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In Protest of a 'Fowl' Regulation **By ELIZABETH CROSS**

A strong, thick shell; an odorless white; a golden-orange yolk that holds its shape when the egg is cracked -- it doesn't take a culinary genius to recognize a good egg. I hate it when I crack an egg and its papery shell shatters, letting the pale yellow yolk drip all over the bowl...and onto the kitchen counter...and the floor.... Eggs like that make me suspicious as to the actual benefit of eating anything from the refrigerated section of the supermarket. It is no surprise, then, that a growing number of Americans are taking matters into their own hands, raising their own animals for eggs, milk, and sometimes meat.

As almost anyone knows, home-growing foods is kinder to the Earth, is better for the animal, and provides an irreplaceable opportunity for the stressed citizen to commune with nature. Surely, every municipality must be rushing to embrace the comeback of this wholesome, eco-friendly tradition...Zoning Bylaws, Article II, Section 2.3, Provision 1: "Provided that no structures housing poultry are within 100 ft. of any street or property line." Provision 2: "Provided that such activities shall be located on parcels of more than five acres."

Or not. A couple quick calls to Town Hall informed me that these two provisions mean that, if you have under five acres of land, you can obtain a special permit to house poultry on your lot. However, the only areas of town where you can house poultry on under five acres are zones **Residential B** -- a lot with its own septic, like the dwellings near Royalston; and **Residential C**. The 100-foot clearance law still applies. A little quick math reveals that, in order to build a modest, 4X4 foot chicken coop and have 100 feet of clearance on all sides, your lot must be at least 0.96 acres -- but that's if your lot is a perfect square.

If you live on a rectangular or triangular lot, it would have to be significantly larger. How many people in Athol are so lucky as to have the magic lot size and layout? Compare this to Seattle, where, according to the Seattle Municipal Code, "Up to eight domestic fowl may be kept on any lot...Roosters are not permitted...Structures housing domestic fowl must be located at least 10 feet away from any structure that includes a dwelling unit on an adjacent lot." It is easier to raise laying hens in a bustling, ultramodern metropolis than in a traditionally agrarian community in a quiet, secluded area of west-central Massachusetts? I fail to see the logic in this.

The only reason I can conceive of for any town to leave on its books such insane poultry regulations as Athol has is that they don't want to be inundated with noise

complaints about roosters. Roosters don't lay eggs; **chickens** do. As the Seattle laws suggest, you don't need a rooster for a small, backyard flock.

Perhaps one of the reasons for these regulations was to promote Athol as an industrial-minded town. Is that really what we want for Athol? Dependence on multinational corporations who could outsource their operations to China any day now?

I am reminded, as I write, of the episode of The Andy Griffith Show where Mayberry was selected as the shooting location for a movie. Though the film producer was taken in by the rustic charm of the community, the townfolk scrambled to modernize their simplistic town. In their zeal, they foolishly began erasing all vestiges of their culture, up to the climax, when they almost chopped down their most cherished monument, the beloved old tree that grew in the town square.

Athol is not a competitive jobs-market. We can never out-city the cities, and it's high time we learn that. Our strength isn't in our manufacturing sector; it's in our agrarian roots, our beautiful forests' ecotourism potential, and our small-town spirit.

Elizabeth Cross is a 15-year-old, whose goal is to raise awareness to the plight of the small-time organic farmer.