

Urban Chicken Flocks in Los Angeles County, California, 2010

In 2010, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted the Poultry 2010 study. One objective of the study was to gather information on urban chicken flocks. Four large cities¹ were selected for inclusion in this urban chicken component of the NAHMS Poultry 2010 study.

Phase I of the urban chicken component involved administering a questionnaire to feed store customers in Denver, Los Angeles, and Miami. The questionnaire focused on bird health, movement, and biosecurity practices in urban chicken flocks. In New York City, Phase I questionnaires were completed by members of a chicken club rather than by feed store customers.

Due to resource limitations, only one metro area (Los Angeles County) was selected for Phase II of the urban chicken component. A random sample of Los Angeles County residents completed the Phase II of the questionnaire, which focused on ownership of chickens in Los Angeles County. Respondents also provided their opinions about raising chickens in urban settings, a growing phenomenon in the United States. Phase I and Phase II results for Los Angeles County are reported here.

Urban chicken ownership²

Urban chickens represent an avian population for which very little information is available. An understanding of the level of urban chicken ownership and the biosecurity practices used in these flocks could be important in the event of a disease outbreak such as avian influenza or exotic Newcastle disease. For the purpose of this information sheet, urban chicken flocks are defined as one or more chickens located in Los Angeles County and owned by families, individuals, or groups of individuals. These chicken flocks are not part of the commercial poultry industry; however, they sometimes provide chicken meat and eggs to local food systems, such as farmer's markets.

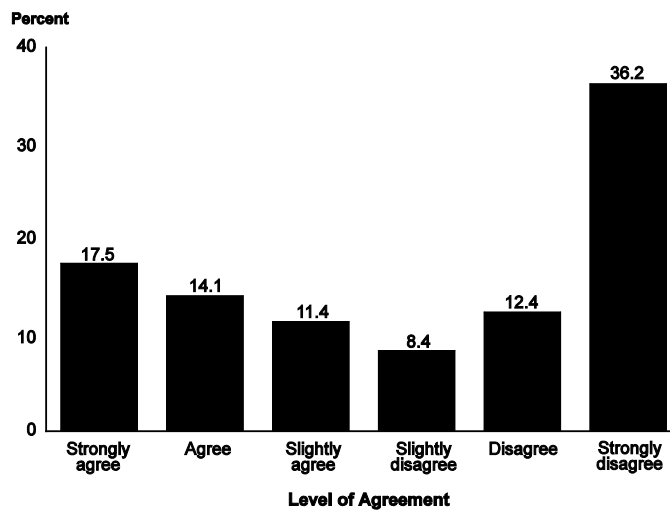
Overall, 1.2 percent of households in Los Angeles County owned chickens. It was speculated that single-family homes on 1 or more acres of land were likely located in the outskirts of cities rather than in truly urban areas. When single-family homes on 1 or more acres of land were excluded from the analysis, 1.0 percent of households in Los Angeles County owned chickens.

Respondents who did not have chickens were asked if they planned to own chickens in the next 5 years. Of households in Los Angeles County that did not currently have chickens, 4.6 percent planned to own chickens in the next 5 years.

Opinions about urban chickens^{2,3}

Overall, 43.0 percent of respondents slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that they were in favor of a law in their community that would allow chicken ownership, and 36.2 percent strongly disagreed.

Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents by Level of Agreement with the Statement, "I would be in favor of a law in my community that allows ownership of chickens."



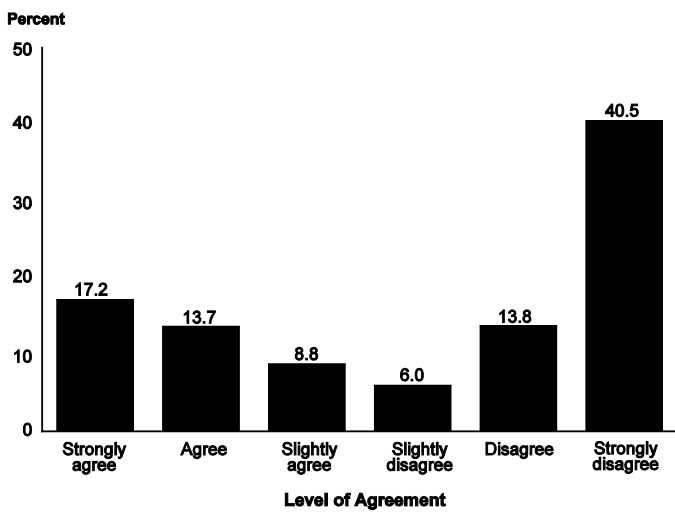
¹Denver, CO; Los Angeles, CA; Miami, FL; and New York City, NY.

²Results in this section from Phase II of the study.

³Results in this section represent respondents' opinions only and not those of APHIS.

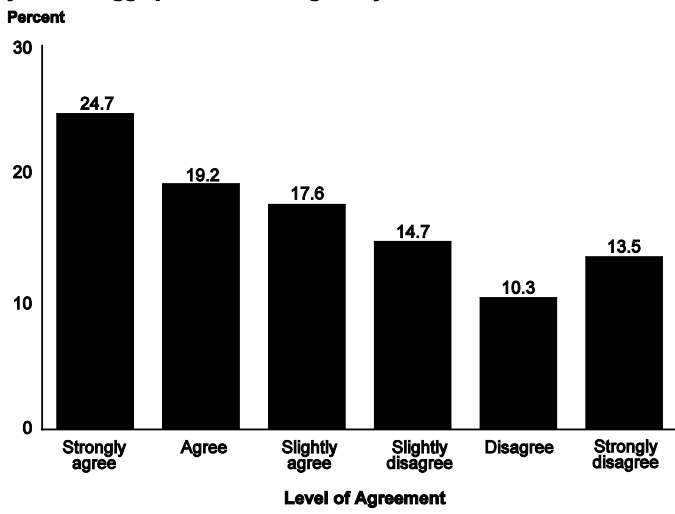
About 4 of 10 respondents (39.7 percent) slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that they would not mind if their neighbor owned chickens, while 40.5 percent strongly disagreed.

Figure 2. Percentage of Respondents by Level of Agreement with the Statement, “I would not mind if my neighbor owned chickens.”



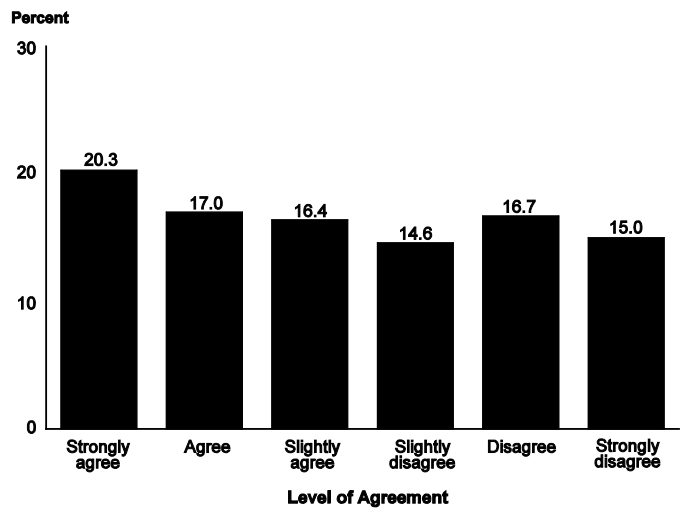
About 6 of 10 respondents (61.5 percent) were of the opinion (slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed) that eggs from home-raised chickens are better for you than eggs purchased at a grocery store.

Figure 3. Percentage of Respondents by Level of Agreement with the Statement, “Eggs from home-raised chickens are better for you than eggs purchased at a grocery store.”



About one-half of respondents (53.7 percent) slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that chickens in urban areas will lead to more illnesses in humans.

Figure 4. Percentage of Respondents by Level of Agreement with the Statement, “Chickens in urban areas will lead to more illnesses in humans.”



Biosecurity and bird movement⁴

Contact with wild birds could introduce disease into urban chicken flocks. Wild waterfowl were seen at least monthly in the usual chicken area (e.g., within 10 feet of the pen) for 16.3 percent of Los Angeles County flocks, and wild birds other than waterfowl were seen at least monthly for 40.3 percent of flocks. About 3 of 10 urban chicken flocks (31.9 percent) had a wild bird feeder at the location where the chickens were kept. Neighbors’ chickens (or other birds) were seen at least monthly in the usual chicken area for about one of three flocks (35.5 percent) [see table next page].

Bird movement into and out of urban chicken flocks in Los Angeles County was fairly common. About 4 of 10 flocks (40.8 percent) had acquired new chickens during the previous 12 months, and about 1 of 4 flocks (26.7 percent) had sold or given away chickens during the previous 12 months. Only 5.7 percent of flock owners had taken chickens to a location such as a fair or show where other birds were present and then returned them to their flocks during previous 12 months (see table next page).

⁴Results in this section from Phase I of the study.

Visitors can carry disease agents from one flock to another, especially if they do not change their clothing and footwear between visits. The majority of urban chicken flocks in Los Angeles County did not have any business or nonbusiness visitors enter the chicken area during the previous 12 months. Business visitors included veterinarians, extension agents, customers purchasing chicken products, bird dealer/buyer, meter reader, other service person, etc. Nonbusiness visitors included school groups, friends, neighbors, etc.

Biosecurity and movement characteristics of urban chicken flocks in Los Angeles County

Characteristic	Percent flocks
Had a wild bird feeder at location where chickens were kept	31.9
Respondent saw wild waterfowl in the usual chicken area at least monthly	16.3
Respondent saw wild birds other than waterfowl in the usual chicken area at least monthly	40.3
Respondent saw neighbor's chickens and/or other birds in the usual chicken area at least monthly	35.5
Acquired new chickens during the previous 12 months	40.8
Sold or gave away chickens during the previous 12 months	26.7
Took chickens to a location where other birds were present and then returned the chickens to the flock during the previous 12 months	5.7
Had business visitors enter chicken area during the previous 12 months	14.4
Had nonbusiness visitors enter chicken area during the previous 12 months	27.7

Summary

About 1 of 100 households in Los Angeles County (1.2 percent) owned chickens in 2010, and almost 1 of 20 households without chickens (4.6 percent) planned to own them in the next 5 years.

About 4 of 10 urban chicken flocks in Los Angeles County acquired new chickens during the previous 12 months, and about 4 of 10 saw wild birds other than waterfowl in the usual chicken area at least monthly.

To our knowledge, NAHMS Poultry 2010 marks the first time that the urban chicken population in the United States has been studied. This study has provided first insights into a population of chickens about which very little information is available. The information may be useful in the event of a disease outbreak such as avian influenza or exotic Newcastle disease.

Detailed results and methodology from Phase I (Feed Store study) for all four cities can be found in the publication "Poultry 2010: Reference of the Health and Management of Chicken Flocks in Urban Settings in Four U.S. Cities, 2010." Detailed results and methodology from Phase II (Los Angeles County) can be found in the publication "Poultry 2010: Urban chicken ownership in Los Angeles County, California, 2010." Both of these publications are available at <http://nahms.aphis.usda.gov>.

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