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## [Hatching Plans for Urban Egg Producers](#)

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Sally and Hybie in their Toronto backyard coop. They supply a family of four with eggs year-round.

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From Greensboro, North Carolina to An Arbor, Michigan, to Vancouver, BC, the practice of raising urban chickens for eggs ruffles more than a few feathers. Even in a town of 6000 such as Chester, South Carolina, individual poultry proprietors are prohibited from raising urban chickens by city ordinances and bylaws. In response to the widespread ban on chickens in the city, urban farmers across North America are pushing for change.

Toronto and its surrounding municipalities are part of a majority of cities that uphold bans on urban livestock. GTA residents are permitted to raise up to six rabbits or pigeons in their back yards, but are otherwise prohibited from keeping animals other than traditional pets. Only the Toronto Zoo, High Park, Riverdale farm, Black Creek Pioneer Village, and the GTA's ever-diminishing agriculturally-zoned land are exempt from this regulation.

Brampton, a small city in the GTA with a rich agricultural heritage, is one of the few Canadian exceptions to the rule.

There, the rule states that two chickens (or rabbits, pigeons, or game fowl) can be kept “on the premises of or in the dwelling unit located on registered plan of subdivision or a built up urban area,” provided that the coop is well-maintained and set back from any dwelling by eight meters. The by-law also stipulates that feed be stored in a rodent-proof container and that chicken waste be buried so as to prevent odour. Members of the Brampton and Peel County Poultry, Pigeon and Pet Stock Association must meet the same requirements with respect to coop maintenance, location and waste disposal, but may keep “any number of rabbits, game fowl or domestic fowl”.

Brampton is not alone in its more enlightened regulatory approach to backyard flocks. A precedent has also been set by some big US cities such as Des Moines, Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Seattle, Omaha, and Redwood, California, which all allow chickens to be raised within city limits. Most place a limit on the number of hens that can be kept by a single-family household, and regulate their distance from the neighbours’ property line. Most do not allow roosters. Seattle has even changed the status of miniature goats from farm animals to small animals, thus allowing them within city limits.

While the battle for birds is being waged on a political level, many poultry promoters are challenging bylaws by keeping their roosts below the radar. One Torontonian keeps chickens in her backyard throughout the winter.

“The chickens are outside during the day and go into the little coop at night. It is amazing how their feathers have filled out in response to the weather,” says Susan, an urban egg enthusiast.

Her small coop is one of many models available commercially through various online companies such as the Eglu from Omlet. While Susan may not be supported by Toronto City Council, she can find support through online blogs, websites, and even a facebook group, which help urban chicken and livestock activists to share tips on policy change, coop cleaning and chick rearing.

Although domesticated livestock were an integral part of the cityscape into the last century, with industrialization and urbanization the distance between field to table has grown. However, with the resurgence of interest in ‘local food’, urban chicken coops could be the next frontier on the journey to a sustainable local food system.

#### **Urban Chicken Websites:**

[www.ChickenKeeping.com](http://www.ChickenKeeping.com)

The City Chicken: [Home.centurytel.net/thecitychicken](http://Home.centurytel.net/thecitychicken)

FeatherSite: [www.FeatherSite.com/Poultry/BRKPoultryPage.html](http://www.FeatherSite.com/Poultry/BRKPoultryPage.html)

Backyard Chickens: [www.BackyardChickens.com](http://www.BackyardChickens.com)

Biosecurity for the Birds: [www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/)

Mother Earth [www.MotherEarthNews.com/eggs](http://www.MotherEarthNews.com/eggs)

The Omelet <http://myurbanchickens.blogspot.com/>

#### **Coop Sales:**

[www.Henspa.com](http://www.Henspa.com)

[www.MyPetChicken.com](http://www.MyPetChicken.com)

[www.Omlet.us](http://www.Omlet.us)

[www.WineCountryCoops.com](http://www.WineCountryCoops.com)