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CURRENTS



A boy checks out one of Woodstock Farm's rescued goats in upstate New York.

Urban Homesteading's Dark Side

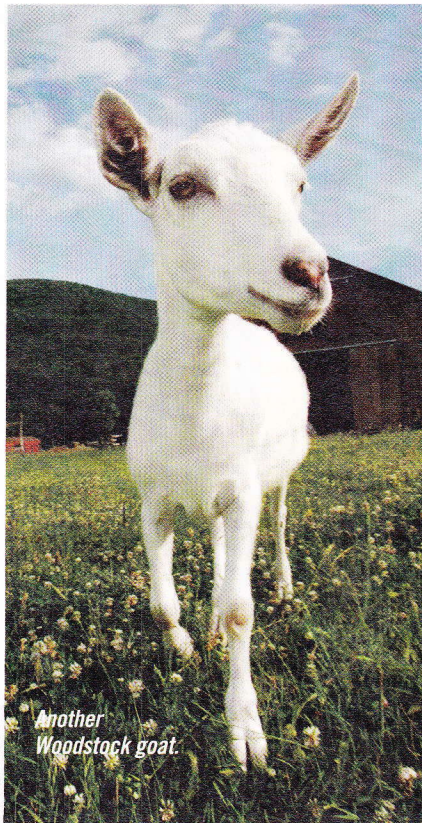
The Trend in Backyard Chickens and Goats has Left Rescues Overrun with Abandoned Livestock

BY JODI HELMER

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Wayne Geiger fields up to 10 calls per week about hens and roosters in need of new homes. When Geiger founded Lighthouse Farm Sanctuary (lighthousefarm sanctuary.com) in 2002, most of the calls he received involved horses, sheep and cattle that were victims of neglect or cruelty. There were almost no requests to help chickens. Geiger blames the increased demand on the popularity of urban farming.

"We get a lot of desperate calls, people scrambling to find homes for their unwanted hens and roosters," says Geiger, founder and president of the 54-acre rescue near Salem, Oregon. "It's become a huge problem."

For many urban agrarians, chickens and goats are the perfect addition to a



Another Woodstock goat.

backyard farm, providing eggs and milk to complement bumper crops of tomatoes and peas. But when the novelty of having a chirping chick wears off or adorable kids turn into grownup goats that eat the landscaping, the animals are often surrendered to rescue groups or abandoned.

A few weeks ago, Geiger got a call about 13 chicks just three weeks old and still featherless in a plastic container left beside a dumpster with a note that said, "Please love us." He rescued the birds. These kinds of calls are not uncommon, Geiger says. In fact, abandoned and unwanted chickens pose the biggest challenge for animal rescues.

Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary (WFAS, facebook.com/woodstockfarm), a 23-acre refuge in upstate New York that rescues, rehabilitates and cares for farm animals, has also seen a spike in the number of calls about chickens and

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roosters in need of homes.

“People get caught up in the trend without thinking about the responsibility,” says WFAS co-founder and director Jenny Brown.

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, Animal Care and Control has impounded more than 330 chickens since 2008. The staff relies on local rescue groups to provide foster care and facilitate adoptions of impounded chickens. Minneapolis-based Chicken Run Rescue (brittonclouse.com/chickenrunrescue) has seen a 780% increase in requests to rescue and place domestic fowl, including chickens.

Like most shelters, Minneapolis doesn't have the facilities to accommodate chickens that arrive at the shelter as strays or owner releases.



An escaped chicken in Los Angeles, California.

“Most urban shelters were not designed to house livestock,” says Stephen Zawistowski, Ph.D., executive vice president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. “The infrastructure isn't available in shelters and there are not a lot of res-

cue groups dedicated to helping farm animals.”

That includes sanctuaries to address the growing problem of unwanted goats in urban areas. Cities like Portland, Oregon, San Francisco, Seattle and Charlottesville, Virginia, allow residents to keep goats within the city limits. Other municipalities including Minneapolis and Northampton, Massachusetts, are attempting to overturn ordinances banning goats in urban areas.

“We are always concerned about these kinds of trends,” says Zawistowski. “What happens [to the goat] when its milk production slows? I'm not sure everyone who gets a goat for their backyard has thought these issues through.”

Noting that female goats need to be bred on a regular basis to produce milk,▶