

**Show Transcript**  
**Deconstructing Dinner**  
**Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY**  
**Nelson, BC, Canada**

**March 27, 2008**

**Title: Farming in the City III: Backyard Chickens**

**Producer/Host - Jon Steinman**  
**Transcribed by James Braun**

**Theme Music**

*Jon Steinman:* And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner – a weekly syndicated radio show and podcast heard on radio stations around the world. Episodes are produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson British Columbia, and I'm Jon Steinman, your host for the next hour.

On today's show we launch yet another ongoing series that will continue throughout 2008 and perhaps beyond, but this one will run as a mini-series so-to-speak of another of our ongoing series of shows titled Farming in the City. On past Farming in the City episodes, we've covered, among other topics, a unique model of operating a farming business in urban backyards, we've learned the ins and outs of at-home mushroom growing, but today we launch a series on Backyard Chickens - yet another unique model of local food production.

And this series will be helped along by a rather unique character – Bucky Buckaw – the passionate host of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast. Produced at a newly formed radio station in Boise, Idaho, Bucky's short segments air on a number of independent radio stations in the United States, and *now*, here on Deconstructing Dinner, we have Bucky Buckaw as our backyard chicken expert.

Each backyard chicken episode on Deconstructing Dinner will revolve around Bucky's weekly segments, but will also be accompanied by other interesting guests who can share their experiences and concerns on this rather controversial but exciting topic.

The interesting guest on today's show is Christoph Martens – an urban backyard chicken enthusiast who is one of only a few brave residents of Nelson, British Columbia, who is defying the city's dated bylaw, which prohibits *any* animals in the city other than dogs and cats. And I say dated, because what we'll find as this series progresses, is that a significant number of North American cities, *do* indeed allow backyard chickens.

Rounding off today's show, we'll also hear a brief clip of Corky Evans – the elected representative of the Nelson-Creston riding of British Columbia. Corky is also the Agriculture Critic for the New Democratic Party – the NDP.

## **Listener Support Announcement**

*JS:* On a recent broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner I concluded the show with a quote by Poet Wendell Berry, and the quote was this, “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.”

I was thinking about that quote quite a bit while preparing today’s episode, as today’s topic does, I believe, help define who we are. One of the great outcomes of choosing food as such a focused subject here on Deconstructing Dinner, is that by taking apart our food and exploring the relationship we as North Americans have with food, the show does, in a very round-about way, define our own North American culture –...cultures are in the end, often very defined by what and how food is consumed.

So what is it about *backyard chickens* that helps define *what* we are? Well comparatively, North American culture is one of the only cultures where raising livestock within cities is *not* the norm. Instead, we’ve created a culture that places the role of food production into the rural areas of the country and in doing so, have isolated ourselves from where our food comes from, how it’s grown and who’s growing it. So how does this help define *what* we are? Well one person we’ll hear from on today’s show is the subversive backyard chickener - Christoph Martens, and as he says, our culture of disassociating ourselves from our food, is a form of pseudo royalty – that what we essentially have been striving for in our relatively short North American cultural experiment, has been a vision of living like kings and queens, whereby the origins of our sustenance, our energy, our material pleasures are not seen, nor heard from, nor even understood.

But regardless of whether we all agree that our culture has long been seeking to live royally, there is little debate that this cultural experiment of ours, of disconnecting ourselves from our food, has allowed for the most appalling practices where the majority of our meat and animal products are produced.

Chickens present one of the most disturbing examples. One of the first shows we ever aired here on Deconstructing Dinner was on the topic of egg production. We learned how 98% of Canada’s eggs come from chickens who spend their lives in tiny cages and who never see the light of day. Now we have yet to tackle the methods in which meat birds are raised, but if any human being were to actually see the images and videos of factory chicken and egg farms, such images would likely alter ones diet completely. Some of these images and videos will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner web site, and that web site is [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).

### **soundbite**

*JS:* Now one alternative to the factory style of raising chickens that has gripped the North American food system, is raising animals right in our own backyards. This is especially an interesting topic to be covering here on the program, because here in Nelson BC, exists an Animal regulation and control by-law that reads, “no animal or poultry except

for a dog or cat, shall be kept or harboured within the Municipality”. On the other hand, there are cities (large and small) throughout North America that *do* allow chickens to be raised within city limits. And as this backyard chicken series evolves, we’ll hear from other cities in Canada and the United States as to how such allowances are managed, we’ll learn the steps involved in setting up your backyard chickens, and most importantly, we’ll learn of the social, environmental and economic benefits to be found in the world of backyard chickens.

Now fortunately there is one person who has recognized how important backyard chickens are to the future food security of North American cities – and that is Bucky Buckaw – the host of Bucky Buckaw’s Backyard Chicken Broadcast. Bucky’s segments are produced weekly for Radio Boise – a new startup radio station in Boise Idaho that has also been airing Deconstructing Dinner for quite some time. And so on today’s broadcast, we’ll listen in on four episodes of Bucky Buckaw and accompanying Bucky will be segments from my recent visit with one brave resident of Nelson who is aiding and abetting four chickens and two ducks on his property within city limits.

But first - Bucky Buckaw’s Backyard Chicken Broadcast. In this first episode Bucky introduces the idea for his weekly radio series and goes through the many benefits to be found by raising chickens. For one, raising chickens in our backyards can ensure that our feathered friends are treated with respect and live outdoors – a different picture than is found in North America’s egg and chicken factories.

### **Bucky Buckaw theme music**

*Bucky Buckaw:* Bucky Buckaw, here, and I’m as happy as a hen to be hosting the very first segment of Bucky Buckaw’s Backyard Chicken Broadcast.

People often ask me, Bucky Buckaw, just what is your agenda? Well, my agenda is no secret. I envision a day when a stroll through any neighbourhood will take you past yard after yard after yard after yard blessed by the bounty of chickendom. The question should never be “do you have a chicken?” but “what kind of chicken do you have?” Bantam or full size? Silkie or Turken? Sebright or Americauna? Polish or Chittagong? And so on. And if you don’t know what I’m talking about with these crazy breed names keep on tuning in because you’ll be sure to find out.

Now the first thing most city dwellers are gonna ask is “Chickens? Why have ‘em?” Here’s just some of the reasons why

1) Chickens will eat every earwig in sight (not to mention doodlebugs and other little pests) which means you can have a happier and healthier garden without using any pesticides or spending hours on your hands and knees debugging by hand. The chickens do all the work and they like it. Even if you don’t have a garden or flower bed who the heck wants those earwigs around anyway? They’re just creepy.

2) Chickens are just so dang cute.

- 3) Chickens will make your kitchen scraps compost faster by eating most of it and scratching around in what's left.
- 4) Chickens are just so lovable.
- 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 higher nutrient content than ANY store bought eggs. And the eggs taste better, are easier to make sunny side up style without breaking yolk or risking salmonella poisoning.
- 8) Chickens are just so friendly.

Everyone with just a little yard can have a chicken or three in their lives. In the city of Boise, unless you live in one of those crazy subdivisions with the covenant [Covenant! Sounds like back in the days when I was a choir boy] can legally have up to 3 hens (but no roosters). Truth is there is probably a backyard chickener in your neighbourhood right now and you might not even realize it.

Boise isn't the only city that allows chickens. In fact, it's legal to keep small flocks of chickens in more places than not; even larger cities like New York, San Francisco, Houston and Portland, the unofficial capitol of North American urban chickening, allow hens. Roosters are frequently banned because of the potential noise problem. Look at your city's code online, call the city clerk, or your local animal shelter to find out. Make sure you see it in writing, though, because there are many stories of government employees assuming chickens are illegal and passing that misinformation on. A website I often refer to, The City Chicken has a list of a few dozen cities and their chicken ordinances. For the link to that and other useful sites, visit the Bucky page at [sagebrushvariety.org](http://sagebrushvariety.org).

If chickens are banned in your city, perhaps you can take inspiration from places like Madison, Wisconsin, that have reversed restrictions on chickening, and consider that you might be able to accomplish the same where you live. In cities where chickens are banned, there's invariably a "chicken underground", folks who keep chickens anyway and hope their neighbours won't find out, object, and turn them in. Those people might not want to go public, for risk of having their flocks confiscated. But they could be a great resource to you, in trying to change those laws.

Now, just 'cause I'm proselytizing on raising chickens doesn't mean I think you can treat your chickens any old way. The truth is if you're not treating your chickens right me or one of us old school backyard birders is gonna hunt you down and give you some tough love.

But don't worry about that too much because part of my aim here is to tell you just how to raise a chicken companion or companions properly. We'll discuss diet and care, ways to build a predator proof coop without spending a lot of money and other things you'll need to know to raise chickens properly.

But it's not gonna be just about the nuts and bolts stuff.

We'll tell you fun and interesting facts about chickens and the history of chickenry throughout the world, especially urban chickenry. We'll have special guests - backyard chicken celebrities like Neem, a Bantam Cochin, who has starred in two local films, and other backyard chickens and their caretakers.

I'm especially looking forward to answering listener submitted questions. If you have comments or suggestions for other shows, please email me at [sagebrush@radioboise.org](mailto:sagebrush@radioboise.org). If you record your question in your own voice and send it to me as an mp3 file, I might just play it on my next show.

So that's what we have in store. Keep tuning in to the Backyard Chicken Broadcast. This is Bucky Buckaw. I had a good time.

### **Bucky Buckaw ending theme**

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner and that was episode 1 of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast. In this next episode, Bucky responds to one misperception that chickens can't safely be sheltered within cities. Bucky says that's a myth.

### **Bucky Buckaw theme music**

*Bucky Buckaw:* This is Bucky Buckaw, welcome to the Backyard Chicken Broadcast, where I promote my agenda whereby small flocks of chickens dot the landscape from the neglected and abused rural areas to the artifice of the suburbs and even, maybe even especially, in the teeming cities.

Having chickens is the smart thing to do because they provide pesticide-free bug control, humane and extra nutritious egg production, fertilizer for vegetable gardens, and cuz they're lovable and help us all regain our humanity while they help us reclaim food responsibility and independence from the corporatization of our lives and sustenance.

It's the smart thing to do, raising chickens, but it's not difficult. Take the issue of shelter. I meet plenty of people who are dissuaded from chickening, or haven't even given the idea a chance because they think they can't safely and securely shelter chickens on their little piece of property. I'm here to tell you it's always possible.

I can't give you the one way to do it. You gotta work with your own environment and the personalities and abilities of your particular chickens. But if I tell you how I do it in

my backyard in Boise - you ought to get a lot of the basic advice you need to use. That's how we chickeners do it - we love to talk about chickens and that's how we learn from one another.

Now, I'm a good example of how simple and inexpensive solutions can work in the right situations (everything I started with was scraps or giveaways). The place we rent came with short fence all around my 1600 square feet of backyard - standard metal fence 4 feet tall (3 inch holes). The truth is I know the chickens can get over that if they really, really want to - it's not an impenetrable barrier, it's more like a disincentive so they're not really tempted so long as I make sure they have plenty of food.

One winter they figured out they could jump over the gate between the backyard and our porch area and then wander out into the neighbours yards for fresh grass. I patched a hole in the bottom of the fence but my main response was to extend their area from the backyard right up to my front door (where I put up another 20 feet of 4 foot high fabric fence, sturdier than chicken wire but still pretty cheap, lightweight and easy to put up or take down). This gave them another 400 square feet to play and graze in and I also made sure I raised their ration of fresh greens and grains. They seemed pretty content to stay in their new confines, until spring hit.

At night we do have a coop we lock them into - which consists of chicken wire stretched out over a frame of four corner posts and top and bottom supports. It's pretty much 4 feet square. It's flush up against the back corner of my yard so I only need to make two sides and a top - but I made extra sure that the connections between the chicken wire and the fence that was already there were secure. Depending on the season and the rain/snow, I stretch tarp over the top and some or all of the sides for protection (or airflow as the case may be).

For extra protection, and to encourage the chickens to lay eggs in a single place, I have a large plastic dog house I got for 3 bucks at a yard sale and two cat carriers that the front doors broke off of. I made a lucky guess they'd use those as nesting boxes if I gave 'em the idea by putting a phony marble egg from the dollar store in there.

Now, when it gets below a certain temperature (20 farenheit or so) I take the chickens in at night. I know that sounds like coddling to some people but they like to sleep pretty close to each other and they don't move around much so I just take 'em in a small cage indoors and let 'em out as soon as morning hits. It's less trouble and expense for me than building and heating a fancy coop.

Not too long ago, I got wind of a feller who was giving up chickening and had a nice hand-made coop. I inherited that and it came in handy when we relocated, and also meant that the chickens could stay outdoors at lower temperatures. A sturdy coop is a good thing to have, but the truth is you don't necessarily have to invest a lot of money, or time, or expertise, into an architecturally notable coop.

Now I have a couple of advantages. One is either me or my partner is usually home most of the time during chicken ranging hours. So they can be free range most of the day; we can keep an eye on 'em. In fact, most of the time they depend on me to put 'em to bed at night. They roost on a gate by my porch door and I usually scoop all three up and walk 'em to their coop while I sing or tell 'em a bedtime story.

Another sheltering advantage we got is dogs living in the yards on three sides of us. The dogs can't get over the fence to mess with the chickens but they do help encourage the chickens to stay in our yard in addition to discouraging predators.

One night the border collies woke me up barking like mad at around 2 am. For a few minutes I just lay there trying to send them a psychic message to please shut up so I could get back to sleep. But eventually I went out to investigate and there was a raccoon circling the neighbourhood. He was cute in his own way but I didn't want him anywhere near my little flock so I greeted him, introduced myself and asked him nicely to scavenge elsewhere. He waddled off without any resentment. Seemed like a nice guy.

Anyhow, if you don't have free guard dogs living next door and there's any chance raccoons or feral cats or something are going to have access to your property you're going to need a much more secure coop than I had, built with good quality wood frame and sturdy chicken wire with pretty small holes because raccoons and other chicken eating critters will scare the chickens to one side, reach in and pull 'em through the holes. It's gruesome. I don't even like talking about it, but you should know about it.

You're also going to have to create a barrier to prevent digging predators. You can either sink the wire at least a foot straight down below the surface ('cause they don't want to dig that deep) or you can lay fence flat a few feet out from the coop walls and bury that just an inch or two so long as it is secured to the coop walls and too heavy to move.

Now, if you don't want to wing it there are plenty of places to get plans or buy a pre-made coop. Poke around the internet, I have a few good sites listed on the Bucky Buckaw page at [sagebrushvariety.org](http://sagebrushvariety.org)

Finally, while it's legal to keep small flocks of chickens in more places than not--even large cities like New York City, San Francisco, Houston, and Portland--many municipalities, or zoned neighbourhoods, have restrictions on building structures that could impact your coop plans. Look at your city's code online, call the city clerk, or county clerk, or your animal shelter to find out.

The thing is that sharing your space with chickens is not only great because chickens are so wonderful but also because figuring out how to keep them and yourself happy is a continual source of exercise for that major muscle: the problem-solving brain.

Don't forget if you have questions for me to send them to [sagebrush@radioboise.org](mailto:sagebrush@radioboise.org). What would be really extraordinary is if you could you record yourself reading the

question in an mp3 file. Or, if you have a delightful chicken story of your own send that in.

This is Bucky Buckaw - I had a good time.

### **Bucky Buckaw ending theme**

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner and that was episode 2 of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast. Today's show makes up just one episode of our Farming in the City series that's exploring the important world of urban agriculture. Later on today's broadcast we'll visit with a Nelson British Columbia resident who is moving beyond a City of Nelson bylaw that prohibits the raising of poultry within city limits. But before we hear from Christoph Martens – here's another segment of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast. On this one, Bucky suggests how backyard chickeners can best take care of their chickens in the winter and in colder climates.

### **Bucky Buckaw theme music**

*Bucky Buckaw:* Bucky Buckaw here for the Backyard Chicken Broadcast.

As everyone keeps reminding one another this time of year, it's cold out there, and I have to admit that nowadays I spend a lot less time in my backyard communing with my chickens and opt instead for admiring them through my bedroom window and making sure they're doing ok.

They're not as much fun to watch these days, though, since they're not constantly foraging and bickering and like they do in the warm months and instead spend a lot of time huddled together under the heating unit or picking through the compost bin, which generates its own heat naturally and acts as an edible sprout greenhouse. Unlike the summer, they return to their nests at sunset of their own accord instead of roosting in the open until I put them to bed in their coop. Still, they can't wait to get out of the coop in the morning to stretch their legs in the fresh (if cold) air and are clearly pleased that I've finally opened up most of the garden area to them. There they like to scratch through the snow for carrot greens and stunted lettuce and dandelions. They also pace around the perimeter of the remaining fenced-in area, my kale patch, planning their break-in.

It takes a lot for chickens to freeze to death but there are dangers to chicken health in very cold weather. A common problem is frostbite, particularly on the comb or wattles. It's ugly and painful and you don't want a frostbitten chicken on your conscience. Breeds with the characteristic long single comb and big wattles you see on chicken wallpaper, tea cozies, and other \*\*\*\*\* [ 22:48] are the most susceptible breeds. Roosters are more vulnerable than hens not only because their comb and wattles tend to be bigger but also because they don't have the self-protectiveness of hens, who sleep with their heads buried under their feathers. Ultimately, any chicken, male or female and even the ones with small or bunched up combs can get frostbite. Also, too much exposure to very cold weather will cause a general strain on health and shortening of life

span and a longer recovery time to their full egg-laying selves when the weather finally does warm.

During the day, when chickens like to be out even during weather most of us can't stand, it's important to make sure your flock has access to warm water. Keeping them hydrated helps them fight the cold and besides it's just plain rude to leave your chickens out with all their usual drinking sources frozen solid. I go out as often as the temperature warrants and add warm water to their dishes. There are also electric water warmers available at your local feed store or over the internet if you will be away from home for long stretches or are just too lazy to refill the bowls yourself.

Fresh food is also important. In the morning and especially right before chicken bedtime, you should make sure your birds can fill their crop. During the warm months, it's important not to let chickens over-indulge in corn, as it fills them up without providing a balanced diet, but during the winter it's a good idea to raise their corn ration as it provides the kind of energy they need to generate their own heat.

And of course, they need to have a warm place to sleep at night. The most common way to ensure this is by installing a heat lamp or 100-watt light bulb in the coop. Backyard chickeners debate which is better as a heat lamp is highly directional, which means you're not heating the whole coop, only the area right in front of the lamp. The advantage of this is that the chickens (who are the best judge of the best temperature for their own optimal comfort and health) can adjust how close they want to be to the heat source. Either way, this means you have to run an extension cord or build wiring out to your coop -- a fire risk if care is not taken to make sure the heat doesn't rise too much and that the contents of the coop are not flammable.

Now, the traditionalists say that the properly built coop shouldn't require an artificial heat source unless you are talking about temperatures well below 0 Fahrenheit. The trick is to have the coop properly insulated and the right size for your flock so that the chickens can heat it with their own body warmth. Another idea is to leave your chickens' poop in there but throw new wood chips or hay over it. As you do this repeatedly, bottom layers will compost, generating heat. This is called the deep bedding method.

Remember, with a well-insulated coop it's important to have a roof vent in the coop for ventilation. For all you environmentally evolved builders out there, I'll link to a site with plans for a solar-powered coop at [sagebrushvariety.org](http://sagebrushvariety.org).

I'll tell you how my chickens \*\*\*\*\*[25:42] winter. When it gets below a certain temperature I take the chickens in at night. I know that sounds like coddling to some people but it's easier for me than building the perfect coop, much less wiring it for heat.

Once it's bed time I drop a cloth over the cage so they won't be distracted by indoor activities (**soundbite**) and can go to sleep. They settle on their nests and don't move

around much, and soon I forget they're even there. I used to put them all in one cage, but then I discovered if I brought them in too early or I slept in past when they wanted to go out there'd be bickering. So now they each have their own small cage. I wouldn't even bother with a cage except I don't want them interacting too much with our indoor pets - cats and ferrets.

There's also a benefit to you. If you keep chickens outside when your windows are shut you may not hear their clucking, or in the case of roosters, crowing, in the morning. Keeping them inside during the cold months will improve their services as alarm clocks--a much more pleasant way to wake up than the standard alarm, in my view.

If you'd have comments or questions or suggestions for other shows, please email me at [sagebrush@radioboise.org](mailto: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.

The Backyard Chicken Broadcast started in Boise. Always remember, it's legal to keep small flocks of chickens in more places than not, even larger cities like New York, San Francisco, Houston and Portland, which is the unofficial capitol of North American urban chickening. Look at your city's code online, call the city clerk or your animal shelter to find out.

This has been Bucky Buckaw, I had a good time.

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner – a weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and we've been listening to segments of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast produced at Radio Boise in Boise Idaho.

Now as Bucky suggests, before setting up a backyard chickening operation, it's important to first check with the city to ensure that chickens are allowed to be kept within city limits. It's probably safe to say that in many cities, dealing with backyard chickens is not an ongoing issue. But, I think it's also safe to say that this issue will become much more prevalent in years to come. Clearly there is a growing interest across North America to live more socially and environmentally responsible lives, and with backyard chickens being ideal to provide food, fertilizer, and free gardening labour only steps away, setting up such an operation seems pretty attractive, especially in light of current and expected rises in the price of food.

Here in Nelson BC, our animal regulation and control by-law no. 2333, has since 1989 stated that "No animal or poultry, except for a dog or cat, shall be kept or harboured within the Municipality". The bylaw also states that, "No animal or poultry shall be tied, secured or fastened to any public building, structure, traffic control post, parking meter post, sign, tree or power pole on a public place within the Municipality". Now such animal control bylaws here in Nelson are an ongoing debate, but not so much in the case of tying your chicken to a parking meter.... Instead, the City of Nelson also has a bylaw

that prohibits walking your dog within the downtown core of the city. Now for those of you who have maybe long been listening to Deconstructing Dinner and learning of the many innovative and progressive projects that people here are undertaking, I can imagine it comes as quite the shock to learn how aristocratic so-to-speak our municipal government is here in Nelson. There are ongoing stories here of by-law enforcement officers calling in the Nelson City Police to confront anyone who refuses to accept a ticket for walking their dog downtown. To top it off, the city even seemingly violated its own graffiti bylaws and stencilled on every street corner in the downtown an image warning that no dogs are allowed. One Nelson resident even chose to make light of the situation, and in the wee hours of the morning, went around the downtown and stencilled similar images beside the no dog stencils, but these ones said, no bears, no moose, and no pigs. The city chose to deal with the new stencils by simply spray painting them black. So needless to say, Nelson's downtown sidewalks were littered with spray painted graffiti, most of which, was done by the city.

### **soundbite**

*JS:* Now one person who has for the past few years, began to work towards reducing his ecological footprint, reduce his dependency on oil, and lower his grocery bill, is Christoph Martens. In his quest to live a more responsible life, Christoph chose to not be restricted by Nelson's no chicken by-law, and happily harbours two ducks, four chickens, and some rabbits. Christoph has never tied his chickens to a parking meter.

I paid a visit to Christoph's property, right in the city of Nelson. Arriving at his home was quite different than what I would imagine a visit to a *factory* egg or chicken farm would look like, where I would have donned a biohazard suit before walking into an enclosed barn with no windows. ...Instead, I opened Christophs gate and was greeted by a dog and two curious ducks.

*JS:* So should I be blindfolded as we walk over to your chickens?

*Cristoph Martens:* No, I think it would probably be better if you don't have blindfolds on, you might trip.

*JS:* Are you ever nervous when you're walking around in your backyard and maybe worry that someone's going to see you, maybe there's a by-law enforcement officer up in the tree?

*Cristoph Martens:* You know, I'm actually pretty lucky, I have a very secluded spot and I've talked to my neighbours and they're really cool about it. And actually my one neighbour suggested--I started with ducks—she suggested I get chickens, so I did. So I'm lucky that way, and I think it's really important at this point especially to make sure that people are really okay with it. There's no point in pissing people off.

So you can see the chickens and the ducks walking around. At this time of the year they've got free range, and the point of the chickens at this point is to clear the garden of slugs. I've got a huge slug problem. Usually when I'm home I let them out; when I go away I put them back in. I don't want them to range the neighbourhood for obvious reasons.

*JS:* So you say you have a slug problem. Is that a problem for some of the food you grow?

*Cristoph Martens:* Often I will lose an entire row of lettuce to slugs; they'll come up, and the next day they'll be gone. So I did some research and found out that chickens and ducks are an ideal solution. This summer I'm planning to divide the yard into three sections, so that I can rotate the animals before I plant, so starting off one section, clean it up with the birds and then plant and move on to the next section. So I'm using them as pest control; they've been used for centuries that way. There's nothing like feeding your animals and getting rid of bugs at the same time.

*JS:* I see you have two ducks right here, hanging outside the coop. But they don't look like normal ducks, what kind of ducks are these? When I say normal I mean the ones we would normally associate as ducks that you would see at a park.

*Cristoph Martens:* These are Muscovy ducks. They are a Central American duck, and they are actually not very closely related to our normal ducks. They can breed with mallard crosses and domesticated mallards, but they won't have viable offspring. So they're pretty much a breed unto their own. The reason I chose these ducks is because they don't make very much sound, they have a chirping sound but no quacking. It's perfect for city use; they have incredible character. These guys are pets. They definitely are.

*JS:* And what kind of personalities do they have? Do you have a special relationship with these ducks?

*Cristoph Martens:* These guys are very curious. They don't like me to touch them, but they like to check out what I'm doing. So when I come out of the house, I sit in front of the house and drink coffee and they'll come over and see what I'm up to, see if I'm going to drop anything for them. They like to jump into the pond that's in front of the house; once a day they'll go for a swim. They're not water ducks, so they don't require water, but in winter time I put out a Rubbermaid bucket and they jump in it and clean off.

It's essential for them to have water; because that's the only way they have to clean themselves. Chickens will have dirt baths, and they'll pluck around in the dirt, but ducks require water to stay looking clean.

*JS:* And how do they get along with your dog here?

*Cristoph Martens:* They don't like her to get too close. My dog is really good with birds, she'd like to herd them around, but I've trained her not to. They get along great, and most dogs can be trained, but it takes a little bit of time for introductions.

**Sound of footsteps** *Cristoph Martens:* This is the little gate into the coop, and I made it as small as I possibly could. The ducks can just barely get out and the chickens—it's a pretty small hole for them as well. The purpose for that being that dogs can't get in. I mean, a raccoon could get in, a skunk could probably get in, but at least I don't have to worry about dogs.

*JS:* What about cats? Are cats a problem at all?

*Cristoph Martens:* I'm not worried about cats. Maybe I should be, I don't know.  
**Laughter** I haven't had any trouble yet.

So we're going in now. So this is an open shed, about a hundred square feet, and it's open on both sides. As far as the city's concerned it's not a building, it's more of a carport-type. And I have wire around, and on one side I've got more of an enclosed area for the birds. So what it allows is that the birds, and I've also got rabbits here, and they can run around in the enclosure when it's not okay to be outside. For the rabbits, they have to be in the coop otherwise they will disappear. The chickens are here when it's snowing or raining. Keeping things humane, I think, is really important. It's really easy in the city to recreate the conditions of industrial agriculture, because you're trying to be too compact. So, space is crucial. There are figures on what is considered humane. For chickens, I believe, it's something like ten square feet per bird. So I've got a hundred square feet here, ten birds.

*JS:* So when they're going outside is there any worry that they're going to get into your garden?

*Cristoph Martens:* I will be fencing the garden into sections. Yeah, they don't go into the garden unless I have nothing planted. There are ways of protecting things using row covers and netting to keep them out, because they will destroy your garden. Also, outside of the coop I will have a smaller enclosure, so they can go and get fresh air when the garden isn't accessible to them. So generally from November until April they get free reign, and after that it has to be limited to...

*JS:* There will be images of Christoph's coop and chickens posted on the Deconstructing Dinner web site at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). The next stage of my tour of Christoph Martens small backyard chicken set-up was meeting the chickens themselves. But before we get to that, let's first listen to another episode of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast. On this episode we learn about what to feed chickens and what NOT to feed chickens. Again, here's Bucky Buckaw.

**Bucky Buckaw theme music**

*Bucky Buckaw:* Bucky Buckaw here. Every time I take a look, around my neighborhood, in the media or on the internet, I see more evidence that more clever people are reclaiming their independence from corporate food sources by raising chickens in their backyards. Small farming is actually returning to North America as it becomes apparent that the big business model of farming is actually unwieldy and out of reach for rural people. But chickens don't require big tracts of countryside - traditional villages teemed with household chickens and suburban and urban dwellers are returning to that world.

I used to be just like most of my listeners - worried about the chemicals and additives in my grocery purchased foods, not to mention the substandard flavors, and worried about the stories of livestock abuse on the factory farms that produced my meat and milk and eggs. Then I adopted a couple of baby chickens to help me debug my garden and maybe provide a little fertilizer for the veggies. In short order I fell in love with their incredible personalities and fantastic work ethic and when they started laying eggs, and I started having those for breakfast a whole new world opened up for me.

But I remember when my partner first pitched the idea of backyard chickening to me and, the first thing I thought was "one more mouth to feed. That's all we need. What are we gonna feed these critters? Well, I soon discovered that not only did I get more food from the chickens than I gave to them - due to the eggs and my improved garden productivity but also they're easy to feed - and to feed naturally.

First thing I figured out was what not to feed chickens.

Don't feed them processed food empty of nutrition but designed to fatten up your bird to look good in a refrigerator. Don't feed them other chickens. That's just not right. Especially not chickens that died of disease. Don't feed them chicken poop. Do I need to explain why? Don't feed them hormones, antibiotics or arsenic.

This is all the kind of stuff that commercial egg and meat operations do feed their birds. For example, arsenic is contained in Roxarsone a drug that most companies add to their feed to spur added growth in chickens and as an anti-bacterial agent. That's a potential environmental and public health threat. What kind of person exposes themselves and their neighbors to arsenic and other chemicals?

Not to mention that substandard feed makes chickens prone to disease, is a crummy way to live for the chickens and makes their eggs taste like cardboard at best. When you buy a conventional egg or eat a typical grocery store chicken you're paying someone good money for a nutrition deprived egg with a cruelty bonus. That just doesn't make sense. Why do that when it's so easy to raise your own chickens and feed them your way?

So what should you feed your chicken? A lot of the same things as humans but in different proportions. So where humans have the food pyramid, chickens have the food egg.

On the fat end of the egg is protein and fat, bugs from your backyard, soybeans (make sure you boil them because raw soybeans contain compounds that may be toxic to chickens) and other beans and grains that provide protein.

In the middle, the widest part of the egg, grains like barley, corn, millet, oats, wheat, or whole rice. These are staples and plenty should always be available whether you're free ranging your chickens in the backyard or keeping them in a large coop or chicken run. The truth is a typical backyard won't have a lot of grains just laying around.

On the small end of the chicken nutrition egg but still close to the middle is greens. Chickens love greens. They'll eat most weeds, and grass, and sometimes a little too much of your garden if you give them too easy access.

Calcium is on a small end of the egg but worth mentioning because it is necessary for egg production as well as for general health.

And at the very tip of the egg is grit. Chickens need little stones in their crop, that's the spot in their neck where their food gets ground up for digestion. If your chickens really don't have access to a variety of small pebbles you may want to get some packaged chicken grit but most chickens find their own grit just fine.

Chickens need a balanced diet but that's pretty easy to provide since quite a lot of their requirements can be met with items that already thrive in your backyard like weeds or grass or other greens you don't plan to eat. And of course bugs and worms.

Kitchen extras are another convenient and basically cost-free food source. For instance, when there's not a lot of greens in my yard, I go out and buy fresh cilantro and chop the whole thing up for my adorable little flock who think it's a swell treat. But even when I get something like cilantro for myself (or parsley) and trim it, I'll feed the stems and roots to the chickens. Most of the time when I trim my vegetables, what I consider scraps is still quality nutrition for the chickens. Just don't feed them rotten veggies. That's an insult. They're not buzzards or goats.

If you're a soft touch like me, you're going to set aside a little of some meals as a treat for your chickens. Everyone I've ever talked to agrees that chickens love pasta. And I gotta tell you, it's so cute to see them eating plain spaghetti like it's quality worms, and running around the yard trying to steal the noodles from each other. If you make rice in a rice cooker, or even a pot, there's invariably gonna be some rice sticking to the bottom. Soak that in water, scoop it out, it's a way for chickens to get rice and their water for the day.

You can get grains at the grocery store in the human section for pennies.

On the other hand, if you're just not the resourceful type, you can organic get feed at the pet store or feed store that'll still be much better than what the big operations feed their chickens. I'd at least recommend you supplement the processed feed with some of the

stuff I mention above and perhaps as you learn more about your chickens you'll move towards more fresh foods.

Your chickens will probably get enough calcium if they get a variety of dark greens and bugs or even certain grains like amaranth, but ground oystershells--available in massive quantities at feed stores or in crushable pill form at health food stores--is an acceptable shortcut. Another shortcut is to feed them eggshells, once they start laying their own eggs. If you do that it's important to dry and crush 'em so the chickens don't recognize what they're eating and get in the habit of breaking open their own eggs when they're craving calcium.

Another reason for breaking up eggshells is an old superstition going back to the Middle Ages that a witch could steal a halved shell and use it as a boat to roam the countryside. Personally, I like to keep a few halved eggshells around the house in case some tiny little being needs to borrow it for transportation. But when they're good and dry I break 'em up for chicken feed.

Chickens have pretty good instincts when it comes to food. They know they need grit, and if they are in a yard will hunt for just the right size pebble or piece of pit from your compost. They'll eat ground eggshells when they need calcium and they'll graze around trying to get a variety of greens and bugs. I've noticed that when they're trying to hatch an egg and they only eat once a day, they'll bulk up on their grain supply. But, like us humans, they are omnivores. That means they can survive on just about anything, but it also means they can't always be counted on to eat what's best for them. One of our chickens is always trying to sneak into the house so she can steal some cat food. In the four seconds it takes our pneumatic screen door to swing shut she can run past me and before I put down whatever I'm carrying she's already gobbled down at least one piece of kibble.

Personally, I don't want to eat the eggs of a chicken that feeds on processed cat food; I'm not a big fan of processed foods for any person or animal, I just can't get my cat to eat anything else. Finally, you'll definitely want to keep your chickens away from temptations like raw potato peels, chocolate or too much salt.

This is Bucky Buckaw – I had a good time.

### **Bucky Buckaw ending theme**

*JS:* You can expect more episodes of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast on future episodes of our Farming in the City series here on Deconstructing Dinner, and our new ongoing focus on Backyard Chickens.

But now back to Nelson, British Columbia and resident Christoph Martens who has himself taken up the role of backyard chickening right within city limits, and in a city that technically does not allow them. The last segment of my tour that we heard of Christophs

backyard ended just after I entered into the chicken coop itself. And so now, we can meet the chickens.

*Cristoph Martens:* We've got four chickens...and these are Banties, which is short for Bantam, and it's a miniature chicken—they're about half-size of a regular chicken. They're a little bit wilder than the regular chickens; they sometimes will hide their eggs. They go broody very quickly, which means that they will start to sit on eggs and try to hatch them. And if you don't collect your eggs every day, it encourages that instinct. So the other day I forgot to collect the eggs, and sure enough, two days later I had two broody chickens. And it's hard to get them to snap out of that. What you do is you isolate them for a few days, and they snap out of it pretty quick.

*JS:* Now they're making a little more noise right now, now that we're looking at them. Are they trying to say something?

*Cristoph Martens:* **Laughter.** These guys, I got them as adults, and they don't like human contact. They grew up in a larger barnyard. If you get them as chicks they actually don't mind us being here, but these guys would prefer if we weren't.

*JS:* So what's your main reason for having chickens? Is it for the eggs, is it for the meat, is it both?

*Cristoph Martens:* These guys are for, as I mentioned earlier, bug control and for eggs. And I do sometimes get four eggs out of these chickens, usually about three. And that's more than I can eat myself. So two Bantie eggs equals one regular egg, so essentially I'm getting two full-size eggs a day.

*JS:* So you say that's more than you can handle. What would you say is the ideal number of chickens that one person would require to get a substantial amount of eggs, or enough eggs?

*Cristoph Martens:* One chicken would do it per person, depending on how many eggs you eat of course. But I think if I could only have one chicken I think that would be definitely adequate for myself.

*JS:* So maybe you can just describe the set-up you have in here. In terms of maybe the bedding, in terms of the roosts you have here, what does a chicken require here to feel at home?

*Cristoph Martens:* Well what we're looking at right now is their enclosed nighttime coop, and it's about three feet wide by probably eight feet long, and eight feet high. So, I've got four chickens and two ducks in here and they seem to have plenty of room, it's only their nighttime spot. It's not a lot of space required for that sleeping time, and they've got a roost, they've got three nest boxes made out of recycled material and filled with straw. It's very low budget, I've insulated part of it with some Styrofoam that I got from the florist. You can just use recycled materials. But the one thing that's extremely

important is vermin-proof. You don't want skunks or anything else to get in. In my first attempt I did lose my chickens to some unknown animal, and that can easily happen in the city.

JS: And so they have a bowl of food down there, what's exactly in there? I see some corn, and what else is in that bowl?

*Cristoph Martens:* It's an organic chicken mash. It's the mainstay of their diet, and you get that at the farmer supply store. And then, working at the Co-op, I get sweepings from the bulk aisle and that supplements their food. I also get composted vegetables from the produce department, and they enjoy that as well.

JS: So would you be able to satisfy their feed at all from anything you're growing here on your own property?

*Cristoph Martens:* Probably not, unless I would put the whole property into something like wheat, or corn. They will eat leftovers, like any kind of salad leftovers, even meat leftovers. Chickens are carnivorous, preferring to eat bugs. You could try growing worms and doing a worm compost and feeding them some of those. So you can supplement their diet, but I would say in the city you definitely have to add some outside protein source.

JS: Have you ever had any problems with illness at all with your chickens?

*Cristoph Martens:* Chickens are pretty hardy, and even in the cold, they had a heat lamp. So far I haven't had any problems.

JS: So you say that they hang out in here in the evening, and they run around this more open area during the day.

*Cristoph Martens:* They get to run during the day and then, when the garden is accessible, they'll run around in the garden.

JS: When looking at some of the fears that neighbours may have, or a municipality may have in terms of allowing something like this to legally exist, I think two of the biggest problems that people perceive would be noise and smell. Is that a problem at all with this setup that you have?

*Cristoph Martens:* So far I haven't had any problems. I mean, you do have to be careful. It's good to have straw at hand, and the way that straw works is it will bind organic material, nitrogen and ammonia, and turn it into compost, basically. So what that does is absorbs the smell at the same time. If you don't do that you can run into smell problems. And it's extremely important to be aware of that. So every month I'll put a bunch of straw down in their coop, and rake up the run to make sure it's clean. And I'll mix it with straw—or you could use sawdust, woodchips, and things like that. Anything that's carbon material will absorb the nitrogen.

*JS:* I can say it actually smells pretty nice in here. Well, it smells like a farm in the middle of the city in a good way, it's not at all a foul smell. And they're being pretty quiet, now that we've let them back into their privacy.

*Cristoph Martens:* It's interesting that people perceive chickens as being noisy, and I think if you had ten thousand chickens it would create quite a racket, especially in a crowded situation where they're not happy. A happy chicken makes no sound, a little chirping sound as you could hear earlier. A chicken that's afraid will make a cackling sound, and certain breeds of chickens will make a cackling sound when they lay an egg.

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner. As my tour of Christoph Martens urban backyard chicken set-up neared its end, I did of course ask him that one important question, of what *he* thinks of the Nelson city bylaw that prohibits the raising of chickens within city limits. Cristoph believes such a bylaw is the remnants of a bygone era of pseudo-royalty, and that in moving beyond this, he hopes to find others in the community who are doing the same, or who are wishing to do the same.

*JS:* Do you interact with other backyard chicken enthusiasts? Are there any in Nelson? Are there any you interact with outside of the community?

*Cristoph Martens:* I don't know of anybody. There's one person who basically has an acre, so it hardly seems like the city, but I haven't spoken to him. I don't know of anybody. I'd like to have a support group.

*JS:* So, clearly if you're the only person in town—at least, that you know of—doing this you have at least laid some of the groundwork for the experience of being able to do this within a city. So what's your take on the by-law that prohibits this, which from what I understand is really different from most other cities, especially in the United States, that do allow chickens?

*Cristoph Martens:* When a by-law is on the books it's hard to get rid of it. I've talked to city councillors about that and it does take a lot of community activism to change a by-law. There has to be a lot of support. Since I'm the only one that I know of doing this, I don't feel like there is adequate support. I mean it's one thing to do it hypothetically, but there has to be some illegal activity to begin with to show support. Petitions aren't going to do it. As far as why that law is there, I imagine it has to do with gentrification in the fifties, people wanting to get away from farming lifestyles. The Green Revolution, where agriculture became this industry and city people were just supposed to be this pseudo-royalty that was removed from that. You go to the supermarket, 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. I mean, there's a movement back to agriculture and organic and small-scale organic, and I think the city is a really important part of that equation.

*JS:* So if there was an interest of people within the community who wanted to start doing this, would that be something you'd be interested in facilitating or being a part of? Would you be interested in having a support group of sorts?

*Cristoph Martens:* I'd love to have a support group, and I'd love to be a resource to people. Anybody who asks can come and have a tour and learn from what I'm doing and share ideas see what works.

*JS:* And that was Christoph Martens – a Nelson British Columbia resident whose four chickens provide him with eggs, fertilizer, gardening help and the security in knowing that some of his needs are being met with a very minimal environmental impact. You can expect to hear more about Christoph's path to self-sufficiency on future broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner.

I'll also note that there will be a number of short segments of video footage listed on the Deconstructing Dinner web site of random people who have set up chickens in their backyard, and you can learn quite a lot from just those videos. And for any Nelson residents who are also raising chickens within the city and if you're wishing to "come out of the coop" so to speak and link up with Christoph, you can contact Deconstructing Dinner by emailing us at [deconstructingdinner@cjly.net](mailto:deconstructingdinner@cjly.net).

And in closing out today's Backyard Chicken broadcast, I'll leave you with a short clip of Corky Evans speaking at an event held on March 22 here in Nelson. Corky is the elected representative in the province for the Nelson-Creston riding and he is also the Agriculture Critic for British Columbia's New Democratic Party (the NDP). Corky has been touring around the province to hear from farmers on what *they* think needs to be done in the province in order to improve the viability of agriculture. Understandably, he spoke mostly of the role of the *Province* in supporting farming and food production, but he didn't mention anything about the role of Municipal Governments in encouraging more responsible eating. We'll hear a full recording of Corky's presentation on a future broadcast, but I did, at the event, pose to him this question on the role of municipalities and farming.

*Corky Evans:* The majority of the food elsewhere in the world, outside Canada, is produced within cities or two miles outside the city. Actually, the idea of production four hundred miles away from the marketplace is not the norm. And, as the previous speaker said it's basically based on cheap oil, post-World War II energy prices. Municipalities could let people keep chickens in their yard, they could put on adult education courses in how to garden, how to use your roof, how to use the roof of your garage, how to grow food in a way that's not offensive to your neighbour. They could assist in the distribution of food \*\*\*\* [57:08]. They could block off the streets on Saturdays and tell people you can come and sell your food. They could do almost anything, if municipalities decided that they cared. Part of this is the politics of rural chauvinism. We, rural people, have pretended for a long time that food is our issue. We actually live on the country and they're just city flakes". So we took the issue from municipal governments. And I think municipal governments should be every bit as big a part of this as rural people. I started by commenting on chicken laws. There are many municipalities in British Columbia that

don't like the sounds of roosters and so they banned, essentially, raising animals in the town. That's wacko, right? That means there's no manure and fertilizer, and there's kids growing up not knowing where eggs come from. All that can be changed by municipalities. I'm not going to change that in Winlop; there are hardly any kids in the neighbourhood. It's going to be changed by Nelson, or not at all.

### **Ending theme**

*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.*

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

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