

Halifax family runs afoul of poultry police

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Halifax's civic chicken cops are at it again.

A Halifax family plans to file an appeal Thursday after a provincial court judge gave them an expensive lesson in the rules of the roost: a \$500 fine and an order to remove a rooster and 13 chickens from their Upper Tantallon property.

Trevor Smedley and Jane Parker live on a 2.5-acre property within Halifax city limits. The neighbours couldn't see or smell their unlucky chickens, but a noisy rooster triggered a bylaw complaint and led to the discovery of the outlawed birds.

"It's frustrating," Parker said on Wednesday. She and Smedley are just raising pets for their three children and enjoying the birds' brown eggs, but Nova Scotia provincial court judge Jamie Campbell was clear in his Tuesday ruling.

"These domestic chickens are fowl. They cannot be kept in an accessory building in a zone that is not zoned agricultural," the judge ruled. Smedley and Parker's chickens may be domestic and fowl, but they're not your average run-of-the-mill birds. They are a heritage breed developed in the 1800s known as Silver-laced Wyandottes and hail from Quebec. "They're still a favourite among the chicken fanciers in the world, because they're fluffy and look pretty," Parker said. It's the second time in three months that the city has swooped down on urban chicken farmers. In late January, bylaw officers cracked down on Louise Hanavan, crying foul over three chickens on her west-end property.

Hanavan gave her three chickens away to a farmer, but she holds no ill will against the bylaw officers, who she says are just doing their jobs. But as an advocate who believes that local food is best, Hanavan wishes Halifax would be a little more lenient. "Right now, the law is not set up to support urban agriculture," she said.

Halifax is in line with the rest of Canada in that regard. Jennifer Blecha, an assistant professor of geography at San Francisco State University and a former Vancouver resident, did her dissertation on urban livestock keepers. Blecha surveyed 21 cities in Canada and found that only four allowed chickens: Brampton and London in Ontario, and Surrey and Victoria in British Columbia. In contrast, the U.S. allows chickens in 53 cities.

"It's very strange that in the U.S. and Canada, over the last 100 years, productive animals have been regulated out," Blecha said. She believes a lot of it has to do with class values, suburbanization and the rise of the lawn. According to Blecha, people used to grow their food in their yards before it went out of fashion. Now individuals make a statement by saying, 'I control this much space and I'm wealthy enough to buy my food at the store, which you can tell from how green my lawn is. I don't need to grow my food here.' But Blecha is big on chickens. She said benefits include everything from fresh eggs to the fact they eat kitchen scraps, cutting down on municipal solid waste.

"I think absolutely we should be allowing people to raise them. Chickens have existed in cities since the dawn of time and they still exist all over the world," she added.

For now, though, that's small consolation for Smedley and Parker, who are supposed to give up their flock by the end of May.

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