

## **Deconstructing Dinner**

*by Jon Steinman*

### **Chickens in Your Backyard?**

*Accommodating a few feathered friends in the city can provide a wealth of benefits, however, some municipalities still say harbouring poultry is a punishable crime!*

I have long suggested that deconstructing our food is a great way to deconstruct who we are as individuals and as a culture. Whether it be examining the speed at which we eat, or the obsession we have to purchasing only unblemished produce, how we eat can tell us a lot about ourselves.

As for the eggs we eat, what have we allowed to happen to the millions of chickens that produce our eggs?

Approximately 98% of Canada's eggs are produced by hens that spend their entire lives indoors in what are called 'battery cages'. In the past few years, images and videos of the insides of some of these chicken and egg factories have surfaced and the conditions are quite disturbing.

These images have received a lot of exposure in recent years, and this has in part prompted many municipalities throughout British Columbia to ban the use of battery-cage eggs within municipal facilities.

What is surprising, is that the conditions found in Canada's egg factories have been the norm for decades. So why is it only in recent years that these animal welfare issues have received more of the spotlight? Perhaps the reason is rooted within the values underlying our urban culture? There has been a longstanding interest within North American cities to disconnect the urban from the rural populations; a scenario that is far different from the rest of the world where food is often grown and raised within cities themselves. Combine this with the power of the Internet, and the tipping point seems to have finally arrived where people are beginning to see what farming has become.

This unknowing of where our food comes from prompted Poet and Essayist Wendell Berry to write; "If there is any truth to the cliché, you are what you eat, then we should be honest about the fact that most of us do not have the slightest idea what we are."

Christoph Martens is a Nelson, British Columbia resident who believes backyard chickens are a way to showcase what we've indeed become, and that is "pseudo-royalty". Martens comments on the so-called 'green-revolution' of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. "Agriculture became an industry," says Martens, "and people were supposed to move from the rural areas and into a lifestyle of urban convenience. You go to the supermarket and get your food on a piece of styrofoam and it doesn't matter where it came from. I think that's an idea that has run its course."

While many cities throughout the United States and a few in Canada do indeed permit the raising of poultry within city boundaries, Nelson is one city that still maintains a bylaw that prohibits their presence. Martens is not deterred by the bylaw.

For the past three years, Martens has been working towards greater self-sufficiency in order to reduce his ecological footprint and ensure that the animals providing him with food are treated humanely. While there are many farms that do indeed raise chickens humanely, Martens has instead chosen to accommodate four chickens on his small city lot.

Martens is not alone. Another backyard chicken advocate is Bucky Buckaw; a character created by Robert McMinn and Gwen Sanchirico of Radio Boise in Boise, Idaho. Bucky hosts a weekly segment called “Bucky Buckaw’s Backyard Chicken Broadcast”.

The radio show certainly has an agenda, but Bucky insists that his agenda is no secret. “I envision a day when a stroll through any neighbourhood will take you past yard after yard blessed by the bounty of chickendom,” says Bucky. “The question should never be; ‘do you have a chicken,’ but, ‘what kind of chicken do you have?’”

In the first of Bucky’s episodes, he explains, in his signature southern twang; why city dwellers should have chickens:

1. Chickens will eat every earwig in sight; not to mention doodlebugs and other little pests, and you’ll have a happier and healthier garden without using any pesticides.
2. Chickens are just so dang cute.
3. Chickens will make your kitchen scraps compost faster by eating most of it and scratching around on what’s left.
4. Chickens are just so loveable.
5. Chicken poop is an awesome fertilizer.
6. When chickens drink from the bowls you put out for them and they tilt their heads way back and relish that water going down... dang, that’s adorable; make your whole day.
7. Backyard hens will lay eggs that are free of pesticides and hormone residues, and have a higher nutrient content than store-bought eggs. They taste better and are easier to make sunny-side up without breaking yolk or risking salmonella poisoning.
8. Chickens are just so friendly

With such benefits to be found from raising backyard chickens, it seems inevitable that municipal bylaws prohibiting the raising of poultry will fall by the wayside soon enough.

*Deconstructing Dinner is heard on radio stations across Canada and is available as a Podcast. More information on today’s topic can be found at ([www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner/farminginthecity.htm](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner/farminginthecity.htm)).*

**Crosshead Option**

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