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PRACTICE URBAN LIVESTOCK



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Urban Micro-Livestock Ordinances: Regulating Backyard Animal Husbandry

By Jaime Bouvier

While small farm animals never completely disappeared from most cities, a growing number of communities are revisiting their animal control and zoning regulations in response to a renewed interest in chickens, bees, and goats among urban agriculture practitioners and backyard hobbyists.

This article explores how small farm animals (i.e., micro-livestock) can and already do coexist in urban environments, and it examines the regulatory tools cities use to sanction and control backyard animal husbandry. The following sections are intended to serve as a guide for local governments considering legalizing and regulating this budding hobby.

WHAT IS MICRO-LIVESTOCK?

There is no universal definition of micro-livestock. It often just means small animals—like chickens, ducks, quail, and rabbits. It can also mean breeds that are smaller than average—such as bantam chickens, Nigerian Dwarf goats, or Red Panda cows. Finally, it can mean an animal of what is normally a large breed that just happens to be small. Many international organizations have long championed raising micro-livestock in cities to provide a secure and safe local food source. Because they require less food and water, are often especially hardy breeds, and their small size makes them ideal for small lots, micro-livestock are especially well suited to urban living.

Right now, most attempts to legalize micro-livestock focus on chickens, goats, and bees. Although rabbits are micro-livestock, they have caused less controversy. Perhaps because they are more accepted as pets, they were never made illegal in many cities. Very small pigs, like the pot-bellied pig, have also been accepted in many cities

Uncle Sam Expects You To Keep Hens and Raise Chickens



U.S. Department of Agriculture

➡ During World War II, the U.S. government framed backyard chicken keeping as a patriotic duty.

as a pet; because they are not being raised for bacon, people don't think of them as livestock. There has been some move to legalize miniature horses as guide animals for the blind and disabled. Other animals, like miniature hogs, cows, or sheep, may also be suitable for city life under the right circumstances, but fewer people are advocating for them.

A SHORT HISTORY OF URBAN HENS AND OTHER MICRO-LIVESTOCK.

Although micro-livestock never disappeared from cities altogether, they used

to be an accepted and even encouraged part of urban life. For example, during the Victory Garden campaign, when the U.S. government urged American citizens to grow more of their own food to support the war, the government encouraged people to keep and raise chickens.

As it became cheaper and more convenient to buy food from a grocery store, it became less common to see livestock in the city. While many people believe that livestock became illegal because they were a nuisance, there is little evidence that this was the case—especially when just

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About the Author

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a few animals were kept. Instead, exiling livestock was partially a class-based phenomenon. Excluding animals that were seen as productive, that is animals kept for food purposes, was a way to exclude the poor. Animals that came to be viewed as nonproductive, such as dogs and cats, required money to keep and did not have the same associations. By illegalizing behavior associated with the recently rural and poor, a city could present itself as prosperous and progressive.

The desire to exclude the poor is a reason why ordinances making livestock illegal are often found in suburbs and even exurbs where the lot sizes are especially conducive to raising animals. It is also a reason why changing the regulations, even in such suburbs, is often especially contentious.

Now, however, raising livestock is becoming an activity that many young, educated, middle-class people seek out. The association between micro-livestock and poverty is no longer relevant. And distinguishing cities and suburbs from rural occupations is no longer universally seen as a sign of progress. In fact, many view a well-regulated return of micro-livestock to the cities and suburbs as embracing progressive values. And legalizing micro-livestock can actually attract people who seek to live in a place that supports the close-knit communities that this hobby creates.

MICRO-LIVESTOCK COMMUNITIES

Communities are essential to the micro-livestock movement. They provide much-needed support for people to discuss common problems and share interests.

Many communities began as a few people who already raised chickens, or goats, or bees—in violation of city law. They organized to legalize their animals. One of the leading examples of this is a group called Mad City Chickens in Madison, Wisconsin. Members of the group who kept chickens illegally, the self-described “Chicken Underground,” were

Many communities began as a few people who already raised chickens, or goats, or bees—in violation of city law.

generally law-abiding citizens uncomfortable with their outlaw status. They did not understand why raising chickens in a way that did not bother their neighbors should be illegal. In 2004, in response to the group’s lobbying efforts, Madison amended its zoning ordinance to allow chickens (and, subsequently, bees in 2012). Their lobbying efforts became the focus of a film, also titled *Mad City Chickens*, and have been a model for other groups seeking to legalize micro-livestock, such as the New York City Beekeepers Association and Seattle’s Goat Justice League.

These groups’ stories show that many people already keep micro-livestock in cities whether or not they are legal. It also shows that once citizens and city leaders are educated about these animals and shown how

they can, and already do, peacefully coexist in cities, they often will legalize these animals. Finally, it shows that cities are better off reasonably regulating micro-livestock, rather than forcing hobbyists out of their cities or underground.

CHICKENS, GOATS, AND BEES: BENEFITS

The main benefits to keeping chickens, goats, and bees is not so much to eat the animal itself, though people do eat chickens and goats. The main benefit is to eat the food they produce: eggs, milk, and honey. There is good research to show that backyard eggs are tastier and have more nutrients than store-bought ones. Milk from backyard goats, moreover, tastes better because goat milk does not store or ship well. It is also, arguably, easier to digest for those who cannot drink cow’s milk. Goat hair is a prized material for making cashmere and mohair fabric. Manure from these animals is an excellent, and surprisingly pricey, fertilizer. Many people also value these animals for their companionship and become as close to them as they do any other pet. Finally, backyard and hobbyist livestock keepers ensure a diverse and more robust population of animals, ensuring the propagation of breeds that are not valued commercially but may become important if commercial breeds, because of genetic uniformity, become threatened by disease.

Apart from honey, keeping bees in urban areas has two main benefits: pollination services and ensuring an extant bee population. Honeybees pollinate two-thirds of our food crops and in recent years have suffered devastating losses. Some experts assert that these losses are caused or exac-

erbated by the use of pesticides, the stress of constant travel to different farms to pollinate crops, and the lack of plant diversity in rural environments. Thus, hobbyist beekeepers who do not subject their hives to such stressors may prove to be a haven for the continued existence of honeybees.

CHICKENS, GOATS, AND BEES: CONCERNS

Concerns about chickens and goats generally boil down to three things: odor, noise, and disease. None of these provide a reason to ban hens and does, but roosters can be too noisy and a ratty buck may be too smelly for dense urban environments.

Contrary to popular myth, roosters do not just crow in the morning to greet the rising sun—roosters crow all day. Hens do not need roosters to lay eggs; roosters are only necessary to fertilize the eggs. Hens are generally quiet, but when they do cluck, the resulting noise is about the same decibel level as a quiet human conversation. And, as long as a chicken coop is regularly cleaned and adequately ventilated, a small flock of hens will not be smelly.

Goats, too, are not generally noisy animals. While a goat may bleat, the sound is generally far less than the noise of a barking dog. Some goats, just like dogs or cats, are noisier than others. And, as for odor, female goats (does) and neutered male goats (wethers) do not smell. Male goats (bucks), during the mating season, do smell. The gamy odor of a ratty buck is the smell many associate with goats. While it is necessary for a doe to mate with a buck and deliver a kid to lactate and provide milk, this can be arranged with a stud-buck kept in more rural environs.

Finally, there is the issue of disease. As with any animal, including dogs and cats, disease can be spread through feces. Regular cleaning and straightforward sanitation practices, such as hand washing, can take care of this issue. While concerns about backyard chickens spreading avian flu have surfaced in some communities, the kind of avian flu that can cross over to humans has not yet been found in North America. And neither the Centers for Disease Control nor the Department of Agriculture have asserted that the possibility of bird flu is a reason to ban backyard hen keeping. Public health scholars have concluded that backyard chickens present no greater threat to public health than other more common pets like dogs and cats.

The major objection to honeybees is the fear of being stung. Here, it is important to understand the distinction between bees and wasps. Honeybees are defensive; they will not bother others unless they are threatened. A honeybee's stinger is attached to the entrails, so it will die if it stings. Bees want pollen; they are not interested in human food. Wasps, by contrast, are predatory, can sting repeatedly with little consequence, and are attracted to human food. Many people confuse fuzzy honeybees with smooth-skinned yellow jackets, a kind of wasp that forms papery hives. People do not keep wasps because they are not effective pollinators and do not produce honey.

A connected objection is a fear of a swarm. A swarm is a group of bees traveling to establish a new hive. While a swarm can be intimidating, before bees swarm they gorge on honey to prepare for the trip, which makes them particularly lazy and docile. Unless attacked or bothered, they will follow a scout bee to a new location within a few hours to a day.

Before drafting an ordinance, local governments should be aware that federal and state laws already regulate livestock.

AGRICULTURAL BASICS FOR CITIES CONSIDERING LEGALIZING MICRO-LIVESTOCK

Chickens and goats require companionship. As a consequence, cities should allow a minimum of four hens and two does. This ensures that the city is not interfering with good animal husbandry practices.

And, while bees never lack for companionship, it is a good idea to allow beekeepers to have more than one hive. This allows the beekeeper to better inspect for and maintain hive health. Cities should not be overly concerned that hives kept too close together will compete for food—honeybees fly up to a three-mile radius from the hive to find pollen.

FEDERAL AND STATE LAW CONSIDERATIONS

Before drafting an ordinance, local governments should be aware that federal and state laws already regulate livestock. The federal government regulates the sale, processing, labeling, and transportation of chickens, eggs, and other meats (21 U.S.C.

§451 et seq.; 21 U.S.C., §1031 et seq.; and 21 U.S.C. §601 et seq.). The FDA requires that all milk be pasteurized, including goat milk (21 C.F.R. §1240.61) and regulates nutrition and information labeling of honey (21 U.S.C. §§342–343). Many of these laws have exceptions for animals and animal products raised for home consumption, but someone who wants to raise eggs, milk, or meat for sale or distribution would need to comply.

Most states have laws regulating the movement of livestock, including chickens, goats, and bees, into and out of the state. To track and attempt to control some diseases associated with livestock and bees, some states either require or encourage keepers of livestock and beekeepers, even backyard hobbyists, to register their premises with the state. Other states only ask to be alerted if a particular disease is found. Many states also have laws regulating the slaughter and sale of any animal used for meat, as well as laws regulating the sale of eggs, milk, and milk products. While these, also, generally have exceptions for home consumption, they will apply to sales. Often state agricultural

extension services will have online information pages describing the regulations and exemptions for hobbyists.

For beekeeping, however, a few states have passed laws that interfere with a local government's ability to regulate. Wyoming, for instance, controls how close together apiaries (an area with one or more beehives) may be located (Wyo. Stat. Ann. §11-7-201). In June 2011, Tennessee preempted all local government ordinances regulating honeybee hives (Tenn. Code. Ann. §44-15-124). And in July 2012, Florida also preempted all local government ordinances regulating managed honeybee colonies or determining where they can be located (Fla. Stat. §§586.055 & 586.10).

COMMON ASPECTS OF URBAN MICRO-LIVESTOCK REGULATION

In the cities that have recently passed ordinances regulating micro-livestock, the ordinances are all quite different. No standard ordinance has yet been established.



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- ⊕ Portland, Oregon, allows up to three pygmy goats in a residential backyard without a permit (§13.05.015.E).

There are, however, many common aspects to these regulations. Most of them limit the number and type of livestock that can be kept in the city, establish setbacks for where the animals can be kept on the property, and require a certain amount of space per animal. Some also require a license.

Micro-Livestock Standards

Most cities have not taken a comprehensive regulatory approach to micro-livestock, but appear to allow particular livestock in response to citizen lobbying. Hundreds of cities have legalized chickens in the past few years. And the growing popularity of beekeeping means many cities have also adopted separate ordinances to allow for it. For example, South Portland, Maine (§§3-51 & 3-710; Cary, North Carolina (§5.3.4(I) & (O)); Ypsilanti, Michigan (§§14-13 & 14-171); and Littleton, Colorado (§§10-4-4 & 10-4-14) have recently passed ordinances separately allowing for both chickens and bees.

Some cities make idiosyncratic choices. For example, Ponca City, Oklahoma, allows miniature horses and donkeys, but still bans all other fowl and livestock (§7-3-10). Sebring, Florida, allows two hens and

two pot-bellied pigs (§4-1). And Carson City, Nevada, allows chickens, pigs, rabbits, and bees, but no goats (§§7.02 & 7.13.190).

And some only allow goats. In 2011, Loveland, Ohio, allowed two pygmy goats on residential properties of any size (§505.16). It defines pygmy as a goat no heavier than 60 pounds. The choice of such a light weight is curious, given that many micro-goat breeds weigh more than 60 pounds. Also, many breeds of dogs weigh up to three times as much, but most cities do not restrict the size of dogs. In 2010, Carl Junction, Missouri, allowed just one pygmy goat on a property of any size (§205.200(C)). Because goats are herd animals, this limit encourages poor animal husbandry practices.

Meanwhile, many cities are legalizing a wider variety of livestock. For example, Denver allows up to eight ducks or chickens and up to two dwarf goats and two beehives (§8-91; §11.8.5.1). But it requires 16 square feet of permeable land available to each chicken and 130 square feet for each goat. The city also requires adequate shelter to protect the animals from the elements and from predators. This means that to keep the full complement of eight chickens and two

goats, the yard would have to have approximately 400 square feet of space. For chickens, ducks, and goats, Denver has a 15-foot setback from neighboring structures used for dwelling and requires that the animals be kept in the rear half of the lot. For bees, Denver has a five-foot setback from any property line and requires that hives be kept in the back third of the lot.

Seattle allows up to eight domestic fowl, four beehives, one potbelly pig, and two pygmy goats, or no pig and three pygmy goats, on any lot (§23.42.052). It then employs a step system for additional animals. For lots larger than 20,000 square feet, an additional small animal—which means a dog, cat, or goat, may be kept on the lot. Seattle also allows other farm animals, including cows, horses, or sheep, to be kept on lots that are greater than 20,000 square feet. Seattle allows one of these animals per 10,000 square feet. Also, it has a 50-foot setback from the neighboring property for all farm animals, not including potbelly pigs, fowl, or miniature goats. Finally, Seattle has a separate ordinance that restricts goats to their premises, “except for purposes of transport or when on property other than

that of the miniature goat's owner with the permission of a lawful occupant of that property" (§ 9.25.084(H)).

Cleveland has a slightly more complex ordinance in that it has different regulations for residential and nonresidential districts (§347.02). It also employs a step system, allowing one animal per a certain number of square feet. In residential districts, it allows one hen, duck, rabbit, or similar animal per 800 square feet, and one beehive per 2,400 square feet. The ordinance spells out that a standard residential lot in Cleveland is 4,800 square feet, so most households could keep up to six hens and two beehives. Setbacks for hens are five feet from the side-yard line and 18 inches from the rear-yard line. Setbacks for bees are five feet from the lot line and 10 feet from any dwelling on another parcel. Neither animal is allowed in the front or side yard. Cleveland only allows goats, pigs, sheep, or similar farm animals on lots that have at least 24,000 square feet (i.e., a little more than a half-acre). If a lot is that size or larger, two of these animals will be allowed, with an additional one for each additional 2,400 square feet. Enclosures for these animals must be set back 40 feet from the property line and at least 100 feet from the dwelling of another.

In Cleveland, the nonresidential districts are less restrictive, with one chicken, duck, or rabbit per 400 square feet, one beehive per 1,000 square feet, and one goat, pig, or sheep per 14,400 square feet. This can allow for more intensive operations in less populated areas—and also opens the area to urban farms.

Hillsboro, Oregon, and El Cerrito, California, employ similar step systems. El Cerrito allows three hens as long as the property is at least 4,000 square feet (§7.08.020). Hillsboro allows three hens as long as the property is 7,000 square feet (§6.20.070). Both cities require at least 10,000 square feet to keep goats, but Hillsboro limits goats to two, and El Cerrito does not appear to limit them. El Cerrito, however, does require an administrative use permit to keep goats and allows for a conditional use permit to keep goats on a smaller parcel of land. El Cerrito requires a property of at least 5,000 square feet to keep one beehive. That beehive must be 20 feet from an adjacent dwelling and 10 feet from the property line. Hillsboro allows up to three beehives on any size residential property with a setback of 10 feet from the property line.

Vancouver, Washington, is an example of a less restrictive ordinance (§20.895.050). It allows up to three goats, if they weigh less than 100 pounds, on any size property. It also allows chickens, ducks, geese, or rabbits on any size lot with no numerical restriction. It does provide in the ordinance that the keeping of animals is subject to already existing nuisance requirements.

Roosters and Bucks

Most of these cities prohibit roosters and male goats (or bucks). Hillsboro prohibits roosters and uncastrated male goats with no exceptions. Seattle also prohibits roosters and uncastrated males but has an exception for nursing offspring that are less than 12 weeks old. Denver does the same but only until they are six weeks old. El Cerrito prohibits roosters but does not say anything about the gender of the goats it allows. And Cleveland has a more complicated system, in that it will allow roosters,

the license on those grounds (§205.04). The department also notifies neighbors about the license application and waits at least 21 days to hear back from them. The director can consider any evidence that the neighbors submit concerning nuisance, unsanitary, or unsafe conditions. To determine whether to grant the license, and any time after the license is granted, the department can inspect the property and enforce any penalties for violating sanitation or nuisance regulations.

Ellensburg, Washington, has an interesting ordinance in that it requires a license for dogs and cats, but does not require a license to keep up to two beehives and four hens (§§5.30.260 & 5.30.310). Seattle, likewise, requires a license for dogs, cats, pigs, and goats, but does not require one for chickens or bees (§9.25.050).

After restricting livestock to property with three acres or more, Pittsburgh amended its ordinance to allow chickens

**Some cities require a permit or license . . .
[which] are relatively straightforward and do
not allow for much discretion on the part of the
official who issues it.**

but only on property that is at least one acre in size with a 100-foot setback from the property line for the coop. Cleveland, like El Cerrito, does not say anything about goat gender.

Licensing

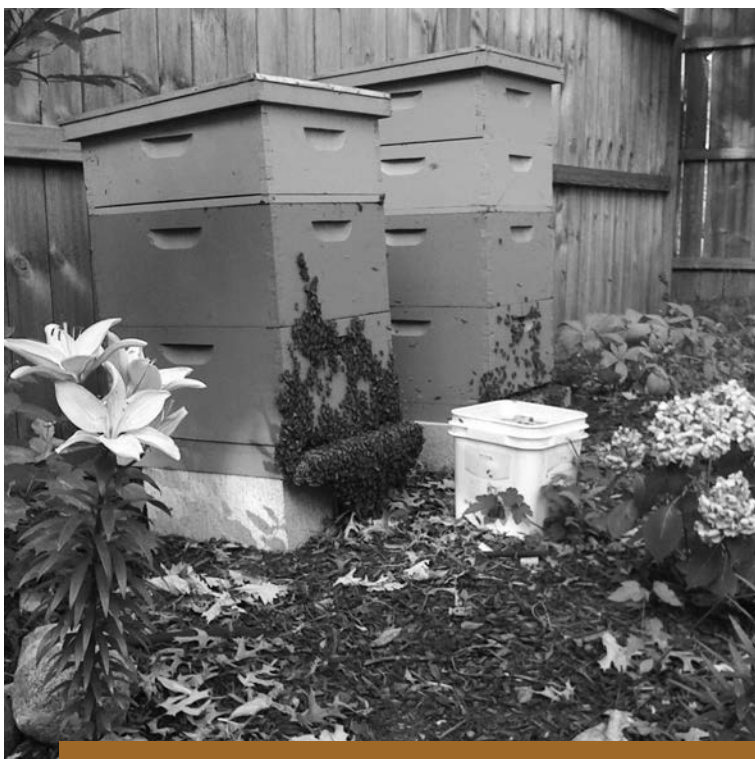
Some cities require a permit or license. Most of these permits are relatively straightforward and do not allow for much discretion on the part of the official who issues it. For instance, Denver requires a livestock or fowl permit to keep chickens or goats but requires no more than the provisions of the ordinance be met and a fee be paid to acquire the license. The city charges \$100 annually for a livestock permit and \$50 annually for a fowl permit.

Cleveland also requires a license. Its health department issues a two-year license to keep any type of livestock, including chickens and bees. In issuing the license the director of public health must consider evidence of "nuisance or conditions that are unsafe or unsanitary" and any "recorded violations" and may deny

and bees in 2011 (§912.07). It allows three hens and two beehives per 2,000 square feet on occupied, residentially zoned lots. It allows one more bird and hive for each additional 1,000 square feet. However, it requires the home owner to seek a special exception to keep livestock as an accessory use (§922.07). The special exception requires the zoning board of adjustment to hold a public hearing, to make findings of fact, and issue a written decision within 45 days of the hearing. This allows it to reevaluate and reweigh all of the concerns with raising chickens and bees in the city, even though the city council had already made the legislative determination and established criteria for when and where it was legal to do so. This puts a substantial burden on each home owner to fully argue the case before each iteration of the board. It also uses up considerable city resources.

COMMON AND LESS COMMON BEE PROVISIONS

Some cities never made keeping bees illegal, and do not regulate the practice.



Michael Aras

Chicago allows up to five bee colonies in a residential backyard without a permit (§17-17-0270.7).

Among cities that do regulate beekeeping, flyway barriers and a source of fresh water are common requirements. Flyway barriers force bees to fly up over the heads of people so that they do not establish flight paths through a neighbor's property or populated sidewalks, streets, or parks. Bees require water; if a beekeeper does not provide it, bees will frequently use a close source, like a neighbor's pool.

Concerning flyway barriers, Cleveland requires a fence or a dense hedge of at least six feet in height within five feet of the hive and extending at least two feet on either side. However, it does not require a flyway barrier if the hive is at least 25 feet from the property line or on a porch or balcony at least 10 feet from the ground. South Portland, Maine, has a similar flyway barrier standard, but requires it to extend at least 10 feet in each direction. And Carson City, Nevada, requires the flyway barrier to "surround" the hive on any side that is within 25 feet of a property line. Neither South Portland nor Carson City has exceptions for balcony or rooftop hives.

Concerning a water source, Ellensburg, Washington, requires "a consistent source of water . . . at the apiary when bees are

flying unless it occurs naturally. The water may be 'sweetened' with mineral salt or chlorine to enhance its attractiveness." Cleveland requires a freshwater source to be maintained "throughout the day." And Carson City requires water only from April 1 to September 30.

As for less common provisions, Ellensburg, Washington, requires that all hives "consist of moveable frames and

combs." Cleveland prohibits Africanized bees. Africanized bees have only been found in a few southern states; beekeepers, moreover, do not seek to keep Africanized bees. Boise, Idaho, prohibits Africanized bees, as well as wasps and hornets (§11-09-11.03). This is peculiar; people do not keep wasps or hornets because they do not provide honey or pollination services. Boise and Carson City require a queen to be removed if the hive shows "unusually aggressive characteristics." And Carson City requires the new queen to be chosen from "stock bred for gentleness and non-swarming characteristics." Carson City only allows honey to be extracted "where there is no access by bees before, during, or after the extraction process." Carson City also requires any hive found to be diseased to be either "treated so as to completely eradicate the disease" or destroyed at the owner's expense. Finally, both Carson City and Ellensburg provide that abandoned hives are to be considered nuisances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the ordinances discussed above, two stand out as potential models: Denver's and Seattle's. These ordinances show that the trend, over time, is to simplify regulations. Local governments seeking to regulate these practices should consider how much they are prepared to spend, in terms of resources, on licensing or monitoring these practices given the relatively small degree of actual nuisance they cause. Governments should also keep in mind that straightforward ordinances following developing norms will be easier to follow and easier to enforce.

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HOW DOES YOUR COMMUNITY REGULATE BACKYARD FARM ANIMALS?

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