GreenTyrtil@gmail.com)

Summarized below are suggestions and environment, health, backyard slaughter, and disposal of post-egg laying hens concerns related to ZTA changes to Section 3.2.11.<sup>1</sup> Environmentalists who have only superficially studied the issue assume—incorrectly—that backyard chickens will reduce conventional chicken and egg consumption. Those who have thoroughly studied the issue and explored the many myths conclude that backyard chickens are environmentally unsound.

### Suggestions

1. Withhold future expansions of animal husbandry until environmental impact assessments can be performed.
2. If the environmental impacts are *not* acceptable to the Council, maintain the current (old) setbacks and regulations and assess any additional needed restrictions.
3. If the environmental impacts *are* acceptable to the Council, consider alleviating the most severe damage by allowing them only when soil, sloping, and water tables (especially springs, wells, and streams) are not an issue (see Virginia law,<sup>2</sup> for example); ensure that proper composting protocols are followed; restrict the maximum number of animals allowed per household to 5, not 8; and establish a simple permitting process so the County can monitor the number and location of residential area animals for ongoing environmental assessment and any other concerns. Washington, D.C., already has a model we could adapt,<sup>3</sup> and national experts also offer sample regulation and permitting standards for municipalities to consider and adopt.<sup>4</sup>
4. A permitting process would also allow full education, minimize groundwater contamination, and ensure that homeowners wanting such chickens do not acquire chickens only to learn later that they cannot have them.
5. For chicken health, include links to comprehensive resources on proper chicken care and establish regulations to ensure minimum standards of care, including specifications for coop size.<sup>5</sup> For human health, consider policies that discourage human consumption of eggs and chicken (see “Health Issues,” below).

### Environmental Issue: Manure Overload (“Eutrophication”) and Groundwater Contamination

- According to a US GAO report,<sup>6</sup> domesticated animals produce 130 times the manure of all humans, roughly 5 tons for every US citizen. The United Nations has called for a 50% reduction in US consumption of animal parts *and byproducts*. Manure threats to air contamination,<sup>7</sup> such as nitrous oxide, also exist.
- Backyard eggs may do *more* environmental damage than their conventional, factory-raised counterparts.<sup>8</sup>
- Eutrophication is the #1 threat facing the Chesapeake Bay, and chicken manure is one of the highest sources of nitrogen and phosphorous.<sup>9</sup>
- Groundwater contamination is even worse where wells, springs, and high water tables exist in hilly areas and in certain types of soil, such as that in our region. Takoma Park has a particularly dangerous combination of hills, springs, and—alas—backyard chickens as a serious water contamination source.
- Restrictive laws in the State of Virginia, which mirror the existing, pre-rewrite code, exist precisely to contain the most egregious groundwater contamination.
- Montgomery County does not appear to have conducted an environmental impact assessment, only a comparison to ordinances in other jurisdictions, which also did not assess environmental impacts.

### Health Issues

- Eggs are not a health food, contrary to popular opinion. Even the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) ruled that the industry cannot legally claim that eggs are “healthy”, “nutritious”, or even “safe.”<sup>10</sup>
- Chickens attract rats, mice, fox, coyotes, and other animals.
- Standards of care will need to be determined and stated for everyone’s protection.<sup>11</sup>
- Centers for Disease Control recommendations on animal-human disease transmission aspects should be made known and followed, especially for children under the age of 5.<sup>12</sup> Virginia has also launched a special network to notify backyard flock owners of CDC disease outbreak alerts.<sup>13</sup>
- Hen adoption should be encouraged and chicken hatchery purchases discouraged.

## Backyard Slaughter and Hen Disposal

- Most hens live to the age of 10 to 14 (some longer), but egg production drops after 18 months-2 years. Will people keep feeding their hens for 8 to 10 years if they are not getting eggs? Will they slaughter them in their backyard? Turn them loose? Hope that an already stressed animal sanctuary will take them in?
- Leading farmed animal sanctuaries and avian experts discourage backyard chicken flocks for many reasons.<sup>3</sup> Sanctuaries are already overburdened with caring for and placing unwanted chickens when the fad passes or problems arise.

### Notes, Source Citations

---

<sup>1</sup> Section 3.2.11. Accessory Agricultural Uses, revised version:

<http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/zoning/documents/59-3.UsesPrelimPHED9.4.revised.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Virginia Farmstead Assessment System: Livestock and Poultry Yard Management*, Virginia State University Cooperative Extension, <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/442/442-908/442-908.html>. “[Poultry waste] can be a source of nitrate and bacteria contamination of groundwater. This is especially true if there is no system to 1) divert clean water flow from the livestock/poultry yard, 2) drain surface water away from wells or springs, or 3) collect polluted runoff from the yard for diversion to an area where its effect on surface water or groundwater is minimal. The potential for livestock and poultry operations to affect groundwater is greatest if the facility or area of animal concentration is located on karst terrain or over sandy-textured permeable soils, or when the water table is at or near the surface, bedrock is within a few feet of the surface, or polluted runoff is discharged to permeable soils and bedrock. Wells and springs should be located upslope from the livestock and poultry feed yard and buildings so that runoff will drain away from the water source.”

<sup>3</sup> See Washington, D.C.'s sample permitting process and manure compost recommendations at

<http://www.dcregs.dc.gov/Gateway/RuleHome.aspx?RuleNumber=24-902>.

<sup>4</sup> “Recommendations for Municipal Regulation of Urban Chickens” (for distribution to public and permit applicants), by Mary Britton Clouse, *Chicken Run Rescue*, 2010, 9 pp, <http://www.brittonclouse.com/chickenrunrescue/chickencareandrequirerev2310.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *Chicken Run Rescue*, <http://www.brittonclouse.com/chickenrunrescue/>, is a reputable, thorough, online resource on backyard chickens, including Things to Consider Before Getting Chickens, Minimum Costs, Basic Care, and much more. It provides essential, easy to understand, and complete information for backyard chicken keeping that some advocacy resources do not cover. Its recommended coop size is a minimum of 4 square feet of floor space per bird for the interior (2 feet by 2 feet per bird).

<sup>6</sup> The 130 times the amount of manure and 5 tons per person figures originated in the 1999 GAO report, *Animal Agriculture: Waste Management Practices, Report to the Honorable Tom Harkin, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, U.S. Senate*, United States General Accounting Office [now the Government Accountability Office], July 1999, GAO/RCED-99-205, page 1, <http://www.gao.gov/archive/1999/rc99205.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> “UN: Meat Consumption Must Be Cut to Reduce Greenhouse Gases,” David A Gable, *Environmental News Network*, Apr. 16, 2012. [http://www.enm.com/top\\_stories/article/44270](http://www.enm.com/top_stories/article/44270). Raising, buying, and eating locally raised animal parts and products has economic, social, and other benefits, but much-touted environmental benefits are insignificant, as most environmental costs and damages are in the rearing and production of the animal food, not its transportation (see <http://www.shamanicspring.com/environmental.htm#Local>).

<sup>8</sup> Takoma Park environmentalist Mike Tidwell < <http://mag.audubon.org/articles/living/low-carbon-diet?page=2>> notes, *Ironically, data released in 2007 by Adrian Williams of Cranfield University in England show that when all factors are considered, organic, free-range chickens have a 20 percent greater impact on global warming than conventionally raised broiler birds. That's because "sustainable" chickens take longer to raise, and eat more feed. Worse, organic eggs have a 14 percent higher impact on the climate than eggs from caged chickens, according to Williams.*

<sup>9</sup> “Backyard Chickens and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed,” by Elizabeth Ward, for *Green Risks*, Aug. 12, 2010, <http://greenrisks.blogspot.com/2010/08/backyard-chickens-and-chesapeake-bay.html>. Ward notes that each backyard chicken generates approximately 0.41 pounds of nitrogen and 0.35 pounds of phosphorous per year. Ten chickens generate more than triple the household phosphorous load and increase by more than 30% the nitrogen load. Like the State of Virginia and others, Ward notes that areas with wells and springs are especially vulnerable.

<sup>10</sup> “More Than an Apple a Day: Combating Common Diseases,” by Michael Greger, M.D., *NutritionFacts.org*, <http://nutritionfacts.org/video/more-than-an-apple-a-day-preventing-our-most-common-diseases/>. This four-minute discussion on USDA statements to the American Egg Board is 21 minutes, 24 seconds into the hour-long presentation and ends at 25:24.

<sup>11</sup> “Standards of Care for Chickens,” adapted from Standards of Care for Farmed Animals, The Association Of Sanctuaries (TAOS). Edited by *Chicken Run Rescue*. 6/2008, revised 4/7/2009, <http://www.brittonclouse.com/chickenrunrescue/STANDARDS%20OF%20CARE%208309.pdf>. See also *Collective Position Statement on Backyard Poultry*, United Poultry Concerns, [http://www.upc-online.org/backyard/backyard\\_poultry.pdf](http://www.upc-online.org/backyard/backyard_poultry.pdf) and [http://www.upc-online.org/backyard/120723long\\_beach\\_letter.html](http://www.upc-online.org/backyard/120723long_beach_letter.html).

<sup>12</sup> “Keeping Backyard Poultry,” Centers for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/features/salmonellapoultry/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Extension Launches Animal Health Network to Deliver Critical Information to Backyard Farmers,” noting that “owners of backyard flocks and herds are among the most difficult to alert about disease outbreaks.” *Virginia Tech News*, Feb. 6, 2013, <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/02/020613-ext-animalhealthnetwork.html>.