

Chicken Ordinance Survey

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Introduction

In February 2010 students from Professor Hugh Bartling's class on Green Urban Policy interviewed staff members from over 20 municipalities throughout the country which have recently adopted ordinances allowing citizens to keep poultry in residential districts.

Cities were chosen from internet searches for media reports on chicken ordinances and lists compiled by the Evanston Backyard Chicken Group. The list of cities surveyed can be found in the appendix. Students were assigned specific cities to contact and administer an eight-question, open-ended response survey.

Respondents were comprised mainly of city staff members, although in a small number of isolated cases our respondents were elected officials. The cities are located throughout the country and have enacted poultry ordinances between 2005 and 2009.

The focus of the survey was on how the ordinances were implemented. Respondents were asked about enforcement issues, problems associated with violations and complaints, support given by the city to chicken owners, and overall assessment of the ordinance.

In general we found that most cities were satisfied with their ordinances, major complaints and infractions were rare, and the adoption of chicken ordinances have been looked upon positively.

Below we will detail the survey questions and summarize the answers. Although we surveyed 23 municipalities, not all cities chose to answer each question.

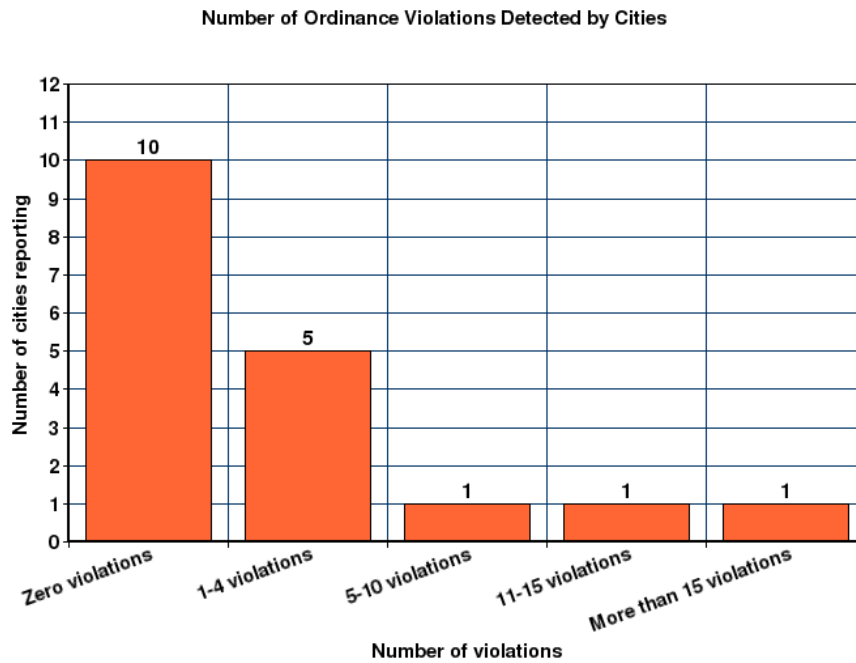
Q1 Have you seen problems with people abandoning chickens or them getting loose?

Of the 20 cities responding to this question, 17 indicated that chickens getting loose has not been a problem. The remaining three reported isolated instances of chickens getting loose. One city reported that the adoption of the ordinance actually reduced complaints since their ordinance requires chickens to be confined in coops.

Q2 How many violations of the ordinance has your community detected?

Of the 18 responses to this question, 10 reported no violations. Two cities reported one violation, two cities reported four violations, one city reported four violations, and one city reported twenty violations.

Two cities reported a range--between 12-15 in one case and between 5-10 in another.



Q3 How many complaints about chickens has the city seen since the ordinance was passed?

Of the 19 responses to this question, 13 reported 0-2 complaints. One said complaints were "rare." Two respondents reported between 5-10 complaints, and three single cities reported 12, 32, and 115 complaints.

One respondent indicated that their city sees more complaints about barking dogs than they do for chicken ordinance violations.

Q4 How is the ordinance enforced?

This question elicited many different answers, which is reflected by the fact that there is no uniformity amongst the various ordinances passed in each city.

Generally ordinance enforcement is complaint-driven with zoning officers, health inspectors, or animal control officers responding to citizen reports of potential violations. Of the 21 respondents to this question, five indicated that they require chicken keepers to apply for city-issued permits.

Likely due to the minimal number of complaints, enforcement has not been a major problem in any of the cities we surveyed.

Q5 Do you have any literature or information that you give to chicken owners about proper treatment of the birds?

Of the 21 respondents to this question, only three provided chicken care and treatment information. It was more common for cities to provide information on the specifics of their ordinances which pertain to coop structures and siting of coops.

Two cities refer chicken owners to community groups and internet sites for education material.

Q6. Since the ordinance was passed have there been any amendments? What was the nature of any amendments?

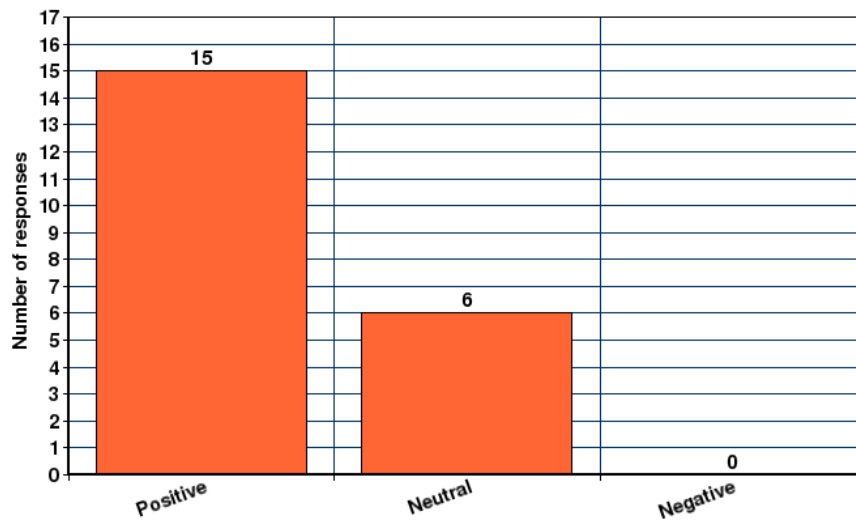
Of the 23 respondents to this question, only four cities reported amendments to their ordinances. In two of these cases, the cities had originally restricted chicken keeping to single-family homes and the revisions allowed the practice on lots that contained up to four housing units. One municipality expanded their ordinance to allow the raising of ducks and another simply reported "minor" amendments.

Q7 In your estimation has the adoption of a chicken ordinance been positive or negative for your city?

Of the 21 respondents to this question, fifteen reported that the ordinance has been "positive." Six respondents reported that the ordinance has been "neutral." No cities reported a "negative" experience.

In the open-ended responses to this question, some of the positive respondents reported that the ordinance helped promote sustainability in the community. Respondents who said it was "neutral" indicated that the ordinance brought many citizens into compliance with the law and that the rules served to relieve tension in the community.

Has the ordinance been positive, negative or neutral in your city?



Q8 Have there been any unanticipated issues that have emerged as a result of allowing residents to keep chickens?

This open-ended question elicited a variety of responses, although the vast majority indicated that there have been no unanticipated issues. One respondent indicated that many people wondered before the ordinance was passed how chicken-owners would deal with birds that no longer lay eggs. They found that most chicken owners treat their birds as pets and keep them as part of the family until their natural death.

Several respondents mentioned that the exclusion of roosters as pets and having a limit on the number of birds each resident could keep were important in insuring effective ordinances.

Appendix

Communities Surveyed

Ann Arbor, MI

Baraboo WI

Belmont, MA

Boise, ID

Bozeman, MT

Buffalo, NY

Duluth MN

Durham, NC

Eugene, OR

Fort Collins, CO

Gulfport, FL

Huntington, NY

Lawrence, KS

Madison, WI

Missoula, MT

Moab, UT

New Haven, CT

Portland, OR

South Portland, ME

St. Paul, MN

State College Borough,
PA

Wake Forest, NC

Ypsilanti, MI