

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
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Title: Backyard Chickens II (Farming in the City IV)

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Transcript – Carol Elliott**

Jon Steinman: Welcome once again to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and this is episode number 101 here on the program, with today's episode marking the long awaited second installment of our ongoing series on Backyard Chickens, which first began airing in March of this year – 2008. The series is also part of yet another we run periodically on the program entitled Farming in the City.

On episode number one of the Backyard Chickens series we met a unique radio show host based at Radio Boise in Boise, Idaho and that was Bucky Buckaw. To the delight of I'm sure many listeners, we have yet again, Bucky Buckaw joining the broadcast to share his in-depth knowledge of *everything* one should know about raising chickens in your backyard.

Today's Bucky Buckaw segments will explore the different breeds that backyard chickeners have to choose from. He will touch on the topic of cleanliness, chicken poop and he'll comment on whether or not it's a viable option to raise backyard chickens, for a profit.

increase music and fade out

Jon Steinman: Today's second episode of the backyard chicken series will help stimulate *some* thought as we approach the launch of yet another series that will be launched on next week's broadcast. The series will be titled Livestock Lost because regardless of whether farm animals are raised in backyards or in industrial barns, foods derived from animals have become an increasingly hot topic as of late, as it's seemingly becoming a far more frequent occurrence to hear about meat recalls which are only getting bigger in size.

BSE, or otherwise known as Mad Cow Disease, remains an ongoing concern, and on June 22nd tens of thousands of South Koreans, fearful of Mad Cow Disease, demonstrated on the streets of Seoul, demanding that beef imports from the United States continue to be banned. On June 23rd yet another confirmed case of a cow infected with BSE was reported in British Columbia by

the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, yet, as of the date of *this* broadcast, the CFIA is refusing to disclose where in the province the animal was discovered. And back in April, the federal government announced that pork producers would be paid fifty million dollars to destroy ten percent of the country's hogs by this fall in order to respond to an economic downturn in the industry.

These stories only represent a handful of the topics to cover as part of the new series titled, *Livestock Lost* and the series will be launched with an interview with author Susan Bourette of the recently released book *Carnivore Chic*. You can also expect early on in the series a revisiting of the BC meat inspection regulations that have pushed many farmers and processors in the province out of business or out of farming altogether.

In the West Kootenay region of British Columbia, one of the most *interesting* responses to the new regulations has been playing itself out over the past year as residents and farmers have been working diligently to build a local slaughterhouse to preserve agriculture in the region. However, the plans have faced rather intense opposition from locals.

This story in particular raises some *very* important philosophical questions and I strongly encourage anyone to stay tuned for that. I know for myself I am also really excited to begin covering that topic in depth. And again, that's the new *Livestock Lost* series starting next week here on *Deconstructing Dinner*.

But in the meantime, for today's show, we will talk about livestock and continue to examine the growing interest in backyard chickens, a controversial issue that has resulted in a number of interesting debates that have recently taken place in municipalities throughout North America.

As part of our March 27th broadcast we met Nelson, British Columbia resident Christoph Martens, who raises chickens in his urban backyard even though a municipal bylaw prohibits him from doing so. As I'm sure many listeners were wondering after that broadcast, would the airing of that show result in the end of Christoph's vision of self-sufficiency by a bylaw enforcement officer? But I can assure you that Christoph *does* continue to raise chickens without any interference from neighbours, bylaw enforcement officers or police.

Since that broadcast aired, I've received a number of interesting emails from people who thoroughly enjoyed the broadcast, including some from listeners who are now energized and inspired to become backyard chickeners themselves. And this series is very much designed to do just that: to provide you as the listener with the necessary resources and knowledge on how, if you're interested, to raise backyard chickens in the most humane, respectful and efficient way possible.

Now another email that was received was one that you'll likely get a kick out of, as I know I did, because it was an email from Christoph Martens' former mailman, Robert Stubbs. According to Robert, when Christoph was on Robert's mail route, they spent many occasions discussing his backyard chickens and in particular discussing the concern many municipal residents often have with backyard chickens in general, which is noise.

Some breeds of chickens are indeed known for making a bit of noise, and *roosters* are an even greater concern to any urban resident. In fact many municipalities that *do* allow backyard chickens do *not* allow roosters. Now it was this discussion between Robert and Christoph that inspired Robert to write a song about a rooster that makes very *little* noise. You see when Robert Stubbs is *not* delivering mail, he produces music as an amateur musician under the name Bob the Postman. Some of his work is located on the CBC Radio 3 website. And so here is Bob the Postman – singing his tune – The Whispering Rooster.

The Whispering Rooster

Out in the barnyard I heard a hull-a-balloo
Was a big red rooster going cock-a-doodle-doo
Got a cocky little bantam muttered under his breath
Go ahead you fool crow yourself to death

Then he looked at me and he winked his eye
Said I can fight about as well as I fly
But with chanticleer it's claimin' his might
I'm helping myself to some chicken delight

You can strut your stuff cock-a-doodle-doodle-doo
The whispering rooster he knows a trick or two
Well you're up on the dunghill raisin' the sun
He's in back of the henhouse havin' his fun

Now you can shake your wattles you can shake your comb
You can cock-a-doodle-doo until the cows come home
You can rant and rave layin' down the law
Half the chicks on the farm call me Pa

Now the hens lay eggs and the roosters lay hens
And when they're finished they're goin' to do it again
You can only lay just one at a time
Well your gettin' yours friend I get mine

You can strut your stuff
You can tread your hen
The whispering rooster will be treadin' her friend

When you're up on the dunghill raisin' the sun
He's in back of the henhouse havin' his fun

Now there's a lot of these boys they to like spin their wheels
To prove they are big hairy deals
But the whispering rooster doesn't squawk or trill
He keeps his beak shut but he gets his fill

The whispering rooster said listen up Jim
You don't have to crow as loud as him
If he's got action just cut yourself in
By being handy and whisperin'

You can strut your stuff like a mighty mighty man
The whispering rooster has a different plan
While you're up on the dunghill raisin' the sun
He's in back of the hen house havin' his fun

Jon Steinman: And that was Nelson, British Columbia's Bob the Postman singing The Whispering Rooster, a tune inspired by Christoph Martens' backyard chickens. A big thanks to Robert Stubbs for sending along the song after he heard our *first* episode of this backyard chicken series.

Now I do want to share another rather startling and quick story that transpired shortly after the first Backyard chicken broadcast. During my tour of Christoph Martens' urban backyard chicken operation we were accompanied by Christoph's dog, whose name is Teegan. Now during my visit, Teegan was rather vocal with the chickens and ducks in the backyard and on about six or seven occasions, Christoph would call Teegan's name and ask him to be quiet. So as you can imagine, the name *Teegan* was resonating in my head for the rest of the day. Now as usual, the Deconstructing Dinner website becomes an in-depth resource of information on the topics covered each week. And as part of the page devoted to the broadcast featuring Christoph, it was decided that some links to amateur *videos* of backyard chicken operations would be of interest to listeners. So I did a quick search on YouTube for some videos, and the *first* one I came across was produced by a British couple. And I'm going to play the first thirty seconds of the video of *their* backyard chickens, and what you're about to hear is one of the most startling examples of *synchronicity* that I know I've ever experienced.

Take a listen to the name of one of the chickens in this video.

You Tube video

We are in the kitchen and we are just going to go outside into the garden. Is ready with the food. Who do you think we should go and feed? They know

they're coming. Going to come and get their dinner. There are two of them. I don't know where the other one has gone. This is Teegan and this is Denelsa.

Jon Steinman: We can now move on to episode two and, as promised, a series of more segments by a unique Backyard Chicken character Bucky Buckaw and his Backyard Chicken Broadcast.

Bucky hosts a short segment at Radio Boise in Boise, Idaho as part of the Sagebrush Variety Show. His segments are heard on a number of independent radio stations in the United States and his segments have now become an ongoing feature here on Deconstructing Dinner.

On episode one of the series we heard Bucky Buckaw introduce his vision for his Backyard Chicken Broadcasts, and that vision is this, "that he envisions a day when a stroll through any neighbourhood will take you past yard after yard after yard blessed with the bounty of chickendom."

And on that first episode we listened in on segments that focused on what to *feed* your chickens, how to *shelter* your chickens, and how to take care of your chickens throughout the winter.

And now, on today's part two, we'll listen to Bucky Buckaw speak about the various breeds that backyard chickeners can choose from. We'll hear tips and tricks on how to keep your backyard chicken operation clean and how to manage the resourceful chicken poop that our feathered friends produce daily. Bucky will share his experience at a food conference in New York City when backyard chickens were discussed in depth. And we'll hear Bucky's thoughts on the economics of *commercial* backyard chicken operations.

And so first here is Bucky Buckaw and his segment exploring the breeds of chickens available to interested backyard chickeners.

Bucky Buckaw theme music

Bucky Buckaw: Welcome to the Backyard Chicken Broadcast. One of the questions people ask when they are on the verge of inviting chickens to live in their backyard is, what breed of chickens should I get?

I take the same view toward chicken breed preferences that I do towards people who are excessively concerned with cat or dog breeds. There are some very striking physical qualities that are unique to certain breeds. But in terms of temperament I believe the variation is more about the individual bird than it is about their breed.

Chicken lovers love to make generalizations about breeds and personalities but you also will have a hard time finding two chickeny folk who have the same

opinion and they all love to talk about the many exceptions they encounter: “well I had this chicken who was an X breed but he did this or that and isn’t that surprising.”

Egg-laying habits, or broodiness, which means how often they decide to try hatch an egg, can be determined by a breed and definitely play in to how affectionate or handleable a bird is. But even that is subject to a large degree of individual variation. So breed really doesn’t make that big of a difference. On the other hand, I will admit that chickens are beautiful creatures and it’s not hard to understand why a person may decide they really want to be able to look out their window and see a Polish or other crested breed strutting around their yard with their distinctive umbrella of feathers, in the case of a cock, or a hen with a powder-puff head, and that is just one example.

However, I still really believe that the most important thing is to get the chicken you plan to raise from a reputable source, one that you know treats their animals well. I know from experience that sometimes it can seem easier to get the first chicks from a pet store or large commercial breeder. But in most cases it’s not that much more trouble but much more satisfying to find and work with a small scale or hobby breeder. A small scale breeder might specialize in a particular breed or they might raise hybrids. Either way, they are likely to tell you their chickens have the best genetics in the region. The important thing isn’t so much the breed as it is that you will be supporting small-scale farming and a humane and respectful approach to raising chickens.

However, one breed characteristic that can be very important when it comes to backyard chickens is size. If you are like me and you have a relatively small yard, say a thousand or fifteen hundred square feet, you may want to consider a smaller breed. Most breeds come in two versions: full size; and bantam or banty, which has all the same physical characteristics but is one-fifth to one-quarter the size.

Many full-size varieties may weigh as much as eight-an-a-half pound hen or eleven pound cock where the banty version would be one-and-a-half or two pound hen and a rooster no more than three pounds. There are also a few breeds known as true bantams and those are small chickens that have no large-size counterpart. Examples are Burmese, Rosecomb, Sebright or the old Dutch Bantam, which is said to have been developed by peasants to provide small eggs in a time when the law stated that all or some large eggs were to go to the lord of the manor. It’s also worth noting that, at that time in history, chickens laid relatively few eggs per year as compared to contemporary birds. However, contemporary Dutch tend to lay more eggs than other banties so it is possible that they were always ahead of the curve.

The most obvious advantage of keeping banties as opposed to full-size breeds in a small backyard is they will have proportionately more space. It will be easier for

you to house and handle them and they also are less likely to entirely destroy your garden if they manage to get in unsupervised at a time when your seedlings are vulnerable.

A disadvantage is that banties are less intimidating to any stray cats that might wander onto your property. Almost no cat will mess with a full-size chicken. But the balance of power between banties and cats is a little too even for my taste. Still banties do tend to be better flyers and have a better chance of fleeing an attack. And, of course, some might consider it a disadvantage that banties will lay smaller eggs. Personally, I find a couple of small backyard eggs more than adequate for a good breakfast.

One of the birds living in my backyard goes by the name of Quincy and is of a breed I mentioned earlier, the Sebright. That breed was developed by Sir John Sebright early in the 1800s. It's the only breed of chicken named for an individual. Surprisingly, Quincy lays eggs that are very nearly the same size as the eggs laid by the two hens that are thirty-five to fifty percent larger than her. Sometimes I do wonder if the day will come when some government entity will start demanding a portion of the eggs from my backyard so I kind of think of it as insurance that I have got small egg layers.

If you have comments or questions or suggestions for other shows please email me at sagebrush@radioboise.org. If you record the message in your own voice and send it to me in MP3 format I just might play it on my next show.

Bucky Buckaw signing off. I had a good time.

Bucky Buckaw ending theme

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and that was an episode of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast.

In this next episode of Bucky Buckaw we hear his thoughts on the topic of cleanliness. While it's often perceived as rather dirty to keep farm animals within a city, Bucky Buckaw disagrees and insists that chickens are clean animals and backyard chickeners can play an easy role in ensuring that their backyard flocks remain clean and safe.

So here again, is Bucky Buckaw.

Bucky Buckaw: This is Bucky Buckaw with the Backyard Chicken Broadcast. One of the things that gets in the way of my agenda of replacing cruel, toxic and inhumane factory farms with a vast network of healthy backyard chickens is the misperception that chickens are unsanitary. Personally, I have always known better. My neighbours have always been clever enough to recognize healthy conditions when they see them. But I have observed that one of the main

reasons many people haven't fully considered chickenry or have been stopped by local ordinances is the myth that chicken coops are dirty affairs. This is a myth that helps corporate agriculture keep all of us dependent on substandard food. The righteous truth is chickens are tidy, fastidious and their poop doesn't smell.

Okay, maybe that is a slight exaggeration. They are critters after all, not accountants. But here's the facts. In my experience, as well as that of people who visit my flock, and others I have communicated with, chicken poop really is not very smelly. One thing's for sure: my neighbours' unscooped dog waste has got to smell at least ten times as strong, and bad, as my flock's.

I will say that, in the winter, I let the chickens sleep inside. Easier than figuring out a way to heat the coop. They poop over night but it still doesn't smell much in the morning. I'm not entirely sure why that it is. Maybe 'cause I only have three chickens, who were free-ranged in a generous amount of space. That means the poop is well dispersed. Or maybe it's because I frequently collect chicken droppings from the their coop and even from the yard and then mix it in with our compost of kitchen scraps, coffee grounds and plant fibres.

Or, maybe it's their diet. I never feed them commercial feed and I keep them on vegetable, grain and bug diet. I prefer that to the commercial feeds which often contain animal fats, drugs, extracts and artificial or processed ingredients. The healthier, vegetarian and whole food diet is always going to come out the other end smelling better, even in humans.

I also found a comment on a fellow chicken owner's blog that might explain why my chicken yard does not smell bad. This fellow was saying the chicken poop that is left out to dry usually doesn't smell so bad. But that wet and fermented chicken poop is another thing entirely. Another good reason to protect your coop from the damp, something that's effortless in the hot and dry part of Idaho where I live with my chickens. Furthermore, I might also argue that chicken poop can potentially improve the smell of your yard, and that if you keep a compost bin, the high nitrogen content of chicken manure helps everything break down faster.

Now that we have got the manure conversation out of the way, let's talk about the personal habits of chickens. A good portion of any kind of bird's, including the chicken's, day is spent cleaning and grooming, and preening. Preening is the term that describes the adorable action you see where a bird grabs its feathers, one at a time, patiently but efficiently, at the base and straightens them out. For birds that fly a lot this makes the barbs lock neatly together so they can be more aerodynamically sound. For chickens it probably helps their relatively poor flying skills but mostly it just makes them prettier. Furthermore, chickens and most other birds have an oil secreting gland called the preen gland, or uropygial gland, underneath their tail.

The bird rubs its bill against the gland and then spreads the oil over the surface of the feathers, which waterproofs them and kills bacteria and fungi. Plus it makes their feathers flexible and gives them an attractive sheen. It's also a way for them to remove any bugs, which also constitute a light snack.

When they are done with the preening it is time for their bath, a dust bath. The dust bath is an ancient chicken tradition that invariably delights humans who witness it. That is, after the initial shock wears off. Many new chickeners are confused, even terrified, at the first dust bath they see. A chicken with a good plot of dirt will flail around in the dirt in an extreme display of abandon. They'll assume strange and sometimes impossible seeming positions in their attempt to fling dust through every nook and cranny of their coat in order to scrub out all pests. When they're done, especially on a sunny but cool spring day, they'll sprawl out in a hole they have created as if they have died of multiple fractures. It is common for a brand new birder to approach their chicken with a solemn heart only to be startled at the last moment when the chicken jumps up and squawks in outrage at the interruption.

I hate to sound like a voyeur but I really enjoy seeing the very different styles of bathing in the handful of chickens who live with me. Our littlest chicken, a golden Sebright named Quincy, likes kicking dirt straight up several times her own height in a continuous move that resembles more of a shower than a bath. Quinoa, by contrast, is a meticulous bather also using dirt liberally but in a more thoughtful, soapy style. Kneen digs impossibly deep holes. I think of them as bathtubs. Sometimes when I check on the flock I don't see her at first because she's hidden in a hole larger than herself. For the fun but all too brief year when two roosters lived with me, I got to witness some very dramatic renditions of the seizure, or broken wing, routines described above.

On a particularly beautiful day I will see all three of the current flock bathing side by side in peace. Other times that tranquil scene will be replaced by the slapstick comedy of one chicken trying to enjoy a bath while another attempts to steal the choice bathing sight, or prepared tub, or just takes the opportunity to tweak the other's feathers when she is not looking.

Grooming, preening and bathing are part of the daily ritual of the chicken. Even when a hen is brooding and spending as much time as possible trying to hatch her eggs, it will spend time off the nest to attend to her hygiene. Disease is obviously not unheard of in backyards but a free-range hen is invariably and quite visibly healthier than its factory counterpart. Not only are factory chickens denied the space and dirt to perform their daily ablutions, many are debeaked as mentioned on previous shows so preening is impossible.

The stress of their situations causes health problems that are highly infectious in such close quarters and the host of antibiotics fed to them just weakens their immune systems. The germs that thrive in those environments may be hidden to

the grocery store egg and meat consumer but they do make their way into all of our food supply and even our water and air.

So if you are really concerned about hygiene you'll stop driving your Suburban to the chain grocery store to support the public health hazard that is corporate agriculture and instead go ask your backyard chicken keeping neighbour how you can follow her shining example.

Thanks for listening to this week's show. Don't forget. If you have questions for me send them to sagebrush@radioboise.org. It's legal to keep small flocks of chickens in more places than not. For weblinks on this and more visit the Bucky page at sagebrushvariety.org.

This is Bucky Buckaw. I had a good time.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and you're listening to part two of the Backyard Chickens series here on the program. This series is part of a more diverse periodic one that's titled Farming in the City, which explores the important role of urban agriculture in an age of finite resources, a changing climate, and an industrial food system that is becoming increasingly unsafe, unhealthy and less nutritious than what a locally-managed and produced diet can provide.

You can check out previous episodes of the Backyard Chicken series and the Farming in the City series by visiting the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca

Lending his backyard chicken expertise to this series is Radio Boise's Bucky Buckaw and his Backyard Chicken Broadcast. The series of short segments is produced as part of the Sagebrush Variety Show in Boise, Idaho and also airs on other independent radio stations in the United States.

Now, as part of the topic of cleanliness, we of course arrive at the topic of chicken poop. Now, chicken poop is an incredible resource for any urban farmer or backyard gardener and managing poop is a topic unto itself. According to Bucky, one full-size chicken can produce sixteen-to-seventeen pounds of manure a year and it does *also* produce methane, which if captured, can be used as energy. And so here again is Bucky Buckaw, sharing insights into how to *harvest* poop,

Bucky Buckaw: Bucky Buckaw here, host of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast. I love collecting fresh eggs. I suppose I mention that on just about every show, don't I? And, you'll hear it lots more and not just on the upcoming egg episode. But today I am going to tell you about one thing I enjoy almost as much as harvesting eggs. The truth is, I really get a kick out of harvesting the

day's chicken poop, which is good because a typical full-size chicken will produce about sixteen or seventeen pounds of manure a year. My banties probably make a half to two-thirds that much.

Now first of all, chicken poop is not as stinky as a lot of people who don't have chickens think it would be. I guess stink is in the nostrils of the smeller. But still, I am convinced that my flocks' poop smell so sweet in part because my chickens eat only veggies and grains and bugs. No cannibalism chicken eating for them. No meat of other livestock. Not to mention I don't feed them processed foods, or added preservatives, or chemicals like antibiotics.

And it probably doesn't hurt that my chickens have a pretty large area to roam and poop in. When concentrated in a small area, like a coop, the smell of poop might start to be too much of a good thing. I do remember at one point last winter there was a lot of snow and my spoiled little chickens were spending a lot of time in the coop and it did get a tad overpowering in there until I took fifteen minutes to clean it out. Anyway, if you have any sense at all you, too, will realize that chicken poop has a wonderful fragrance because you will know that mixed into your compost pile it's going to be an essential part of a green garden. You know, before the chemical fertilizer revolution, chicken manure was recognized as having equal value as eggs and meat as a usable product of chickenry. And it's worth noting that male chicks weren't routinely slaughtered to the extent they are now. It was okay to have an excess of roosters around because it meant that much more valuable fertilizer for the crops.

Chicken manure is the richest animal manure and what green thumb types like to refer to as NPK composition. That's nitrogen – N; P, for phosphorous; and K, for some reason, for potassium. Most gardeners recommend chicken manure be composted before adding it to the garden because it is so rich in nitrates it will burn the plants if applied directly. However, I got to tell you, my partner has blended our flock's poo with our compost and added it to the garden without any aging period as well as putting small amounts directly on our garden late in the season. And we haven't seen any burning. Still, just to be on the safe side, I have started working chicken manure into our composting schedule. Especially since I learned that chicken manure helps compost break down faster.

You may have heard that chicken litter has been blamed for introducing phosphorous to the water supply leading to algal blooms. But keep in mind that this is the result of factory farming and the American appetite for vast quantities of meat.

Small scale farming like backyard chickens would never have that kind of impact. And, for when we run out of auto fuel, which a lot of the show hosts here on Sagebrush Variety argue convincingly we will, you all ought to know that chicken fuel can be converted into methane to run combustion engines. A small flock won't get you a lot of trips but in a pinch.

By the way, contrary to what a lot of people have told me they believe, chickens can indeed control when they poop. Maybe not forever but they can hold it in, just like you probably. If I have a chicken on my shoulder and it needs to poop she lets me know and I have at least a full minute to put her down. That's because I have a good relationship with my chickens. Contrast that with fieldfare birds, who will attack as a group and bomb predator birds with their poop from the air. Chickens could probably poop as a defense, too, so you better watch it.

Finally, I thought I would tell you about some of the medicinal uses of chicken poop that I have come across. Sextus Empiricus, a Greek philosopher who lived in Alexandria and in Athens a couple thousand years ago, believed that boils could be burst by applying the dung of a red cock to them. At the time, there was a bit of a controversy in the medical field since others suggested a white cock's dung was more efficient. In the seventeenth century it was believed that chicken manure taken internally killed colic, pain in the womb, jaundice, gallstones and urinary tract infections, and that the ashes of chicken dung sprinkled on the flesh dried running sores and scabs. Use of these folk remedies persisted in America until at least the 1800s. And what a lot of people don't realize is that processed extractions of poultry dung are still used in commonly known deodorants, dentifrices, mouthwashes, hair colourings, hand creams, lotions and shampoos.

If you don't believe me, do a web search on urea and cosmetics. I really can't recommend any of the older medical cures. I just don't have the courage to use chicken poop topically or internally and I very rarely even use the cosmetics named above but that is another story. At any rate, it just goes to show in what high esteem chicken manure was once held and how, even in this strange and squeamish day and age, makes itself useful. So, no more of this wringing your hands about having chickens living in your backyard because you think you or your neighbour is going to find the smell offensive. That is just bullshit, which, by the way, is not so great.

This is Bucky Buckaw signing off. I had a good time.

Jon Steinman: And that was Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast and his segment on chicken poop.

Now on the last Backyard Chickens broadcast here on Deconstructing Dinner we learnt quite a bit on the topic of shelters, what materials to use, how much space is needed. We took a tour of Christoph Martens' chicken coop in his backyard here in Nelson, British Columbia. Bucky Buckaw spoke quite a bit on the topic as well on how to build your own chicken coop. And while building your own can be fun and resourceful, there are other options for those less structure savvy individuals. And there's one company in particular that operates in the United Kingdom and the United States that manufactures backyard chicken coops that are ready to use right out of the package. Bucky Buckaw was visiting a New York

City conference on food issues in 2007, and at the conference was a raffle to win one of these very chicken coops, also known as the eglu. Of course, you can be certain that Bucky Buckaw was eager to enter into the draw. And here he is, sharing the story.

Bucky Buckaw: I recently attended a conference called Good Food Now, a summit on food farms and community health organized by Just Food, a group that promotes small scale, healthy, non-polluting and sustainable local farming, community gardening and backyard food production.

Just Food has an impressive range of programming - educating, training and assisting farmers, gardeners and eaters on how to set up farms and set up gardens and ways to buy food. I am even more impressed that they back up that work by finding allies in politics and pressuring their less enlightened elected representatives to support their efforts.

And it gets better. Just Food's regional focus is New York City, a place where agriculture has been nearly but not quite forgotten. And where the phrase, "you can't fight city hall," was invented. Best of all, they promote backyard chickening. So of course, I absolutely had to go to this summit to meet other people who share my passion for urban food production and to learn how they were making it happen in New York City, along with my partner, who is the producer of the Backyard Chicken Broadcast.

We brought along a few Backyard Chicken flyers describing the Bucky Buckaw agenda, the agenda I repeat one way or another in every show: achieving a world with a chicken, or three, in every backyard everywhere. Why? Because chickens provide pesticide-free bug control; garden enhancement in the form of fertilizing poop and improve composting; and tastier, more nutritious eggs than you could ever buy from the store, minus the cruelty and because chickens are downright loveable.

Imagine my delight when, at the very first session I attended at the summit, on livestock in the city. Owen Taylor, Just Food's chicken coordinator, opened the panel discussion with a brief speech that sounded almost identical to the Bucky Buckaw agenda.

My partner and I each met dozens of people who were very interested in the Bucky Buckaw agenda, who loved chickens, and who were dreaming of keeping chickens in New York City. We even met a few people who were already involved in raising chickens. After the sessions there was a reception featuring a fund raising raffle. Attendees could buy tickets and enter them in a box for a drawing to win one of dozens of prizes donated to Just Food by sponsors.

But what caught my eye was the eglu – E G L U - urban chicken coop. When I first started chickening, I learned about this British made product constructed of

sturdy, energy efficient polymers; built to last in all kinds of weather; big enough for two to four chickens, including the wire construction chicken run for daytime foraging; predator-proof yet light enough to move around a small garden or even from rental to rental. Ordering these over the internet will run North Americans around seven hundred bucks. And while I am normally a booster of less expensive do-it-yourself chicken housing, I have to confess I have often thought about how nice one of these would be.

As soon as I heard that an eglu would be one of the items raffled off I planned to buy three chances to win. Either way, the raffle money was going to a good cause. Now there were hundreds of people at this conference, mostly residents of New York City, including quite a few college age or recently graduated people.

It seemed like everyone was impressed with the eglu but I noticed not a lot of people were putting tickets in the box. In fact, I didn't actually see anyone else. I guess a lot of people want chickens in New York City in a theoretical, abstract way but most of them still do not have yards of their own or permission from their landlords, or they are young and mobile, or have some other reasonable barrier to keep them from making that leap to urban chickening.

After about an hour or so of watching the raffle I started thinking to myself my chances must be pretty good. I thought about buying three more tickets to really stack the odds in my favour and that is when I got to confess I went over to the eglu drawing box and shook it around a bit while peering down the ticket slot. I only saw three tickets - my three tickets - in there. I started counting my chickens before they hatched.

I joined up with my partner and had a little debriefing. After an initial period of giddiness, we started to wonder how we were going to get the thing home to my partner's parents' little apartment where we were staying, and where, in New York City, this particular eglu would be housing chickens. Right about then, we ran into a young couple from the conference who had ambitions of raising chickens in Brooklyn and who also had put in three tickets. They were not quite sure they had the space and the landlord permission necessary to set up the coop but they were definitely interested. My partner and I conferred off to the side and then made an offer to the couple that we would pool our chances and whoever got up and running first would use the eglu.

The suspense was really heavy and the four of us drank quite a few complimentary, locally brewed beers, just to take the edge off, you understand. When the Just Food people drew for the eglu it was my number that came up. I had introduced myself to quite a few people by then and there was a lot of mutual, inebriated excitement over the fact that Bucky Buckaw was the eglu winner.

Meanwhile, our new friends were having second thoughts about transporting the coop on the subway. We had a someone easier trip, and so we agreed to take it home with us, and they would come pick it up in their automobile the next day when they were sober enough to drive.

The eglu may be mobile but it is about the size of a medium doghouse and weighs about fifty pounds. The trip on the subway was not easy. But I have to say I actually enjoyed it because other subway riders wanted to know what they were seeing and I had a lot of enjoyable conversations about the possibilities of urban chickening in New York City. Everyone wanted to know where I was going to have chickens and if they could come see them and wanted to ask me about urban chickening and backyard farming in general.

The other big question I heard all day was if it is really legal to keep chickens in New York City. The answer is, it is, as long as they are hens, not roosters. In fact, it is legal to keep small flocks of chickens in more places than not, even other large cities like San Francisco, Houston and Portland. Look at your city code, or county code online, or call the clerk or your animal shelter to find out. For weblinks on this and more visit the Bucky page at sagebrushvariety.org.

The overarching message of the day was that many, many people already have the sense to love chickens, to love the idea of raising them, or at least living near someone who does raise them, and they understand the appeal of having a miniature, integrated farm where everyone lives.

The next day our friends called and said they weren't set up for chickens just yet after all but they are moving next spring and they may have another chance then. Either way, we made plans to get together soon. So another great thing about chickens is that they bring human beings together.

At the moment the Bucky Buckaw raffle winning eglu is temporarily being stored in the bedroom where we are staying. I am not sure who is going to raise chickens in the eglu yet but I am determined it will be someone in New York City and their experiences will be featured on the Backyard Chicken Broadcast. Perhaps that will even be yours truly.

So stay tuned.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. So we do have one more segment from Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast to share with you today, and you can be sure that many more Bucky Buckaw segments will appear here on the program as part of our Farming in the City series every two to three months.

And this last segment does nicely introduce the new series that we'll be launching here on the program next week titled, Livestock Lost – a series that will

be exploring in greater depth the industrialization of animals and animal products; what dangers have already come from this food experiment; what future dangers we could expect; and what alternatives exist.

Now the large-scale rearing of animals is not an idea that sits well with someone like Bucky Buckaw, who is clearly an enthusiast of people maintaining backyard flocks from which to gather their eggs and or meat. This was a topic that came up for Bucky in recent times and he hosted a segment to address the economics of *commercial* backyard chickening. And here again is Bucky Buckaw.

Bucky Buckaw theme music

Bucky Buckaw: This is Bucky Buckaw with the Backyard Chicken Broadcast. Recently I ran into someone who wanted to come over and visit my little flock of chickens. I am always glad when someone takes an interest in backyard chickens. I've already admitted many times that the nefarious Bucky Buckaw agenda is to get as many people as possible, especially suburbanites and city dwellers, interested in chickens instead of wasting outdoor space on lawns.

But one of the reasons this woman wanted to see my little micro-farm was because a friend of hers was thinking of getting her young daughter started raising a small flock of chickens as a way to make a little extra money. And that made me kind of skeptical.

The thing is, it is pretty difficult, all but impossible in fact, to make a profit from a couple of dozen birds. One backyard chickener from Vermont did a detailed but fun to read analysis of the economy of keeping a small flock and came up with a final profit of two dollars and fifty cents per month. Even with a low maintenance flock, spending fifteen minutes or less per day on the flock, like this person, it's simply not worth the time if a money-making opportunity is what you are looking for. For a link to that website see the Bucky page at sagebrushvariety.org.

Now don't be confused. I absolutely believe everyone, with a modest amount of outdoor space at their disposal, will improve their own lives and help the health of the planet by inviting chickens into their backyards and lives.

As I always say, backyard chickens will till and fertilize your soil for gardening; get rid of bugs without the use of pesticides; provide you with eggs that are proven to be more nutritious and better tasting than the grocery store variety; and also provide great entertainment and companionship. Caring for chickens on a small scale is a relatively easy and hassle free way for people to reclaim a degree of self-sufficiency in their lives. But doing it for profit is almost sure to end in frustration.

How do the factory farms manage to turn a profit where you can't? As I have told you before, they cram their chickens together in densities that boggle the mind.

They feed them the cheapest stuff that can sustain them, including a lot of dead animals from the very same chicken factory or other sources; kill hens as soon as they are past peak production; and use a variety of artificial means, from round the clock lighting to hormone injections, to maximize fertility. There is no way someone with a dozen, or even a few dozen, chickens and any sense of decency toward their animals is going to compete with the factory farm price of one dollar or so for a dozen eggs, even if your eggs are tastier and better for the consumer.

There was a time when a farming family could raise a small supplemental income by selling eggs to people in town who didn't raise their own chickens. But that was more or less a century ago, before the industrialization of food production and distribution. In one of my favourite references, *The Chicken Book* by Paige Smith and Charles Daniels, the industrialization of chickens and eggs are described in fascinating if horrifying detail. When I hear of people planning to make egg money with their backyard farms I can't help but think of the great chicken farming rush of Pentaluma, California in the early twentieth century.

Hopeful chicken farmers, many of them attempting to escape the cities and nine-to-five office job routines - that probably sounds familiar - poured into Pentaluma to start their own ranches using a sort of Pentaluma method, which featured all the early developments and the industrialization of farming, such as mechanization and a bit of crowding, which was believed to be an all but guaranteed formula for success. And for a while it was a guarantee for success. But mostly because, just like the dot com boom, this boom fueled itself for awhile through supporting businesses and pyramid schemes.

But in a little over a decade the small operations had closed. In the end, the only real money-makers were the mechanized hatcheries that turned out thousands of baby chicks for sale to new farmers. That moment in history marked the beginning of the end to the concept of small income generating farms that had any chance of competing with factory farms.

Today we spend only ten percent of our income on food. In 1950 we spent twenty-two percent of our income on food. And in 1935 a moderate income farm family spent forty-seven percent of their total living on food.

The real cost of that change, however, is that much has been lost is in terms of flavour and local variety of food. Contemporary, non-organically grown foods are less nutritious than the vegetables, fruits and meats of pre-Industrial agriculture. And we now are routinely exposed to pesticide residues, antibiotics, hormones and other chemicals as a by-product of nearly every meal. And worst of all, your options for acquiring food grown the pre-Industrial way dwindle as factory farms crowd out the last of the small farms.

The good news is that you can still reclaim your right to healthy food and your connection to the land even in a suburban or urban yard by becoming part of the do-it-yourself permaculture movement. And even better news is that you can transition in steps. You don't have to sell your house or quit your nine-to-five job and learn to farm overnight. You can start in your own backyard with a small organic garden and a couple of hens. You can free yourself from worrying about the profitability of your efforts and focus instead on the self-sufficiency you gain, which in my experience may save you so much money that it feels like earning.

It's legal to keep small flocks of chickens in more places than not, even in larger cities like New York City, San Francisco, Houston and Portland - the unofficial capital of North American urban chickening.

Look at your city's code online. Call the city clerk or your animal shelter to find out.

This is Bucky Buckaw signing off. I had a good time.

Bucky Buckaw ending theme

Jon Steinman: And that was the last of today's segments featuring Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast. The segments are produced at Radio Boise in Boise, Idaho and you can expect more from Bucky Buckaw on future segments of this Farming in the City series here on Deconstructing Dinner.

As has been mentioned on a number of occasions here on the show, urban agriculture – that is, producing food right within a city - is one of the most effective ways to not only produce food, but as a tool to help us reconnect *with* our food and where it comes from.

While cultures all throughout the globe have long maintained at-home livestock, whether it be chickens, goats, cows or pigs, here in North America the idea of having farm animals in a city is still very much a novelty. Now on the other hand, while many would perceive backyard chickens for example as a novelty, it really is a very concrete alternative to the risks inherent to these experimental methods of producing animal products that now dominate the food supply of North Americans. When stepping back for a moment we can observe that placing tens if not hundreds of thousands of animals in a barn is a very new model that has only existed for a short while.

And so where did it all begin? Well, in this next clip we listen to segments of audio from a film produced in 1952 titled, Protecting Poultry Profits. The film was produced by pharmaceutical giant Merck and Company. The film helps capture the beginning of the industrialization of chicken and egg production and also captures how comfortable it was to feed chickens drugs in order to solve the already-recognized health issues inherent to industrial production of poultry.

The keywords to look for in this clip are “scientific feeding for marketability and profit”. Quite the alternative to the principles behind raising chickens at home and in backyards.

audio segment from Merck

Poultry business is big business, with an annual income of over three billion dollars from the sale of poultry and poultry products and represents more than fourteen percent of the total national farm income derived from animal products. Not so long ago, chickens lived on a few handfuls of grain, table scraps and whatever else they can scratch from the ground. Today, commercial mixed feeds are scientifically compounded, completely mixed, uniform, palatable and nutritive, promoting maximum performance and profit through improved growth and production. And saving time and labour required in mixing feeds on the farm.

And breeders supply the excellent stock, which has brought our chickens to their present high state of development. We've learned that we can't take out of a bird what has not been bred and fed into it.

But between the initial start, with prime stock and growth through scientific feeding, to the final delivery of a marketable bird at a good profit stands the most important single element in the successful poultry business: management. Good management means wise management. Backed by a vast amount of information available to the poultryman of today....

Even with most careful management it is almost impossible to completely rid the brooder house of all oocysts when cleaning and disinfecting because all oocysts responsible for coccidiosis are exceptionally resistant to most of the common disinfectants. Just a few surviving parasites may infect an entire flock.

Laboratory and on practical poultry farms were required to develop sulphaquinoxaline, commonly known SQ, to the point where it could be produced economically so that poultrymen could use simple, practical low cost methods for the prevention and control of outbreaks of coccidiosis.

And here is the first dead bird, and another, and another. While the birds on sulphaquinoxaline are active with appetites as keen as ever, there are one or two birds that appear listless...

Feed manufacturers, for example, have the equipment and the know-how developed through years of experience in blending vitamins such as riboflavin in large amounts of feed. They are able to mix minute amounts of a drug uniformly with a ton of feed through a series of progressively larger blends and they can check the thoroughness of the final results with tests required by government regulations.

Poultry profits originate with good stock, good feed, wise management. Management whose motto is start clean, keep clean. And these profits can be protected with sulphaquinoxaline, the product recommended for prevention as well as control of coccidiosis in both chickens and turkeys.

Coccidiosis deaths have been limited to less than two percent as compared with a previous loss of ten to twenty percent. Broilers weigh more on less feed than untreated birds. The flocks maintain greater uniformity and better market quality.

The drug has no adverse effect on egg production, fertility or hatchability. There has been no severe outbreak of cecal or intestinal coccidiosis in the raising of hundreds of millions of birds by some of the largest growers in the country. It is effective the year round under a wide variety of climatic conditions and it protects the birds while they build immunity.

The development of sulphaquinoxaline is an important milestone in the Merck research and production program devoted not only to more effective disease prevention but also to continuing improvement of the nutrition of poultry.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and that was a short collection of segments from the 1952 film, Protecting Poultry Profits produced by pharmaceutical giant Merck and Company. A link to the full *video* of these clips will be linked to from the deconstructing dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca.

I'd like to leave you with one more clip that will hopefully close out this show with a smile. The audio you're about to hear is from a phone call that was recorded by a curious urbanite in Chicago, Illinois, who was inquiring through the City government into whether or not backyard chickens are allowed in the city. During his first few attempts to find out this information, the caller discovered that, for the most part, city officials were unable to find such information. This is a recording of his final correspondence to the City's legal advisor.

The segment is suggestive of what many North Americans may likely encounter when making such phone calls to municipal governments. I can confirm that when I first asked this question to the City staff here in Nelson British Columbia, I too, received a rather unsure response. In the end though, the City of Nelson, does *not* permit backyard chickens.

audio segment from citizen's phone call to City of Chicago

Caller: Yeah, is this 311?

Clerk: Yes it is. How can I help you?

Caller: I'm wondering... Do you have any information about raising chickens? Like, can I raise my own chickens?

Clerk: Um, chickens are... I do not believe that chickens are allowed in the City of Chicago.

Caller: Okay.

Clerk: They are considered non-pet animals.

Caller: Okay. What is the law exactly about chickens?

Clerk: I wouldn't be able to recite the law. I can give you the number to the City Clerk's office that you can call on Monday for the ordinance concerning chickens.

Caller: Okay, they actually have an ordinance about chickens?

Clerk: I believe they have an ordinance concerning non-pet animals and I believe chickens are considered non-pet animals.

Caller: Okay. Yeah, I'll take that number.

Caller: Yeah, I got transferred to you because... I have actually been transferred all over the place trying to find some straight information about keeping chickens. Everyone seems to tell me there is a City ordinance against it but ...

Clerk: There is no city ordinance against it.

Caller: There is no ordinance against it?

Clerk: No.

Caller: Okay.

Clerk: (laughs) I know that finds it hard to believe but there's no ordinance against it.

Caller: Okay, everyone seems to think there is but...

Clerk: No there isn't.

Caller: Okay. The City Clerk actually, yeah, they faxed me that, too. They faxed me a fax and said they couldn't find anything. But they still seemed to think they were going to keep looking for it.

Clerk: No, but there isn't. (laughs)

Caller: Okay. Why are you laughing? Do you get this question a lot?

Clerk: Well, no. Because, ah, yeah, I have had this question twice in the past week.

Caller: Oh really? Okay. All right, great. That's good to know.

Clerk: All right.

ending theme

JS: That was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant John Ryan.

The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson-area resident Adham Shaikh.

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