



# BACKYARD POULTRY FLOCKS

Caring for chickens and other poultry species isn't hard, but it *IS* a commitment. The growing trend in ownership of backyard flocks indicates more people than ever are 'flying the coop' on store bought eggs and taking on their own chickens, ducks and other egg-layers. If you keep poultry on your property, aside from cost, space and local bylaws, there is essential basic knowledge about proper care of avian species to consider.

Management of poultry is NOT an innate understanding. Very few people today have grown up with a flock of chickens in their backyard. In fact, it's much more complex than caring for a pet cat or dog. Because poultry generally do not become a part of the household family, they must be provided with all the tools necessary to thrive in their own environment.

Some knowledge of basic physiology and bird requirements should be obtained prior to owning any bird in order to properly care for flocks and steer clear of what can be significant animal welfare issues. The National Farm Animal Council of Canada (NFACC) has published Codes of Practice for the treatment of both meat birds and laying hens. These *Codes* provide both required and recommended components for all poultry producers in Canada, including backyard producers. All producers, regardless of flock size, should be familiar with the Codes of Practice for their specific species. The *Codes* for chickens and many other species can be found at:

<http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice>.

Commercial poultry meat and egg producers must follow the Codes of Practice and the requirements set out by their individual Feather Board's animal welfare guidelines, but small flock owners are frequently unaware that Codes of Practice, and the mandatory components they contain for protecting bird welfare, even exist. Unfortunately, this can easily result in problems with flock welfare.

## CONCERNS FOR BACKYARD PRODUCERS CAN INCLUDE:

- Minimizing predation
- Providing adequate feed at a reasonable cost
- Soil and vegetation management
- Complying with zoning regulations
- Complaints from neighbors
- Manure management
- Flock size management
- Handling aggressive birds
- Supply of veterinarians trained in poultry
- Lack of good information about poultry health problems, husbandry, and behaviour
- Lack of reliable people to watch birds when going on vacation

*Elkhoraibi et al, 2014*



For more information, visit the National Farm Animal Council of Canada website [www.nfacc.ca](http://www.nfacc.ca) or ask your veterinarian.

## KEEPING THE FOLLOWING THINGS IN MIND WILL HELP YOU TAKE PROPER CARE OF YOUR FLOCK:

### Nutrition

- Food and fresh water should be readily available.
- Properly formulated diets are required for birds. Proper food storage is essential to protect from mold and rodents.
- Adequate feeder and drinker space is necessary to reduce crowding. Ensure wild birds and/or rodents cannot access feeders or drinkers.

### Housing

Poultry home housing kits and DIY coop plans are widely available, but any poultry housing must provide:

- Enough space for proper ventilation and number of adult birds
- Easy access to food and water
- Nesting areas for laying hens
- Protection from the elements and extreme temperatures

Backyard producers often want to allow their birds access to the outdoors when weather permits. Requirements for outdoor access include:

- Protection from predation (fencing, roofing)
- Environmental enrichment (perches, dust bathing substrate, water source for ducks)
- Ramp on a gentle slope, flooring substrate.

Even with these safeguards in place, outdoor access carries a risk for mites, disease and cannibalism.



### Disease/ Biosecurity

All poultry have microbes that transfer easily between bird species. The following will help discourage disease transmission:

- Have separate clothing and boots for interacting with birds.
- Limit exposure of birds to visitors, or ensure visitors are wearing clean clothing and boots and have not had recent contact with other bird species.
- Quarantine new or sick birds.
- Employ sanitary disposal methods for both carcasses and eggs.

### Euthanasia

Willingness and ability to perform humane euthanasia on birds who require it is essential!

Requirements for humane euthanasia include:

- Acceptable methods with proper training: decapitation or mechanical or cervical dislocation.
- Rapid and sanitary methods.
- All methods should be conducted by competent individuals.

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