



Leading Farm Animal Sanctuaries and Avian Experts Discourage Backyard Chicken Flocks

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on December 12, 2009 - 11:06am

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

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Coalition Concerned with Chicken Welfare React to Increased Placement Requests for Unwanted Birds

WATKINS GLEN, N.Y. – December 11, 2009 – Reacting to the increased popularity of backyard chicken flocks used for eggs in urban and suburban areas, a coalition of animal sanctuaries, comprising leading experts in avian care, has issued a public statement discouraging this trend. Coalition members include Animal Place in California, Chicken Run Rescue in Minnesota, Eastern Shore Sanctuary and Education Center in Vermont, Farm Sanctuary in New York and California, Sunnyskies Bird and Animal Sanctuary in New York, and United Poultry Concerns in Virginia. This coalition is also urging municipalities throughout the U.S. not to allow backyard flocks and exhorting those that are already zoned for this practice to establish and enforce strict regulations for the care of these birds.

In the past year, all of these organizations have been inundated with calls to take in chickens, especially roosters, the main victims of this growing trend. As these groups have limited resources and space, it has become increasingly difficult for them to house or otherwise place the hundreds of roosters who are abandoned at local shelters or dumped needing homes.

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I think a lot of people will feel that these groups are overreacting. The point that needs to be made, though, is that before a person takes on a project like raising chickens (or any other kind of livestock, or even a pet), it is important to think through the whole project carefully, and make sure that it is a project you can manage and are willing to stick with. Are you willing to learn the details, and put in the investment needed to care for the chickens properly? What will you do if it turns out that you have unwanted male(s) in the chicks you buy? How will you "unwind" the project, if you decide you are in over your head?

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The coalition's statement asserts that backyard chicken-keeping by hobbyists raises many serious concerns regarding both the welfare of the chickens and the wellbeing of the communities where these birds are kept.

Unbeknownst to many well-meaning hobbyists, the massive hatcheries from which most chicks are purchased by individuals or feed stores are notorious for animal mistreatment. No laws regulate the housing of chickens at these facilities and minimal laws that go unenforced cover transportation of their offspring. Breeding hens and roosters may be confined in cramped cages or sheds with no access to the outdoors, and day-old chicks are shipped to buyers through the mail, deprived of food and water and exposed to extremes in temperature for up to 72 hours. Hens are in much higher demand than roosters; therefore, most male chicks are killed onsite at these hatcheries as soon as they are sexed, adding up to millions of birds every year that are killed shortly after they hatch.

Among the recent flood of requests to place chickens, shelters have received a particularly high number of calls regarding roosters. Chicken sexing at hatcheries is inexact and prone to error, and hatcheries may use male chicks as "packing material" regardless of whether they were ordered. These male chickens, often unwanted and illegal to keep in certain municipalities, are frequently abandoned or dumped at local shelters. If homes cannot be found for these birds with individuals or sanctuaries, they are often euthanized or literally tossed into the street. When new ordinances are passed to allow the keeping of backyard flocks, municipal shelters are then burdened further with new enforcement costs. The coalition is encouraging those considering backyard flocks to do their research on the legality of chicken flocks in their area and the housing, predator proofing, diet, and medical care necessary for the health and safety of their birds. Those acquiring chickens are asked to avoid supporting the cruel practices of hatcheries by adopting chickens from sanctuaries and shelters.

The coalition's full position statement on backyard chicken flocks can be viewed [here](#).

Animal Place, founded in 1989, is home to more than 300 cows, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, rabbits and turkeys in Northern California. In addition to providing refuge to neglected farmed animals, Animal Place educates the public about factory farming through tours, tabling, legislation and outreach programs. More information can be found at www.animalplace.org or by calling 707-449-4814.

About Chicken Run Rescue: Every year, domestic fowl, mostly chickens, are impounded by Minneapolis Animal Control (MACC) and 5 Metro Area humane societies. These birds are victims of neglect, abuse and abandonment, sometimes used as a source of eggs or intended for slaughter, fighting or ritual sacrifice. Some are the discarded outcome of “nature lessons” for children or after a hobby that no longer holds interest. After their release from MACC, Chicken Run provides the birds with temporary shelter and vet care, locates and screens adopters within 90 miles of the Twin Cities and transports the birds to their new homes. Chicken Run Rescue is the only urban chicken rescue of its kind and receives no support from any other organizations, institutions or agencies and depends entirely on donations and sales of art merchandise to continue helping chickens. There is a special need for rooster homes. Don't breed or buy — Adopt! There are never enough homes for displaced animals.

Eastern Shore Sanctuary & Education Center, currently located in Vermont, provides a haven for hens, roosters and ducks who have escaped or been rescued from the meat and egg industries or other abusive circumstances. The Eastern Shore Sanctuary consistently provides homes to both male and female victims of cockfighting, and has developed an innovative and effective method to deprogram fighting cocks so that they can live normal lives. In addition to sheltering and advocating for birds, we conduct research and education aimed at systemic changes in agriculture, trade, consumption, and human attitudes about animals and the environment. We work within an ecofeminist understanding of the interconnection of all life and the intersection of all forms of oppression. Thus we welcome and work to facilitate alliances among animal, environmental, and social justice activists. Additional information can be found at www.bravebirds.org or by calling (802) 885-4017.

Farm Sanctuary is the nation's leading farm animal protection organization. Since incorporating in 1986, Farm Sanctuary has worked to expose and stop cruel practices of the "food animal" industry through research and investigations, legal and institutional reforms, public awareness projects, youth education, and direct rescue and refuge efforts. Farm Sanctuary shelters in Watkins Glen, N.Y., and Orland, Calif., provide lifelong care for hundreds of rescued animals, who have become ambassadors for farm animals everywhere by educating visitors about the realities of factory farming. Additional information can be found at www.farmsanctuary.org or by calling 607-583-2225.

Sunnyskies Bird and Animal Sanctuary of Warwick, NY is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization providing lifetime care for unwanted animals. Home to over two hundred creatures, great and small, including spent hens, fighting cocks, kill pen horses, over one hundred parrots, cats, dogs — and 3 mice — Sunnyskies heals and provides a final resting place for what are often damaged and hopeless spirits in need. Sunnyskies goal is to bring health, joy, and peace to these individuals, many of who have suffered, for years —captives of unkind and uncaring human hands. <http://www.sunnyskiesbirdsanctuary.org/>

United Poultry Concerns is a nonprofit organization that promotes the compassionate and respectful treatment of domestic fowl. www.upc-online.org.



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