

# Moscow looking at tighter rules on chicken numbers

- **October 5th, 2009**
- (0) comments

By David Johnson of the Tribune

## Fresh egg fans cry fowl, plan 'Coop Cruise'



Carol Spurling poses with Nellie and the other backyard chickens. Spurling is encouraging Moscow res...

MOSCOW - Nellie, Dorothy, Margaret, Myrtle and Mable are five of what could technically become thousands of new residents here.

They are chickens. And, according to current Moscow ordinances, every property owner in town can have 25 chickens for every 5,000 square feet of lot size, up to a total of 50 chickens.

The average residential lot, according to officials, is about 6,000 square feet.

"So I think we need to have a discussion," said City Attorney Randy Fife, who's been asked to draft a new chicken ordinance. "We're getting two competing interests. There are people complaining about roosters and neighborhood chickens, and then we have increasing inquiries from people who want to raise chickens in their back yards."

Carol Spurling is of the latter persuasion. She and her family, who live on North Lincoln Street, own Nellie, Dorothy, Margaret, Myrtle and Mable, who live in a backyard coop.

"Chickens are livestock, but really they're pets," said Spurling. "They're good to have around because they really take care of our composting. And there's the egg factor. We love getting fresh eggs. And they're very friendly and personable birds."

So while Fife scratches out a new ordinance, Spurling is promoting a Moscow Food Co-op "Coop Cruise" from 4 to 6 p.m. Sunday for people interested in visiting four backyard henhouses, including hers.

"It's to help people who are curious to learn about it, and find out if it's feasible for them," said Spurling, the co-op's outreach and ownership coordinator.

"I would never suggest banning poultry," Fife said. "So the way I'm going to approach it (writing a new ordinance) is try to find some balance number, something less than a commercial enterprise in a residential zone, but something more than nothing."

Fife said the proposal will probably get its first public airing at a city council administrative committee meeting.

"In this economy, there are lots of people interested in growing things in their back yard," Fife said. "Or maybe giving their kid a farm or pet experience. But on the other hand, you have people saying 'I'm not so sure in an urbanized setting that it's appropriate.' "

From her perspective, Spurling said, the positives of backyard chickens outweigh any negatives.

"They don't make as much noise as a barking dog," she said. "And when you take care of them properly, and don't have them in too great a concentration, they really don't cause any problems. They don't stink or anything."

Spurling said she initially got seven chickens, but two turned out to be roosters. Crowing, she conceded, should not be tolerated in town. Thus, the roosters went back to the farmer who sold her the birds. Her hens, on the other hand, have quietly gotten busy doing what they're intended to do.

"They just started laying eggs. They're brand new at it," she said. "So I don't know if they're good layers or not. When they all get going, we should get an egg a day (per bird) until the really deep winter."

Nellie, Dorothy, Margaret, Myrtle and Mable have also become good friends with Spurling's son, Reed, who learned about chicken raising and egg gathering when the family lived overseas.

"It's because of him we got them."

What about chicken soup?

"It's too early for us to say. My son doesn't like the idea of eating them," Spurling said. "But we have processed them ourselves before. So he knows what you have to do to eat a chicken. We've done that whole thing."

Fife points out the current city ordinance refers to fowl, not just chickens. Which means people can have up to 50 ducks or geese, depending on property size. All of which, he said, underscores a need to update city ordinances.

"Co-op Coop Cruise" participants, said Spurling, will be able to tour the backyard chicken coops and talk with owners about the realities of raising chickens and gathering eggs. Cost of the tour, which starts at the Co-op, is \$12 for adults, \$5 for children, with kids younger than 3 being free. Tickets can be purchased from any cashier at the Moscow Food Co-op. Enrollment is limited and participants must provide their own transportation between coops.

---

*Johnson may be contacted at [djohnson@lmtribune.com](mailto:djohnson@lmtribune.com) or (208) 883-0564.*

