

Roosters versus loud male dogs

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

I recently read another one of those infuriating newspaper articles about communities that have allowed clucking hens to live inside cities while excluding crowing roosters. That's because roosters allegedly crow noxiously early in the morning, disturbing sleeping citizens.

But crowing is a distinction not equally applied. For instance, male dogs (and female dogs) bark early in the morning, late at night and all day long. Nobody suggests banning male or female dogs from a city.

It is at this point that I might mention members of Congress also crow a lot, but that includes female members. So asking male and female members of Congress to put a cork in it is even-handed. Consequently, what's with this discrimination against male chickens?

True, male chickens have slightly louder voices and they are inclined to start crowing when the sun comes up (about 5 a.m. this time of year). That irks some city sissies. But who among us who started life on the farm has not loved that rooster song, that morning musical with which he awakens people in ways that are far more welcome than some clanging alarm clock. So what's the problem with a lusty Rhode Island Red rooster brightening the start of day with song?

And what do hens do?

They cluck. Not quite so loud, but totally boring.

Granted, hens aren't audible a mile away like some roosters, but when they get all their beaks together and all cluck at once, one rooster is a pleasure by comparison. Of course, it is eggs that make hens popular.

Chicken coops in the city is another fad of those aging granolas who tend to go out of their way to fall for nutrition quackery. Bizarre food fads are substitute religions. City chickens are one of those back-to-basics food crazes. It's like the current obsession with the belief that we are all going to die if we don't refuse gluten.

Gluten is that gummy stuff that holds bread dough together and lets it rise. The current food fad message is, "If it tastes good, it's probably killing you and all your friends."

Mind you, some people actually do have genuine difficulty with gluten intake, but that does not include everyone living in a university town or everyone living in the state of California. Those places are filled with massive numbers of people who live in fear of gluten.

(We used to fear nuclear war. Now we are terrified of gluten. The only thing worse would be a gluten bomb.)

But for the most part, there is nothing to fear from chickens. So some cities, trying to bend over backward and make everyone happy, including the chickens, are agreeable to letting us tend a few city hens for fun and eggs.

So far, so good. But don't you suppose the kind of people who want clucking hens in their lives but hate crowing roosters are people (often female) who believe most city neighborhoods already have too many worthless old roosters?

Bear in mind, I am not inexperienced in these matters. During my farm childhood, it was the job of my brother Bob and me to feed the chickens, about 200 of them, back in that time before home freezers. That way, we always had fresh meat on the hoof (or rather on the chicken foot).

Another of our chores was gathering the eggs. The eggs were provided by the clucking hens, of course. (We used to beg the roosters to lay eggs but they were too lazy.)

Bear in mind, if you want to raise city chickens, err on the side of too few rather than too many. The problem is that hens will lay daily for months at a time. Let's say you just want four hens. That means four eggs a day appear where the hens live and there are two of you. The next thing you know, you and your spouse will each be eating two eggs a day, every day of your lives. A thing like that can be tiresome.

You'll soon be begging the neighbors to take some of your unused and not entirely fresh eggs. That will turn you into a neighborhood pain in the neck. Soon you will be getting rid of both hens and roosters, especially those clucking hens who can't sing baritone in the morning.

I'd rather eat gluten.

Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's Opinion page. His email address is wilberth@cableone.net.