

# Backyard Chicken Coops

Zoning Strategies for Keeping Hens  
and Roosters in Connecticut



# Why Did the Chicken Become So Popular





# Overview of Chicken Zones

- How are Backyard Chickens Regulated
- Where are they allowed
- Manure Management
- How many chickens is too many?
- Chicken enclosures and protections
- Statutory considerations
- Reliance on expert guidance
- Conclusions and recommendations





A photograph of several backyard chickens in a grassy field. There are four light-colored chickens and one darker, speckled chicken. They are standing in tall grass with a line of trees in the background under a cloudy sky. The text "How are Backyard Chickens Regulated" is overlaid in white.

# How are Backyard Chickens Regulated

# Home Grown Chickens are Popular

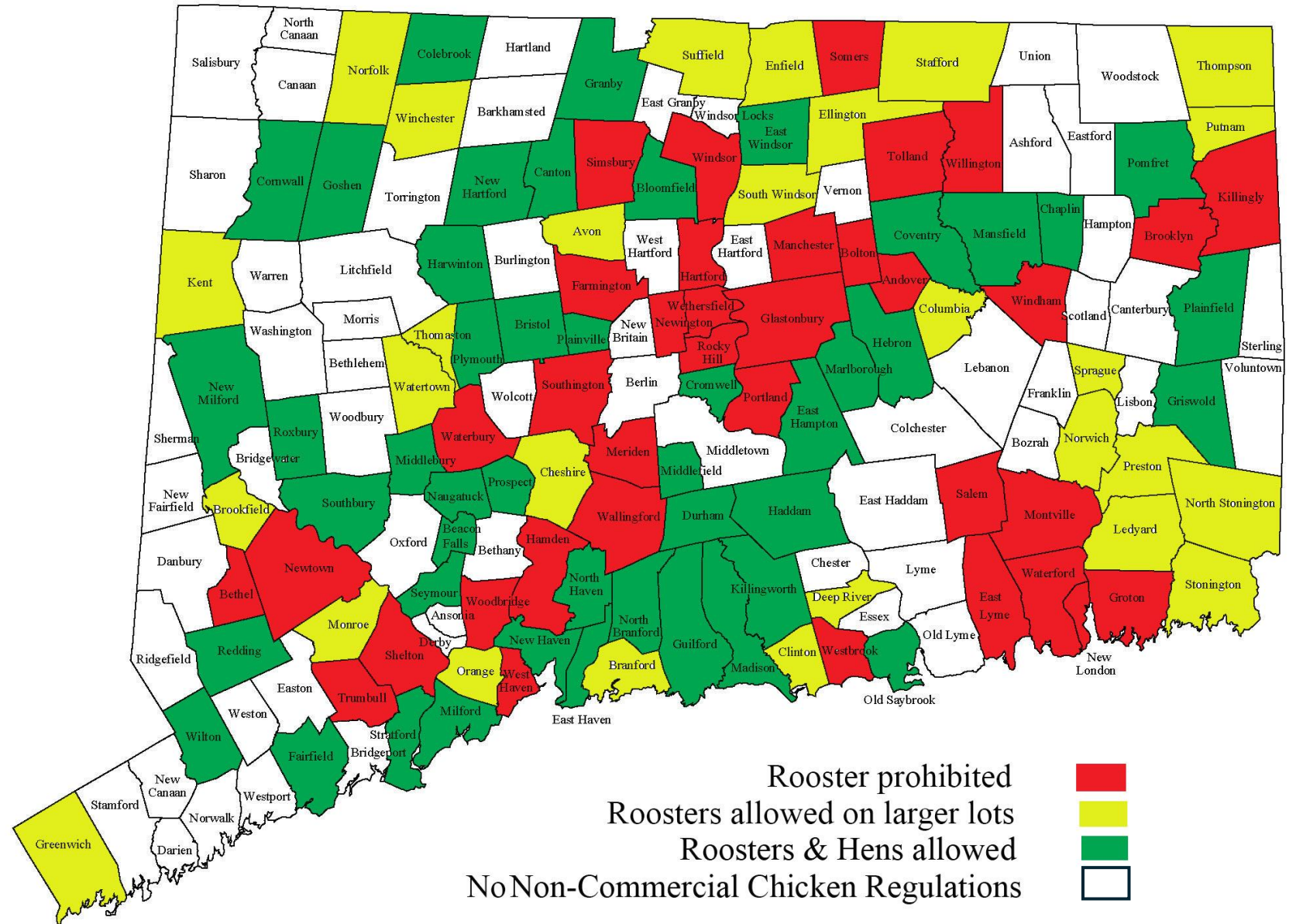
Allow Non-Commercial Chicken Farming?	Municipalities
No	54
Yes	113
No Zoning	2
Grand Total	169

68% of the zoning commissions in Connecticut allow chickens for non-commercial home-grown use.



# Zoning Regulations Governing Backyard Chickens:2025

113 municipalities allow hens. Those that prohibit roosters are in urbanized portions of Connecticut.



# Backyard Chickens are Primarily an “As of Right” Use in Connecticut

Type of Permit for Backyard Chickens	Municipalities
<b>Permitted as of Right</b>	<b>77</b>
Zoning permit	13
Conditional permit	9
Site Plan/Plot Plan	5
Special permit	4
Use permit	2
Varies by Zone (As of right to zoning permit)	2
Building Permit	1
Grand Total	113



# Where are Chickens Allowed



# Minimum Lot Size for Chickens Varies

Minimum Lot Size for Backyard Chickens (Square Feet)	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Grand Total	Percent of Total
Under 20,000	3	13	17	33	29.2%
20,000 to 43,560	10	30	9	49	43.3%
Greater than 43,560 to 87,120	5	9	6	20	18.0%
Greater than 87,120 to 217,800	2	6	1	9	8.0%
Other Lot Size Standards			2	2	1.8%
Grand Total	20	58	35	113	100.0%

Key takeaway: lot size is not an impediment to backyard chickens. 75% of 113 municipalities allowing them do so on lots under 1 acre.

# Are Backyard Chickens Really Kept in Back?

Location of Chicken Coop	Municipalities Regulating non-Commercial Poultry
Inside Property Setbacks	43
Location Not Specified	33
Rear Yard	25
Side or Rear Yard	12
Total	113

67% of municipalities do not specify chicken's location (defaulting to existing accessory use setbacks) or require them to comply with property line setbacks. Only 33% require backyard chickens inside side/rear yards.



# Chicken Manure Management

A photograph of a chicken coop with several white chickens inside. The coop has a corrugated metal roof and a wire mesh front. The background shows a grassy field and trees under a cloudy sky.

# For Some Chicken Manure is a Concern

- **30 municipalities have multiple provision addressing manure as an odor or water pollution concern.**
  - 23 have setbacks from any property line
  - 7 have streams & rivers setbacks
  - 5 have rear/side property line setbacks
  - 5 have setbacks from wells
  - 4 have setbacks from neighbor's house
  - 2 have street line setbacks
- **27 require the Chicken Coops to be odor free and sanitary**



# Not all Land is Suitable for Backyard Poultry

## Five Siting Considerations for Chicken Coops and Pens

- Is site at least 100 feet from wetlands, watercourses
- Is it at least 75 feet downgradient from a dug or drilled well
- Is it free of steep slopes (15%+ grade) or shallow to bedrock
- Is it outside of the septic system leaching field zone
- Is it located in rear of property behind principal dwelling

Once a site is selected, managing chicken manure and its disposal or use as a fertilizer are key to land management

A large group of yellow chicks are gathered in a red bowl. The chicks are fluffy and yellow, with some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The bowl is filled with them, and the background is a soft, out-of-focus yellow. The text "How Many Chickens are Too Many" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

# How Many Chickens are Too Many



# Three Approaches to Counting Chickens

- **Step Function Strategy – More chickens with more land**
  - **Five examples of step approaches used by 50 Municipalities**
    - Brookfield: 6 birds on lots < 40,000 sq. ft. 50 for each 40,000 sq. ft.
    - Chaplin: 10 birds for lots under ½ acre. Up to 5 more for each ¼ acre.
    - Enfield: 12 birds on one 1 acre. Six more for each added acre.
    - Bolton: 10 birds per acre of land
    - Avon: 15 birds on 80,000 sq. ft lot. Add 15 for each ½ acre (100 max.)
- **Fixed Number Strategy – Flock size same regardless of lot**
  - A fixed number is used by 46 municipalities
- **No Size Limits - 15 municipalities adopted this strategy**

# The Step Function: Is it Truly Non-Commercial

Step Function Adds Chickens Beyond Non-Commercial Levels of Production	Number of Municipalities			
Chickens Allowed on 3-acre lot	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Grand Total
20 or less chickens	2	5	7	14
21 to 40 chickens	4	8	5	17
41 to 60 chickens	3	5	0	8
61 to 100 chickens	0	4	1	5
101 to 275 chickens	1	3	2	6
Grand Total	10	25	15	50

Allowing 20+ chickens enables egg production beyond home consumption. 50% of step function users are in suburbs





# Siting Decision Also Must Address Coop Size and Pasture Zone

- Only 12 municipalities have addressed the minimum space needs of the chicken coop on a square foot by hen basis
  - Space required widely varies from 1.6 square feet to 16 square feet per hen for chicken coop
- Only 5 have established minimum space needs for chicken pasture area that must be fenced in.
  - Space required varies from 10 square feet to 33 square feet per hen
- Significantly, 94 (85%) municipalities regulating backyard chickens are without guidance on appropriate flock health & habitability standards.



A photograph of a flock of chickens in a grassy field. There are four chickens visible: three are light brown or tan, and one in the center is black and white speckled. They are all facing towards the left. The background consists of a line of trees under a cloudy sky. The text "What Happens When a Flock of Chickens Crosses the Road?" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

# What Happens When a Flock of Chickens Crosses the Road?

Enclosures & Protections



# Free Range Chickens Common in Suburban and Rural Municipalities

Must Chickens Enclosure Area be Fenced?	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Grand Total
No	12	24	7	43
Yes	8	34	28	70
Grand Total	20	58	35	113

84% of municipalities allowing free range chickens are suburban or rural in character.

# Poultry Protection & the Public Good

## What is the Right Level of Zoning Oversight over Poultry Protection?

- Does poultry protection impact public health, safety and general welfare?
- If so, what is the public interest in this issue?

## Poorly Managed or inadequately Protected Chicken Coops

- Predators are attracted to chickens. What triggers predator interest
  - Inadequately protected chickens (no 360 enclosure)
  - Inadequately protected chicken feed
  - Inadequate sanitary standards and control of odors

## Controlling predators, odors & loud roosters is a public interest

# Zoning Techniques to Reduce Predators

Zoning Techniques to Reduce Predators and Off-Site Impacts of Chickens	Municipalities with Relevant Regulations
Setbacks for Manure from watercourses, property lines and/or off-site dwellings	30
Chicken Coop must be odor free and sanitary	27
Chicken food must be securely contained	14
Require manure and other waste to be disposed off site	8

Key takeaway: only 30 of 111 municipalities have adopted manure setbacks, manure odor standards, off-site disposal of manure and secure containment of chicken feed to discourage predators.



# Statutory Considerations



# Regulations for Backyard Egg Producers

**Sec. 22-47. Exemptions.** Producers selling eggs of their own producing direct to household users are exempt from the provisions of this part, provided such *eggs are cleaned to remove exterior debris, stored at an ambient air temperature of not greater than forty-five degrees Fahrenheit, are not adulterated and contain a label that is not false or misleading and that includes the: (1) Producer's name and address, (2) type of egg, if not chicken eggs, (3) quantity of eggs, and (4) safe food handling instructions.* All types of shippers selling eggs to a first receiver who will grade them into the proper size and grade before reselling are exempt from the provisions of this part.

(1949 Rev., S. 3083; P.A. 23-184, S. 8.)

# Are Chickens Considered Livestock in CT?

- Depends on how you interpret “**including**”. See below.
- CGS 1-1(q) “Except as otherwise specifically defined, the words "agriculture" and "farming" shall include cultivation of the soil, dairying, forestry, raising or harvesting any agricultural or horticultural commodity, including the raising, shearing, feeding, caring for, training and management of **livestock, including horses, bees, poultry**, fur-bearing animals and wildlife, and the raising or harvesting of oysters, clams, mussels, other molluscan shellfish or fish;”





# Can a Zoning Commission Have its own Definition of What Constitutes a Farm?



Yes



Under Section 1-1 (q) of the CT General Statutes: The term "farm" includes farm buildings, and accessory buildings thereto, nurseries, orchards, ranges, greenhouses, hoophouses and other temporary structures or other structures used primarily for the raising and, as an incident to ordinary farming operations, the sale of agricultural or horticultural commodities."



Section 1-1(q) of the Connecticut Statutes also indicates under the definition of farm: **"Nothing herein shall restrict the power of a local zoning authority under chapter 124."**

## Non-Commercial Chickens Governed by Step Function Define Farms Differently

- In 36 municipalities, a farm must meet a minimum lot size. On average these “farm” lot sizes are ten times larger than the minimum lot sizes required for backyard chickens.
- This reveals the degree to which backyard chickens are favorably treated in Connecticut.

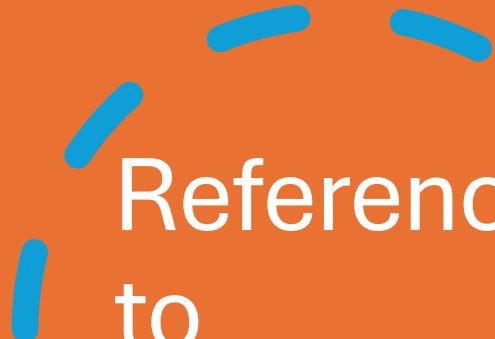
Mininum Lot Size to Qualify as Farm (Acres)	Municipalities Using Step Function
5	20
3	7
10	4
2	3
4.9	1
2.75	1
Not Specified	14
Grand Total	50



# Reliance on Guidance from Experts

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# References to Government Guidance is the Exception – Not the Rule

Only 33 of the 111 zoning commissions reference government standards, regulations or guidance pertinent to poultry matters.

The most cited references are as follows (total exceeds 33 due to multiple guidance documents cited by zoning commissions):

- Connecticut Health Department = 20
- CT Department of Agriculture & Environmental Protection = 16
- Connecticut General Statutes governing poultry = 5
- U.S. Department of Agriculture = 3
- Miscellaneous standards and regulations (Municipal and regional health codes, NRCS, UCONN Extension Service, Humane Society = 7



# Conclusions and Recommendations

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- **Manure Management:** Limited management of manure, wastewater, rooster noise and proper planning for hen houses and open areas.
- **Definition of What is a Non-Commercial Poultry farm:** Most municipalities that apply the step function to allocate poultry do so without considering what is a non-commercial use.
- **Rooster Management:** Only 46% of the zoning commissions that regulate non-commercial poultry prohibit them in all zones.
  - Rooster are not needed for egg laying and are a noise issue





# Conclusions and Recommendations

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- **Limit Use of Special Permit, Site Plan and zoning permit approvals:** 32% of non-commercial poultry uses require excessive zoning commission oversight.
  - Instead consider other approaches including required training, education, technical assistance and/or limits on maximum poultry appropriate in residential (non-farm) applications.
- **Establish appropriate fencing and enclosure regulations:** 38% of the non-commercial poultry regulations do not require fences.
- **Minimum space for chicken coops and outdoor pastures:** Only 17 municipalities have standards on space needed per bird for chicken coops and/or outdoor enclosures.



A photograph of three chickens in a grassy field. In the foreground, a light-colored chicken with a red comb is looking towards the left. Behind it, a darker chicken with a red comb is also looking left. To the right, another light-colored chicken with a red comb is looking towards the camera. The background shows a line of trees under a cloudy sky.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

- **Consider Referencing the Bio-Security Checklist in Zoning regulations:** Backyard chickens are not immune to avian diseases and homeowner guidance is in the public interest.
- **Address Homeowner Health Responsibilities:** 2023 CT Dept. of Agriculture law requires cleaning and temperature controls for backyard chickens.
- **Set minimum land requirements for commercial farms and noncommercial poultry use:** Standards on minimum farm size are distinct from minimum backyard chicken acreage. Zoning commissions are authorized to set such standards.

# Resources for Zoning Commissioners

- [10 Tips for New Poultry Owners: Promoting Healthy Flocks and Families, UCONN Extension Service.](#)
- [Small & Backyard Poultry](#)
- [How to Avoid Chicken Feed Storage Mistakes](#)
- [Space Allowances in Housing for Small and Backyard Poultry Flocks](#)
- [Avian Influenza Fact Sheet](#)
- Permitting and Regulating Backyard Chickens in Connecticut from a One Health Perspective, UCONN CLEAR (pending)
- Jaime Bouvier, How Cities are Responding to the Urban Agriculture Movement with Micro-Livestock Ordinances, The Urban Lawyer, Vol 47, No., 1, Winter 2015