**Backyard Chickens: Hipster Fad or the Gateway to Sustainable Living?**

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**Abstract**

The main purpose of my research was to conduct an in-depth case study of backyard chickens in Saratoga County, to explore the relationship between chickens and environmental behavior, and to decide whether backyard chickens are just a fad or if they are a gateway to sustainable living. I distributed two surveys, one to Saratoga County chicken owners and one to chicken owners across the United States so I could compare Saratoga County to the broader backyard chicken movement. I also interviewed a handful of Saratoga County chicken owners to learn about their personal experiences and meet their birds. The surveys revealed that most backyard chicken owners keep chickens for their eggs and for more control over the production of their food; find out about chickens from books and articles rather than from experiences growing up; and have gardens—90% of them! Most backyard chicken owners reported that their chickens have made them more likely to pay more for local, natural, and organic products, to grow their own food, to acquire more microlivestock, and to compost. All interviewees were extremely enthusiastic and passionate about their birds, and if most chicken owners are like this, then backyard chickens are certainly here to stay. This bird is not just a pet, but a utility animal that could be a key gateway to sustainable living.

**Key Words:** backyard chickens, homesteading, microlivestock, gateway drug

**I. Introduction**

For more than a decade, the homesteading movement has been gaining momentum in urban, suburban, and rural backyards across the United States. Inspired by localism, organic farming, and the do-it-yourself trend, this new food movement is questioning the idea that agriculture is strictly a farmer’s pursuit. By bringing food production into cities and suburbs in the form of community gardens, rooftop gardens, backyard gardens, and even balcony and windowsill gardens, urbanites are reconnecting to their food sources while eating healthier, increasing local food security, and giving their children a better environmental education. Most recently, a new, more complicated character has joined the familiar cast of fruits and vegetables in the backyard garden, and may one day soon become as normal a sight as the family dog: our feathered friend the chicken.

Urban agriculture is generally defined as the growing, processing, and distributing food crops and animal products within an urban environment. This umbrella term can include horticulture, aquaculture, beekeeping, hydroponics, agroforestry, animal husbandry, and more. It may be accompanied by activities such as composting food “waste,” collecting rainwater, and the education, organization, and employment for citizens. Community is an important aspect of urban agriculture because the products are generally used locally. The act of food production itself can bring a community together, whether through community gardens, gardening and animal husbandry workshops, or farmers’ markets (among other activities). In the United States and other industrialized nations, urban agriculture is mainly a social movement focused on creating a more sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle, whereas in developing countries, urban agriculture is seen as a strategy for livelihood and food security. That we can afford to treat urban agriculture as a social movement while others rely on it for survival is somewhat disconcerting. But perhaps the result of increased food production in cities here will raise awareness about how the rest of the world lives and make us realize the crucial role urban and backyard agriculture can play in our food system.

Most recently, microlivestock have joined the host of fruits and vegetables that are grown in the city. Microlivestock are the smaller animals on the farm such as ducks, rabbits, bees, and chickens (as well as small breeds of goats, sheep, cattle, and pigs) that can fit in a backyard setting. Clearly, living animals present a more complicated situation than do stationary plants. Animals can be noisy, smelly, dirty, and can carry disease. Yet the demand for microlivestock has caused many towns and cities to reconsider and repeal half-century bans on animals within city limits. The real star of this exciting movement is *Gallus gallus domesticus*: the common chicken.

Chickens are a natural extension of a kitchen garden. They serve as pest control, a source of fertilizer, soil aerators, food “waste” disposal, and they produce delicious sources of protein in their eggs and meat. As easy keepers, they do not require too much space and can be kept in a small backyard, a community garden plot, or even a rooftop. Though popular depictions of chickens almost always place them on a rural farm, they are also quite comfortable in urban areas. In fact, they used to be ubiquitous in American cities before the rise of industrial agriculture in the 1930s and ‘40s segregated farm and city, exiling chickens to barnyards or to the overcrowded windowless warehouses where too many birds hatch and die without ever seeing the sun. They are, however, still city-dwellers in many countries throughout the world, and with the spread of the urban homesteading movement here, they are again on the rise.

At the turn of the century, a phenomenon called “hen fever” hit America, and everyone who was anyone had chickens. It seems that a second case of hen fever has now overcome America’s backyards. The media is smitten with chickens, publishing everything from *New York Times* articles, do-it-yourself manuals, and egg-themed cookbooks, to backyard chicken websites, social networking groups, and ads for coop-building workshops. Local chicken clubs are popping up across the county, as are coop tours (by bicycle, bus, or on foot) and cooking demonstrations. Chickens are the new hot pet, and internet commerce makes it very easy to order live chicks or pullets by mail. Not only are they entertaining and interesting to watch, but they provide nutrition, pest maintenance, and so much more. In his book *Why Did the Chicken Cross the World?* author Andrew Lawler refers to the chicken as a “feathered Swiss Army Knife” (Lawler 4): a beast with an incredible variety of uses. Can that be said of a dog or cat? No. It isn’t a wonder that the population of backyard birds is steadily rising.

Most studies on the rise of backyard chickens have been conducted in major cities such as New York, Oakland, San Fransisco, Houston, Chicago, Seattle, and Portland OR. One area that has not been studied specifically is that of the small city in the country, surrounded by farms: Saratoga Springs in an eggshell. In addition to the usual inquiries about how common it is to keep chickens, what the motivations and challenges of keeping chickens are, and what are public opinions about chickens, there are some place-specific questions that should also be asked. For instance, why, despite the nearness of farms and farmers’ markets, do residents of Saratoga Springs choose to keep backyard chickens? In addition, several backyard chicken owners claim that chickens are a “gateway drug” into the world of livestock and sustainable living, meaning that having chickens could inevitably lead to having other livestock such as goats and bees. By conducting an in-depth study of chicken keepers in Saratoga Springs, I hope to add a unique perspective to the small but steadily growing literature about backyard chickens, and to explore the effect chickens have on their owners’ environmental behaviors. I want to be able to answer the question: Are chickens a gateway drug? My prediction is that yes, indeed, they are.

**II. Literature Review**

**Purpose:** This literature review will serve to situate Saratoga Springs within the context of a broader international movement towards homesteading and self-provisioning and to survey previous studies on backyard chickens.

The backyard chicken movement has been almost impossible to miss. The birds have been featured in many popular publications such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and many other magazines and newspapers, both in print and online. A library’s worth of books have recently been published on topics ranging from how-to books such as *How to Raise Chickens* by Christine Heinrichand *City Chicks: Keeping Micro-flocks of Chickens as Garden Helpers, Compost Makers, Bio-recyclers, and Local Food Producers* by Patricia Foreman, to cookbooks like Terry Golson’s *The Farmstead Egg Guide & Cookbook* and investigative histories like Andrew Lawler’s *Why Did the Chicken Cross the World? The Epic Saga of the Bird that Powers Civilization*. Social media is swarming with chicken posts, and there are many websites and magazines dedicated to the practice of backyard poultry.

In addition, there are quite a few research studies on backyard chickens from a variety of perspectives including:

**Zoning Ordinances** around the country, exploring shifting views, and shifting laws and land uses. An example paper is *Residential Urban Chicken Keeping: An Examination of 25 Cities; KT LaBadie; University of New Mexico 2008.* LaBadie surveys city zoning ordinances around the country and analyzes each in terms of chicken friendliness. Another example is *Of Backyard Chickens and Front Yard Gardens: The Conflict Between Local Governments and Locavores by Sarah B. Schindler.* Schindler studies the relationship between citizens and government on the topic of chicken and garden ordinances.

**Role of the City/In depth Analysis.** One paper I referenced a lot while designing my research methods was *A Chicken in Every Lot: The 2007 Chicken Ordinance in Missoula, Montana**By Kate Margaret Sheridan 2013.* This paper is an in-depth analysis of the ordinance process, and I admire the professionalism of Ms. Sheridan’s interviews. I used an adapted version of her interview guide in my own study.

**Pros and Cons** of keeping backyard chickens and motivations. *Urban Livestock: Barriers and Opportunities Faced by Homesteaders in the City of Waterloo* *By Heather Cann, Dave Lenton, Cassandra Mader, and Jennifer van Overbeeke 2011*. This study looks at the pros and cons of chicken keeping in the City of Waterloo as well as the barriers and opportunities chicken owners face.

**Food Security.** In the United States, backyard chicken keeping is mainly a hobby that happens to provide fresh food. But in other countries, backyard chickens and gardens are a subsistence method for many people whether in the city, the country, or the suburbs. I learned this in the paper*Does Kitchen Garden and Backyard Livestock Farming Help Combat Food Insecurity?**Kiran Prasad Bhatta, Akira Ishida, Kenji Taniguchi, Raksha Sharma 2008.*

**Education**. Because backyard chickens are so new to many parts of the country, education is a real issue, especially in terms of biosecurity and public health. Some papers such as *Popular Backyard Flock Program Reduces Biosecurity Risks of Amateur Production* By *Sarah Stinson, UC Davis*, attempt to measure the effects of backyard chicken workshops and other education programs for chicken owners on the health of people and birds alike.

**Other Topics.** There are even more papers about backyard chickens out there, including those on heritage breeds, public policy, urban planning, food systems, and local economy, among a handful of others.

**What is Lacking?**

Homesteading and the do-it-yourself movement is currently a hot research topic. The wave of local food, organic farming, and crop diversity movements have encouraged more people to consider adopting agriculture into their own backyards. Because this is a fairly new field of research, the literature remains thin; there is plenty of room for expansion and improvement. In particular, research about urban microlivestock—such as chickens—must be expanded. As of now, nothing that I have read has studied urban homesteading in a small city surrounded by farms. There are also no great studies that attempt to count how many urban chicken keepers there are in a city that does not issue chicken-keeping permits to residents. With my study, I hope to figure out a way to count them without the help of public records. Hopefully, if I am successful, my method can be replicated elsewhere. Studies of backyard chickens often focus on city policy, the motivations of chicken keepers, or public health. Though I wish to touch on these topics, too, I would like to focus also on demographics, location, environmental ethics, and geography. These are a few of the less discussed areas in the urban chicken literature that need to be expanded. Additionally, no one that I have read has connected backyard chickens to their impact on environmental behavior, and whether it is causing people and/or communities to act in a more sustainable way.

**III. Methods**

*Backyard Chicken Surveys*

I created and distributed two surveys in order to gage chicken owner demographics and behavioral changes associated with owning chickens.

One survey focused on the chicken owners of Saratoga County, and the other on chicken owners throughout the United States. Getting a robust sample for each survey was challenging. Some cities such as Missoula, Montana, require residents to purchase permits in order to keep chickens. These cities keep records of the permits, which allows researchers to easily pull names from accessible lists (though it’s certain that not everyone who keeps chickens in such cities purchases a permit). There are established, replicable random sampling methods for cities with permits. Saratoga Springs, however, does not issue permits, and chicken owners do not have to be registered. The ordinance merely states that “no person shall allow fowl to run at large in the Inside Tax District, but he shall keep the same in suitable houses and runways” and “no person shall harbor a crowing cock in the Inside Tax District, the crowing of which disturbs neighbors during the hours from 12:00 midnight to 7:00 a.m., longer than one day after written notice thereof by the office of the Commissioner of Public Safety.” Therefore, I had to figure out a more creative way to form a sample. I relied heavily on social media such as Facebook, word of mouth, snowball sampling, and some investigative fieldwork. For the national survey, I relied almost solely on Facebook, posting it on every backyard chicken related page or group I could find. The pages ranged from poultry magazines and city specific backyard chicken clubs to internet forums and consulting services. See Appendix B for a complete list. I also posted on several internet forums such as backyardchickens.com and mypetchicken.com.

*Interviews*

Because I can only ask so much in a survey, I decided to interview several local chicken owners. I got in touch with a handful of the Saratoga County survey respondents who stated that they would not mind being interviewed and who gave their contact information. Of this handful, I interviewed four chicken owners, using a semi-structured format. My questions focused on the motivations and challenges of each backyard chicken household, as well as their history of chicken keeping, demographics, environmental ethics, interactions with neighbors, city policy, and the food system, following a modified version of Kate Sheridan’s interview guide (see Appendix C). I recorded three of the four interviews, and though I attempted to record the fourth, my computer crashed in the middle of the interview and the recording was lost. After each interview, I toured the participant’s backyard coop and met his or her birds.

**IV. Results & Discussion**

Unfortunately, either my distribution methods weren’t rigorous enough or backyard chicken owners have an aversion to taking surveys. At final count, I had 27 Saratoga County respondents and 91 National respondents. The sample consensus was so strong, however, that I was not too concerned with these low numbers. In future, my methods can always be replicated with a larger sample size to strengthen (or weaken) my findings.

When analyzing the survey results, I first compared the average chicken owner in Saratoga County to the average chicken owner in the United States. Saratoga County backyard chicken owners have 12 birds on average, though 69% have 10 or less. They have had their birds for an average of 4 years, though 80% have had them for 5 years or less. Nationally, backyard chicken owners have 26 birds on average, though 43% have 10 or less. They have had their birds for an average of 8 years, though 62% have had them for 5 years or less. This basic information conveys that Saratoga County backyard chicken owners are, on average, newer to the backyard chicken trend than most of the country, having had their chickens for half as long as the average American backyard chicken owner. When looking at the majority numbers, however, it’s clear that most American backyard chicken owners, including Saratoga County backyard chicken owners, have had less than ten birds for less than five years.

In terms of living situations, I combined the Saratoga County and National surveys because the results were so similar—within a few percentages points. (Henceforth, if I do not mention one survey in particular, it means I have combined them). When I asked, “How would you describe your setting?”, 61% of respondents answered rural, 28% suburban, and 11% urban. Clearly, chickens are most welcome in the country. But a growing number are, indeed, appearing in suburban and urban backyards. On a similar note, 84% of respondents own their homes, while 16% rent them. While it is possible for renters to have backyard chickens, it’s understandable that people feel more comfortable keeping birds on property they own and that not all landlords would allow their tenants to have birds.

The majority (68%) of primary chicken caregivers in backyard chicken households are women. Women have historically been associated with chicken care, so this statistic didn’t surprise me. Personally, I know many more women with chickens than I do men, and that might have colored my hypothesis that only women are chicken crazy. However, my mind was changed when I interviewed two young men in their twenties (roommates who live down the street in Schuylerville) who are also passionate about the birds. In addition to mail-ordering live pullets, they also hatch out chicks from their own stock. By the way they talk about their birds, it’s clear that they, too, have hen fever.

Here’s a heartening stat: a solid 90% of chicken owners also have gardens, and whether they live in an urban, suburban, or rural setting does not effect the percentage. Though I cannot state which came first, the chicken or the garden, I can say that the two are very strongly correlated. Gardens and chickens belong together. Gardens provide chickens with nutritious food scraps and forage at the end of the season, while chickens provide gardens with rich fertilizer, soil aeration, and pest control. (Note, however, that chickens must not have direct access to the garden during the growing season, else they will eat or dig up all of your plants!) With proper care and maintenance, backyard chickens could be a key addition to the urban agriculture movement.

More than half of the chicken owners who took the national survey (56%) also have other microlivestock (smaller farm animals such as bees, goats, sheep, and rabbits). Bees are the most common microlivestock to have in addition to chickens: 23 out of 91 respondents reported that they had bees. Most respondents with additional microlivestock live in a rural setting. But nine suburban residents reported that they had bees, and five reported that they had rabbits, and one urban resident reported that she also had rabbits. Unfortunately, I failed to distinguish between pet rabbits and meat/fur rabbits, so it could be that these respondents merely have pet rabbits. However, the fact that a handful of urban and suburban residents at least have bees in addition to chickens demonstrates that some level of self-sufficient food production can and is occurring in more urban areas. The idea that chickens and other microlivestock “belong” on a farm will likely change in the near future. The very definition of “farm” could very well change, too, if the homesteading movement really takes off.

Of the many ways people learn about chicken husbandry, books and articles have the greatest influence over their decision to get backyard chickens. 31% of respondents reported that they were very important and 35% reported that they were important. That people are getting most of their information from books and articles rather than from experience growing up or from friends and family represents a significant shift from experiential and social learning to book learning. The internet has certainly had a huge effect on the proliferation and accessibility of information, and I would guess that it has largely encouraged the Do-It-Yourself movement because anyone with an internet connection can learn just about anything they want to know by using Google, Wikipedia, or similar search engines. But simply reading about something does not ensure that a person will get it right when *doing* it. There is a fear that new backyard chicken owners will not know what to do when something goes wrong, that they are a threat to public health and sanitation. But the numerous backyard chicken resources online do address these issues, and many areas support their backyard chicken community by providing workshops and veterinary advice. If it takes one generation of book learning to produce many future generations of experiential learning, the risks could well be worth it.

The second greatest influence over a person’s decision to get chickens is spending time with them; 31% of respondents reported that this was very important and 18% reported that this was important. This seems fairly obvious. Spending time with the birds makes them all the more endearing and appealing, and of course one should get to know an animal before adding it to the household. Chickens are just addicting to watch, like a fascinating television show—but better. My neighbor calls his flock his “chicken TV.”

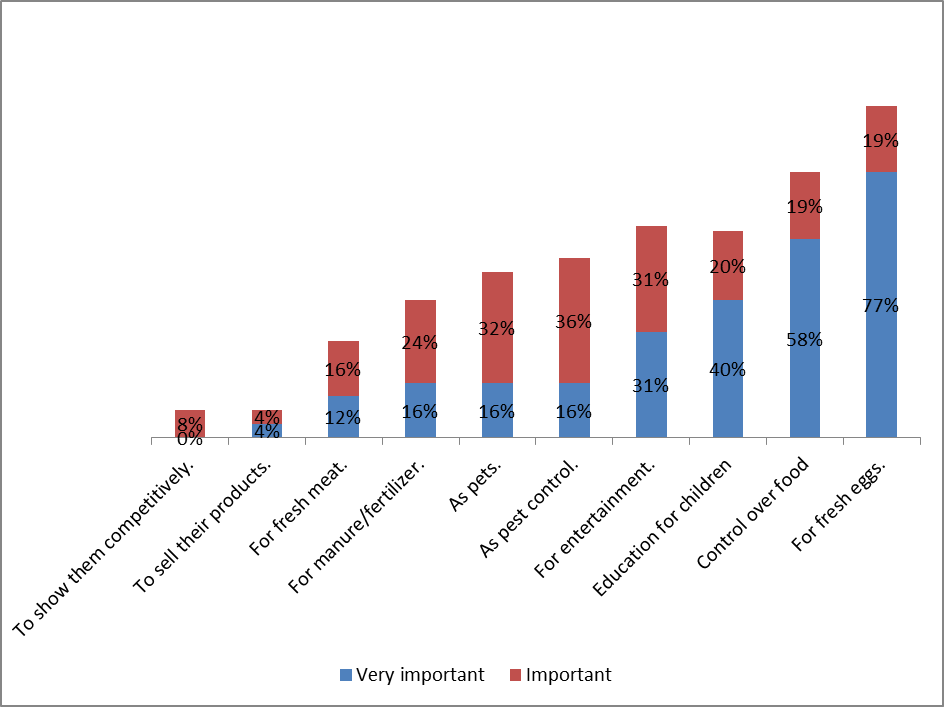
“I always admired a sustainable way of living and chickens are a good source of eggs and meat. All the times that you're going to collect eggs are times that you don't have to go to the grocery store. It makes sense.”

*—Matt Geiling, interview*

People keep chickens for many reasons, but fresh eggs rank number one. Ninety-six percent of chickens owners rank fresh eggs as being important to their decision to keep chickens, with 77% reporting *very* important (see fig. 1). The second most important reason is control over food production, with 58% reporting very important, and 19% reporting important). This demonstrates that backyard chicken owners feel strongly about where their food comes from, and that they want to grow their own food. Entertainment comes in third, with 31% reporting very important, and 31% reporting important. As stated earlier, chickens are very fun to watch. It is heartening to see that “education for children” ranks high because so many kids these days are suffering from nature deficit disorder (Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*). Some parents—like 60% of these backyard chicken owners—understand the need for their children to connect with animals and spend great swaths of time outside. This kind of outdoor education is so important, especially now when most people live in urban areas and do not get to soak themselves in nature on a regular basis. Backyard chickens can help fill that gap.

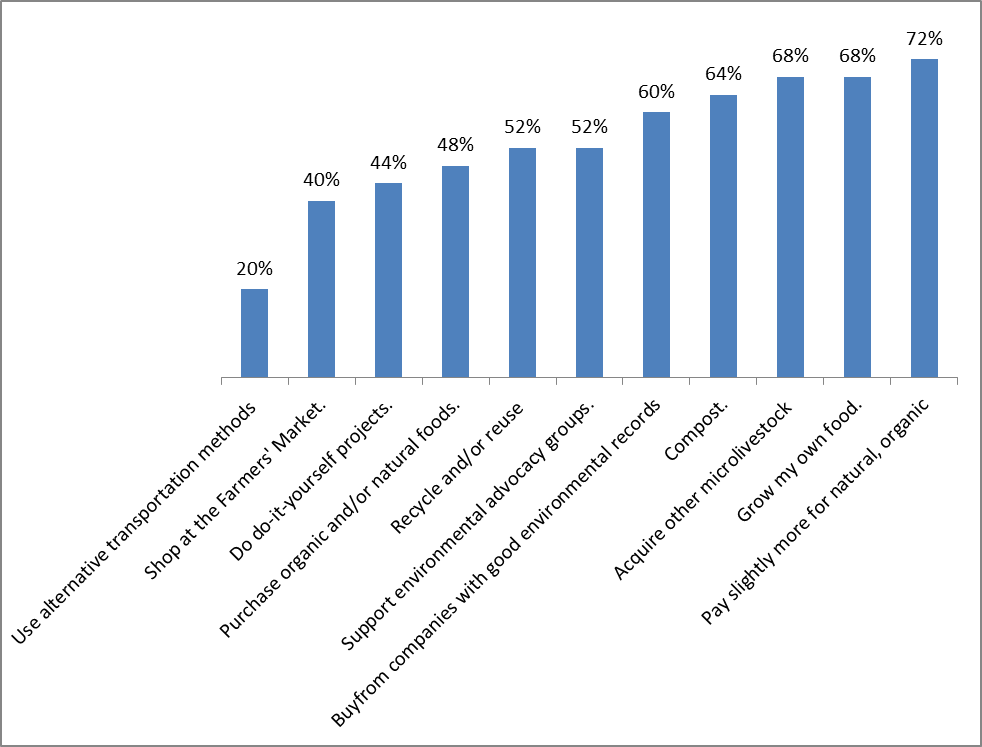
Also of note: backyard chicken owners do not generally sell the eggs or meat. Having backyard chickens is not a business venture, but one of self-sufficiency and sharing.

Fig. 1 People keep chickens for many reasons. Please rate how important the following factors are for you.



I wanted to know how backyard chickens affected the environmental behaviors of their owners, so I asked what having backyard chickens made respondents more likely to do (see fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Having Chickens has made me more likely to…



A great majority of respondents answered that backyard chickens have made them more likely to pay slightly more for natural and organic foods, grow their own food, acquire other microlivestock, and compost. My guess is that having backyard chickens makes people appreciate the effort involved in food production, thus their willingness to pay slightly more for better foods increases. Because 90% of respondents also had gardens, it makes sense that they would answer “grow my own food.” But whether or not they had a garden *before* they had chickens, their birds seem to be encouraging them *even more* to produce their own food. I am happy to see that 68% of respondents report that having backyard chickens makes them more likely to acquire other livestock. This is in line with the theory that backyard chickens are a gateway drug to other livestock, as well as to a more self-sufficient way of life.

When I asked, “Would you recommend chickens to your friends?” an astounding 97% of respondents replied YES. The remaining 3% said maybe; perhaps their friends do not have room or are not animal friendly. It is clear that people love their chickens, and their good experiences with their birds makes them want to share them with others. In all four interviews I conducted, each chicken owner exuded passion and enthusiasm over their birds, as well as a maternal protectiveness. All four interviewees have had their chickens for less than three years, yet they seem committed to having chickens for the rest of their lives.

**V. Conclusion**

"I tell you the real problem, these nice suburban kids are going down into the city and they're coming back later and later at night with chickens, and I know they're listening to that hip-hop-jive turkey music.”

—Matt Geiling

My research shows that the rumors about the backyard chicken being a gateway drug to sustainable living are probably right to some degree. It’s true that in order to get chickens in the first place, some idea of self-sufficiency and sustainability must already be planted in the brain. But in terms of increasing the desire to rely on oneself for nourishment and of building a larger, more diverse backyard homestead, chickens can certainly be cited as a major factor. The fact that they are small, easy to care for, are often less of a nuisance than noisy neighborhood dogs, and have so many uses makes them the perfect catalyst for sustainable living.

In order for people situated in more urban areas to have chickens, however, there need to be several things in place. First, to make backyard chicken keeping a legal activity, city ordinances must allow chickens in residential backyards. Second, there should be local, accessible support for chicken owners, perhaps in the form of clubs, cooperatives, or other community organizations. Education is key, both for first time chicken owners and for cities that are wary of the birds. Happily, Saratoga Springs does allow chickens within city limits, and because it is a “city in the country,” there is plenty of local support for first time owners. If the practice of backyard chicken keeping really catches on in the city, perhaps chicken owners can form a Saratoga chicken club. The possibilities for education, expansion, and community building are endless.

It is my prediction that backyard chickens will not merely be a passing fad. The current atmosphere of movements—including DIY, slow food, real food, localism, urban agriculture, and homesteading—fully embraces the chicken as a permanent addition to the backyard garden. Chicken owners find themselves falling in love with the birds, as they would with any other household animal, and it seems their enthusiasm only grows as the years go by. Some people fear that older birds may be ditched by hipster fadsters because they no longer lay. But anyone truly dedicated to the cause would not abandon them; they would eat them. Chickens: the all-purpose pet you can eat. It doesn’t get any better than that, folks. Backyard chickens, gateway drug to sustainable living, are here to stay.

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**Appendix A**

**SURVEY: Saratoga County**

Saratoga County Backyard Chickens, Skidmore College

Q0 Saratoga County Backyard Chicken Survey

Skidmore College Environmental Studies Department

Julietta Cole, Class of 2015

My name is Julietta Cole and I am a senior Environmental Studies major at Skidmore College. As an avid gardener and chicken enthusiast, I am intrigued by the homesteading and backyard chicken movement in the United States. The information gathered from this survey will be used for my senior capstone project on backyard chickens, and possibly for future publications.

This survey is specifically for Saratoga County residents. Please do not complete this survey if you do not live in Saratoga County, NY.

All answers will remain anonymous and confidential.

Thank you for your time!

Q1 How many years have you had chickens?

Q2 How many chickens do you have?

Q3 People have chickens for many reasons.  Please rate how important the following factors are for you.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not Important (1) | Somewhat Important (2) | Important (3) | Very Important (4) |
| For fresh eggs. (1) |  |  |  |  |
| For fresh meat. (2) |  |  |  |  |
| For manure/fertilizer. (3) |  |  |  |  |
| For entertainment. (4) |  |  |  |  |
| To have control over the production of my food. (5) |  |  |  |  |
| To sell their products. (6) |  |  |  |  |
| To show them competitively. (7) |  |  |  |  |
| As pets. (8) |  |  |  |  |
| As pest control. (9) |  |  |  |  |
| As a learning experience for my children. (10) |  |  |  |  |

Q4 People find out about chicken husbandry from many sources.  Please rank how important each source was to your decision to keep chickens.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not Important (1) | Somewhat Important (2) | Important (3) | Very Important (4) |
| Family (1) |  |  |  |  |
| Friends (2) |  |  |  |  |
| Neighbors (3) |  |  |  |  |
| Experience Growing Up (4) |  |  |  |  |
| Books/Articles (5) |  |  |  |  |
| Attending a Backyard Chicken Workshop (6) |  |  |  |  |
| Visiting a Farm (7) |  |  |  |  |
| Spending Time with Chickens (8) |  |  |  |  |

Q5 Would you recommend having chickens to your friends?

* Yes (1)
* No (2)
* Maybe (3)

Q6 Are you a member of an agricultural organization or chicken community club in your town?

* Yes (1)
* No (2)

Q7 Do you have a vegetable or herb garden?

* Yes (1)
* No (2)

Q8 Do you also have any of the following animals?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Please check all that apply (1) |
| Bees (1) |  |
| Goats (2) |  |
| Sheep (3) |  |
| Rabbits (4) |  |
| None (5) |  |

Q9 Having chickens has made me more likely to...

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| Acquire other microlivestock such as rabbits, bees, and goats. (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Compost. (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Grow my own food. (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Purchase organic and/or natural foods. (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Shop at the Farmers' Market. (5) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Recycle and/or reuse products. (6) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Do do-it-yourself projects. (7) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Use alternative transportation methods such as walking, biking, and buses. (8) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Buy goods and products from companies with good environmental records. (9) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Pay slightly more for natural, organic, and local products. (10) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Support environmental groups. (11) |  |  |  |  |  |

Q11 What is your zipcode?

Q12 Do you own or rent your home?

* Own (1)
* Rent (2)

Q13 How would you describe your setting?

* Urban (1)
* Suburban (2)
* Rural (3)

Q14 On how many acres do you live?

Q15 Thank you for taking this survey!I am also hoping to talk to some chicken owners in Saratoga County so I can better understand their chicken keeping experiences. Would you be interested in participating? (I would love to get to know you and meet your birds!)

* Yes (please provide your name and an email address and/or phone number) (1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* No (2)

**Appendix B**

**SURVEY: National**

Backyard Chicken Survey, Skidmore College

Backyard Chicken Survey

Skidmore College Environmental Studies Department

Julietta Cole, Class of 2015

My name is Julietta Cole and I am a senior Environmental Studies major at Skidmore College. As an avid gardener and chicken enthusiast, I am intrigued by the homesteading and backyard chicken movement in the United States. The information gathered from this survey will be used for my senior capstone project on backyard chickens, and possibly for future publications.

All answers will remain anonymous and confidential. Thank you for your time!

Q1 How many years have you had chickens?

Q2 How many chickens do you have?

Q3 People keep chickens for many reasons.  Please rate how important the following factors are for you?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not Important (1) | Somewhat Important (2) | Important (3) | Very Important (4) |
| For fresh eggs. (1) |  |  |  |  |
| For fresh meat. (2) |  |  |  |  |
| For manure/fertilizer. (3) |  |  |  |  |
| For entertainment. (4) |  |  |  |  |
| To have control over the production of my food. (5) |  |  |  |  |
| To sell their products. (6) |  |  |  |  |
| To show them competitively. (7) |  |  |  |  |
| As pets. (8) |  |  |  |  |
| As pest control. (9) |  |  |  |  |
| As a learning experience for my children. (10) |  |  |  |  |

Q4 People find out about chicken husbandry from many sources.  Please rank how important each source was to your decision to keep chickens.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not Important (1) | Somewhat Important (2) | Important (3) | Very Important (4) |
| Family (1) |  |  |  |  |
| Friends (2) |  |  |  |  |
| Neighbors (3) |  |  |  |  |
| Experience Growing Up (4) |  |  |  |  |
| Books/Articles (5) |  |  |  |  |
| Attending a Backyard Chicken Workshop (6) |  |  |  |  |
| Visiting a Farm (7) |  |  |  |  |
| Spending Time with Chickens (8) |  |  |  |  |

Q5 Would you recommend keeping chickens to your friends?

* Yes (1)
* No (2)
* Maybe (3)

Q6 Are you a member of an agricultural organization or chicken community club in your town?

* Yes (1)
* No (2)

Q7 Do you have a vegetable or herb garden?

* Yes (1)
* No (2)

Q8 Do you keep any of the following animals?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Please check all that apply (1) |
| Bees (1) |  |
| Goats (2) |  |
| Sheep (3) |  |
| Rabbits (4) |  |
| None (5) |  |

Q9 Raising chickens has made me more likely to...

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| Acquire other microlivestock such as rabbits, bees, and goats. (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Compost. (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Grow my own food. (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Purchase organic and/or natural foods. (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Shop at the Farmers' Market. (5) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Recycle and/or reuse products. (6) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Do do-it-yourself projects. (7) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Use alternative transportation methods such as walking, biking, and buses. (8) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Buy goods and products from companies with good environmental records. (9) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Pay slightly more for natural, organic, and local products. (10) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Support environmental groups. (11) |  |  |  |  |  |

Q10 I am optimistic about our ability to address environmental problems.

* Strongly Agree (1)
* Agree (2)
* Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
* Disagree (4)
* Strongly Disagree (5)

Q11 What is your zipcode?

Q12 Do you own or rent your home?

* Own (1)
* Rent (2)

Q13 How would you describe your setting?

* Urban (1)
* Suburban (2)
* Rural (3)

Q14 On how many acres do you live?

Q15 What is the gender of the primary chicken caregiver in your household?

* Male (1)
* Female (2)

Q16 How old is the primary chicken caregiver in your household?

* Under 25 (1)
* 25 to 34 (2)
* 35 to 44 (3)
* 45 to 54 (4)
* 55 to 64 (5)
* 65 or older (6)

Q17 What is the ethnicity of the primary chicken caregiver in your household?

* White (1)
* Black/African American (2)
* Hispanic/Latino (3)
* Asian (4)
* Native American (5)
* Multiracial/Other (6)
* Prefer Not to Answer (7)

Q18 What is your annual household income before taxes?

* Less than $20,000 (1)
* Between $20,000 and under $40,000 (2)
* Between $40,000 and under $60,000 (3)
* Between $60,000 and under $80,000 (4)
* Between $80,000 and under $100,000 (5)
* Above $100,000 (6)
* Prefer Not to Answer (7)

**List of Facebook Pages Where I Posted the National Survey**

*(Repeats are not mistakes; some pages had the same name)*

Wing and a Prayer Farm

Mack Hill Farm

Kinderhook Farm

Merck Forest and Farmland Center

Food Inc

Community Chickens

Backyard Poultry Magazine

I Love My Chickens

Chickens (Magazine)

Yardbirds Backyard Chickens

Life with Chickens

BackYard Chickens

Raising Chickens

Chickens for Backyards

The Chicken Chick

Icelandic Chickens of Whippoorwill Farm

My Pet Chicken

Urban Farm Magazine

Hobby Farms

Keeping Chickens

Backyard Chickens BYC

Chickens For Home

Chickens As Pets

Happy Chickens

Backyard Chickens (Pet Services)

Backyard Chickens at Margarets Roost

Amy's Backyard Chickens

Newcastle Backyard Chickens

Evansville Backyard Chickens

Napa Backyard Chickens

Gina's Backyard Chickens and Poultry

Backyard\_Chickens

Illinois Backyard Chickens

Edgerton Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens for Belgrade

Grandpa's Backyard Chickens

Backyard Pet Chickens in San Antonio

BackYard Chickens (Record Label)

Backyard Chickens

Backyard chickens Class

Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens in Gahanna

Backyard Chickens.Pahrump

Ferndale Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens in Greensboro, NC

Backyard Chickens and Gardening

I Love Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens of Lee County, Florida

Becky's backyard chickens

Binghamton Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens Asheville

Backyard Chickens in Columbia SC

Backyard Chickens for Hagerstown

Pam's Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens for Beginners

Backyard Chickens of Sacramento

Backyard Chickens For Elmhurst, IL

Beloit Backyard Chickens

Bring Backyard Chickens to Erie

Cincinnati Backyard Chickens

Backyard chickens as pets

Raising Backyard Chickens

Roscoe Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens of New Jersey

Backyard Chickens in Berlin, CT

Support Backyard Chickens in Hopatcong

Backyard Chickens for Long Beach, MS

Countin' Chickens: The Life of a Backyard Farmer

Backyard Chickens St Louis Metro Area

Kenosha Backyard Chickens

KDH Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens in Rockland, Maine

Minnesota Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens for Somers, CT

Backyard Chickens in South Jordan

Texas Backyard Chickens

Maplewood Backyard Chickens

Bakersfield Backyard Chickens

Peoria Area Backyard Chickens

Home to Roost: Backyard Chicken Consulting Services

Legalize Backyard Chickens in Woonsocket

Madrid Backyard Chickens

Texarkana Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chickens in Yorktown, NY

Best Backyard Chickens

Beginner's Backyard Chickens

Crazy Backyard Chickens

Fenton Backyard Chickens

Southern Maryland Backyard Chickens

Bring Backyard Chickens to Brookfield, IL

Jessie's Backyard Chickens

The chicken feeder - for backyards everywhere

Raising backyard chickens in Kentucky

Lonokians For Backyard Chickens

Backyard Chicken Farm

North Andover Backyard Chickens

Adams County Backyard Chickens

Clearwater Citizens for Backyard Chickens

Hillsboro Backyard Chickens

Franklin for Backyard Chickens

Apple Valley MN Backyard Chickens

**Appendix C**

**Semi-Structured Interview** for Backyard Chicken Owners

(Adapted from Kate Sheridan’s Missoula, MT Thesis)

*Interview Guide for Chicken-Keepers in Saratoga Springs*

**Introduction**

Thanks for talking with me today. I’m doing these interviews as a part of a research project on backyard chickens. In particular, I am looking at why people in Saratoga Springs keep chickens and in their backyards. I am interested in your experience and what motivated you to keep chicken.

Before we begin, I want to assure you that your identity as a participant in my research will remain confidential. I will not use your name in my final paper or in any presentations, unless permission granted.

Do you have any questions or concerns?

If it is ok with you, I’d like to record our conversation. This will allow me to focus on what is said, and ensures that your answers are accurately recorded. Is it alright with you if I turn the recorder on?

**Participant’s History**

1) How many chickens do you have?

2) When did you get your chickens?

Where did you get your chickens?

3) Why did you begin keeping chickens? (eggs, meat, etc.)

4) What are the benefits to keeping chickens?  
Probe: Are there any other benefits to keeping chickens?  
Probe #2: Before you got chickens how did you get eggs? Does having chickens save you money? (financial benefits?)

5) Have you personally encountered any challenges to keeping chickens?

6) What is your living situation?

**Interactions with Neighbors/Tensions**

6) Please tell me a little about your neighbors’ reactions to your having animals.

Probe: Why do you think they may have responded that way?

**Knowledge generation and sharing**

7) Did you have any experience keeping chickens before this? (i.e. growing up, experience on a farm, keeping animals in another city)

Where do you get information about how to take care of your animals? [e.g. books, internet sites, community in Saratoga Springs]

Probe: Are there specific people or resources in Saratoga County that you go to if you have a question about your animals?

**City policy and decision making**

8) Are you aware of the Saratoga Springs city ordinances that regulate chickens?

9) What do you think the role of the city should be in regulating small livestock?

10) Chickens are currently the only type of small livestock allowed in the Inside Tax District per the Saratoga Springs City Code, though roosters are forbidden. Swine are allowed in the Outside Tax District with restrictions. Do you think there are other types of animals that should be allowed?

11) In the hearing for the chicken ordinance in Missoula, MT, a city councilman brought up a conversation with his wife, who said that if “people want to raise chickens, they should move to the country.” How would you respond to a comment like that?

12) What should the criteria be for allowing animals in Saratoga Springs?

**Bigger picture**

14) Has keeping chickens changed your eating habits? your purchasing habits? your environmental awareness?

15) As you may be aware, many cities across the US are making these kinds of changes to allow certain livestock to be kept in the city. I’m wondering what you think about these changes in light of the larger food system.

16) Do you see yourself as part of a movement?

17) Are there other animals you’d like to keep?

18) Chickens have been described as the “gateway drug” into the world of livestock. Would you agree with this statement?

19) Do you think backyard chickens benefit *society*? How do you envision the future of backyard chickens (realistically and/or idealistically)?

20) What does your backyard flock mean/symbolize to you?

21) Before we conclude, do you have any other thoughts you’d like to share?

**Conclusion**

Thank you. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk about your animals. If I have any additional questions, can I contact you?

Do you mind if I take photographs/use them in my presentation?