

Urban Livestock in Oakland

Highlights from a Preliminary Survey of Ownership and Management Practices

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Highlights from a Preliminary Survey
of Ownership and Management Practices

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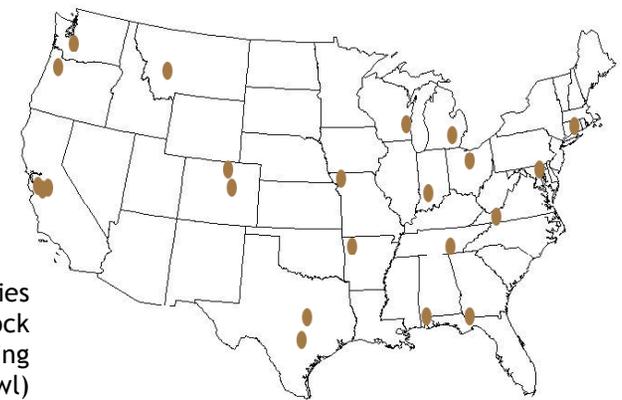
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As public interest in urban agriculture spreads rapidly across the country, city officials are attempting to amend outdated municipal codes to reflect this growing trend. In many cities, planners are updating zoning codes to reflect changing land uses and activities, including the production and sale of agricultural products and the keeping of urban livestock such as chickens, geese, ducks, goats, pigs, rabbits, and bees. Over 20 US cities (including Cleveland, San Antonio, Kansas City, and Seattle) have recently passed ordinances to support and regulate the keeping of urban livestock. A zoning update for urban agriculture in Oakland is currently underway.

A handful of recent studies have examined the implementation and impacts of these policies, as well as how municipalities have navigated tensions associated with allowing livestock in cities.¹ Findings show that ordinances allowing urban livestock have neither led to an increased burden on city services, nor an increase in the volume of complaints.²

Nevertheless, some basic questions remain about the actual practices of urban dwellers keeping livestock as pets and/or sources of food. Our June 2011 survey of 134 respondents from across the United States – including 36 from Oakland – seeks to provide a snapshot of what urban livestock ownership and management “looks like” in Oakland and the 48 other cities represented in the survey, 11 of which have undergone recent ordinance updates to regulate livestock. The survey answers some of these questions.³



Twenty-two U.S. cities have livestock ordinances (all allowing fowl)

Who is keeping livestock in Oakland?

Survey results suggest that urban livestock keepers in Oakland are a stable population providing permanent homes to their animals. Seventy-five percent of Oakland respondents own the property where they keep their animals, 97% of whom reside on this same property. Seventy-two percent of respondents house their animals on lots of 4,900 sq ft or less.

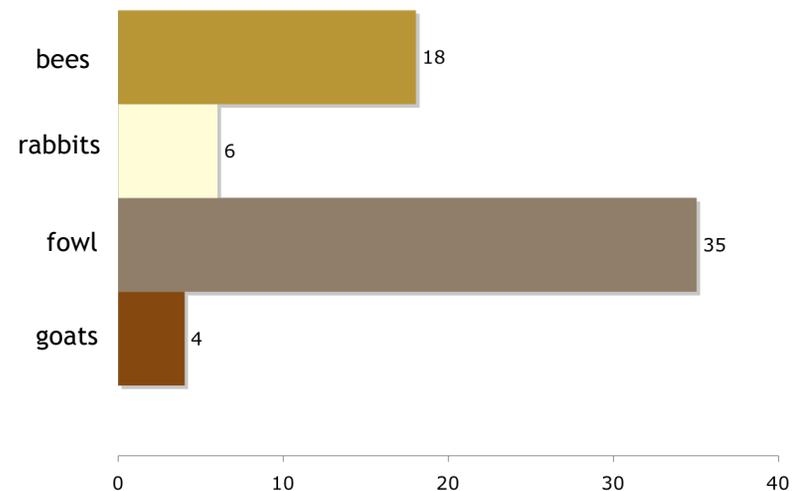
The overwhelming majority (89% in Oakland) of respondents keep livestock for a better source of food. Responses underscore widespread concern over the quality, safety, and environmental costs of commercially available food, as well as to the freedom to choose where one's food comes from and how it is produced.⁴



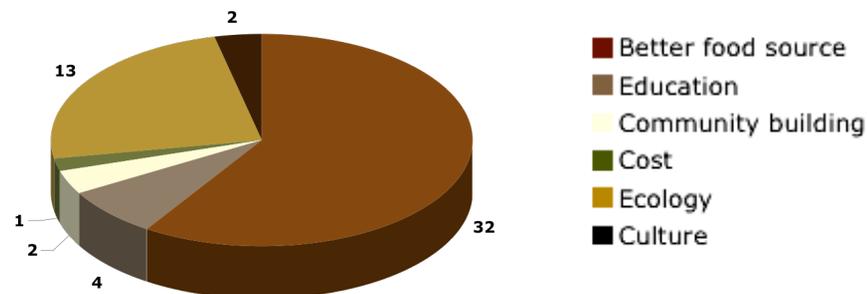
What kinds of animals do people keep and how many?

Respondents predominantly keep fowl and honey bees. More specifically, Oakland respondents keep chickens and other small fowl (50 to 60%), 50% keep bees, fewer keep rabbits (6%) and even fewer keep goats (4%). In both Oakland and nationally, goat owners keep 2-3 goats on average, small fowl owners keep 4-8 birds, rabbit owners keep 1-3 rabbits, and beekeepers have 1-2 hives.

Livestock Type and Frequency



Reason for Raising Livestock



What kind of shelters and pens do they keep their animals in?

Findings suggest that livestock owners provide humane conditions for their animals, including adequate space and structurally sound shelters. Over half keep animals shelters 16 feet or more away from dwellings. Of the 35 Oakland respondents who reported what kind of materials they use for shelters, 27 use wood, 12 use wire, and 1 uses tarp. Respondents were also asked what they considered healthy living space for the animals they keep per animal type. In Oakland, 59% of respondents keeping fowl provide 5 or more square feet per bird. Oakland respondents most commonly keep 1-3 rabbits between 2-3 sq ft per rabbit and 4-5 sq ft per rabbit. For goats in the Oakland and nationally, most kept 2 to 3 goats in a 100-150 sq ft are per goat.



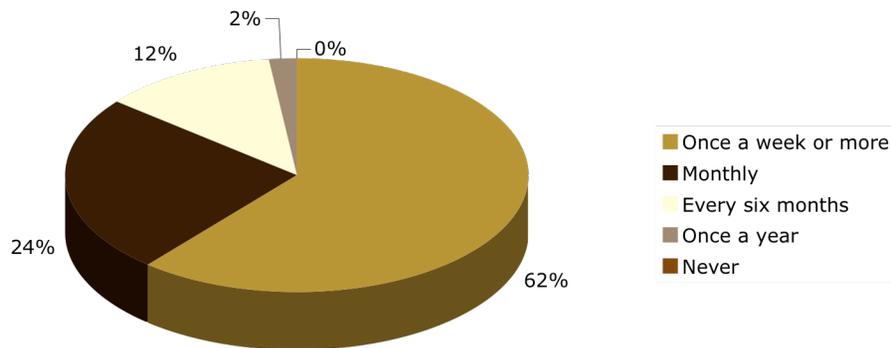
Average Response to “Healthy Space Needed for Animals”

Number of Animals	Living Space
2-3 goats	100-150 sq ft/goat
4-8 birds	5 sq ft or more/bird
1-3 rabbits	4-5sq ft/rabbit

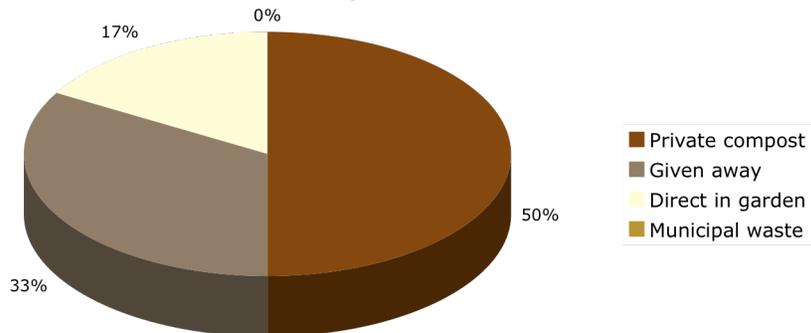
How often do people clean their animal coops or pens?

In Oakland, a third of respondents clean animal pens and coops weekly, a third clean them monthly, and slightly less than a third (31%) clean them every other day (31%). These are similar to U.S. averages: once a week (43%), once a month (28%), and every other day (28%). All Oakland respondents that keep their animal feed outside keep it in containers with lids, a measure which deters rodents.

Frequency of Cleaning



Disposal of Manure



What do people do with the manure?

When asked if they have excess manure, 81% of Oakland respondents reported no and 19% reported yes, mirroring national responses. Respondents who reported having excess manure were asked to describe what they do with it. Of the 7 Oaklanders who responded, 6 compost it, 4 give it away, and 2 place it directly in the garden. Of the 27 U.S. respondents, 22 compost it, 10 give it away, 6 place it directly in the garden, and 2 use municipal waste to dispose of it.

Metal feed containers



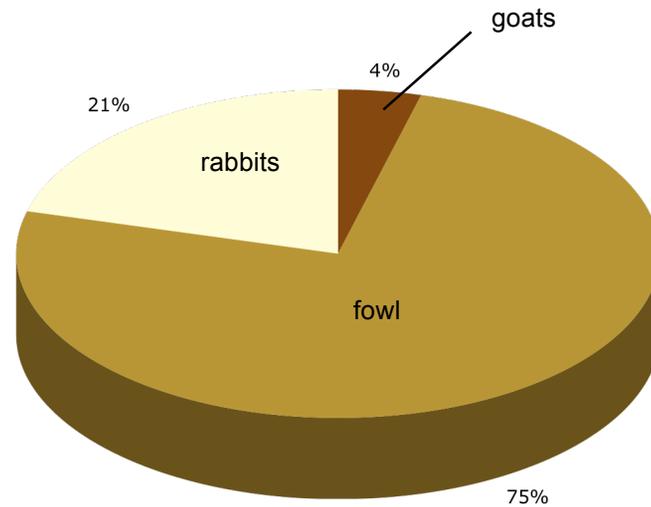
Compost container



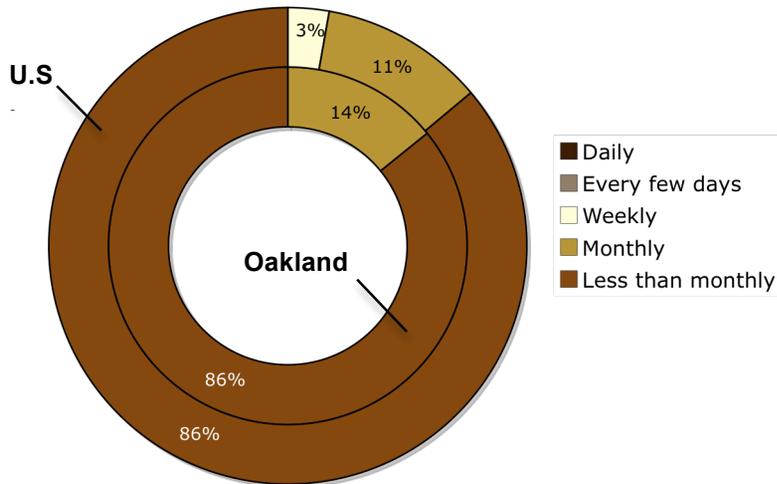
Do people eat the animals they raise?

Forty-four percent of the 36 Oakland respondents process meat onsite, 28% of 134 U.S. respondents process meat onsite. In Oakland, 86% of respondents who process meat do so less than once a month and 11% do so monthly. The majority (roughly 80%) in Oakland process fowl (chickens and turkeys) and the remainder process rabbits and goats. These statistics mirror national responses. Nationally, 44% of respondents who processed their own meat reported eating meat less frequently and the same number ate the same amount as before. In Oakland, 20% ate less meat, and 67% ate the same amount as before. Forty-four percent of Oakland respondents reported that their neighbors are supportive of their onsite meat processing. Some even reported neighbors assisting. None of the neighbors complained. Thirty-three percent reported there were no perceived impacts on neighbors. Only 35% of respondents reported they would purchase meat from standard grocery stores if they could no longer process their own.

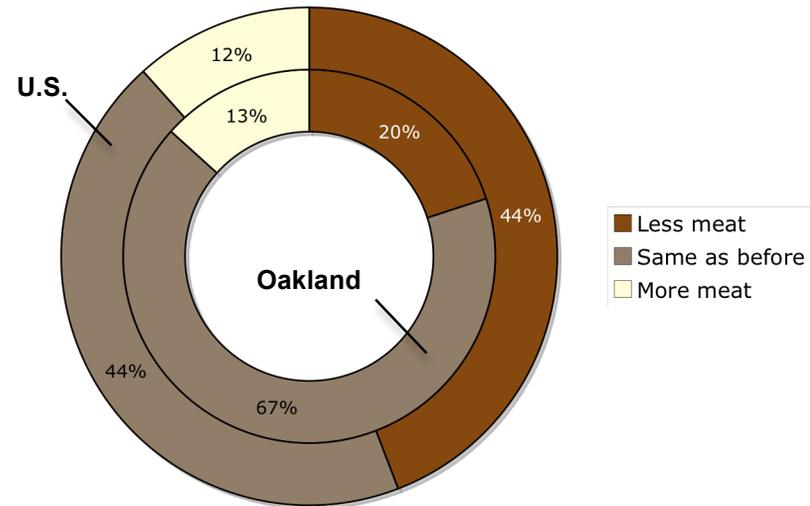
Type of Meat Processed



Frequency of Meat Processing



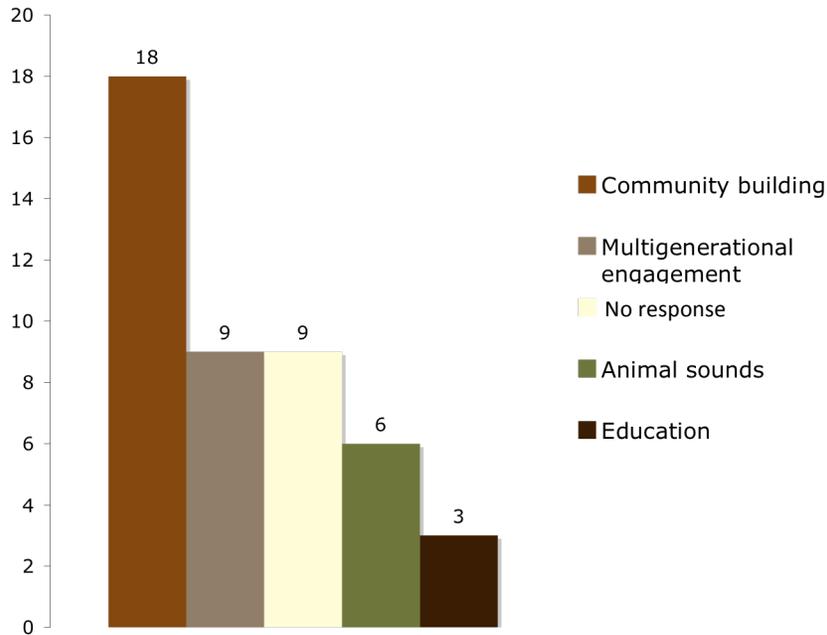
Frequency of Meat Eating



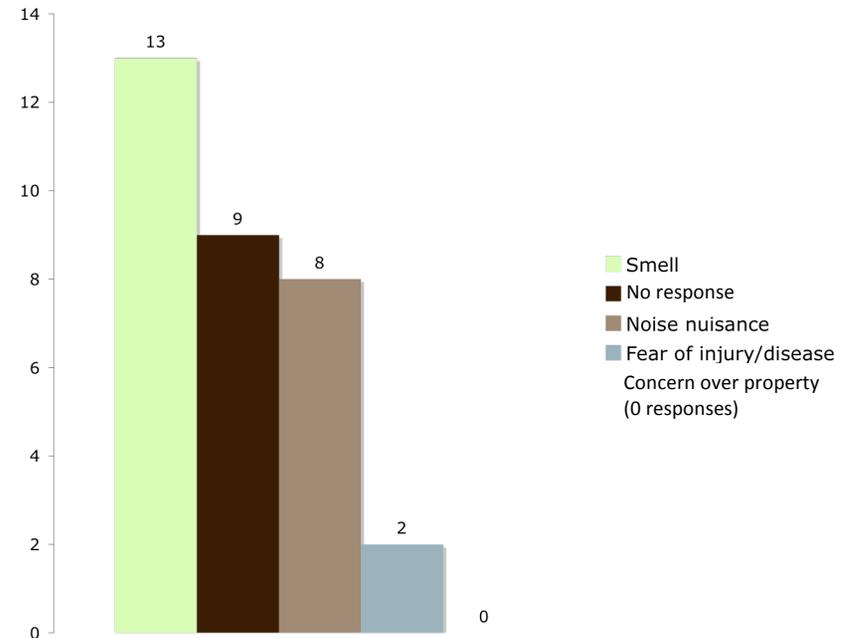
What is the impact on the neighborhood?

Of the 36 Oakland based respondents, 50% reported the benefits of community-building. This is consistent with the findings of extensive research that showed a trend of community building with urban livestock keepers getting to know neighbors and sharing knowledge, space, and meals.⁵ Twenty-five percent reported the benefits of multigenerational engagement, 8% the benefits of education. Another 17% felt that sound was another possible impact, though several specified that the sounds of livestock were no greater in volume or frequency than typical urban sounds. Slightly more than half of Oakland respondents (53%) reported taking proactive steps to mitigate negative impacts on neighbors. No substantial harm to neighbors or neighboring property was reported, in Oakland or elsewhere. None of the Oakland respondents had surrendered their animals to city services.

Impacts on Neighbors: Positive



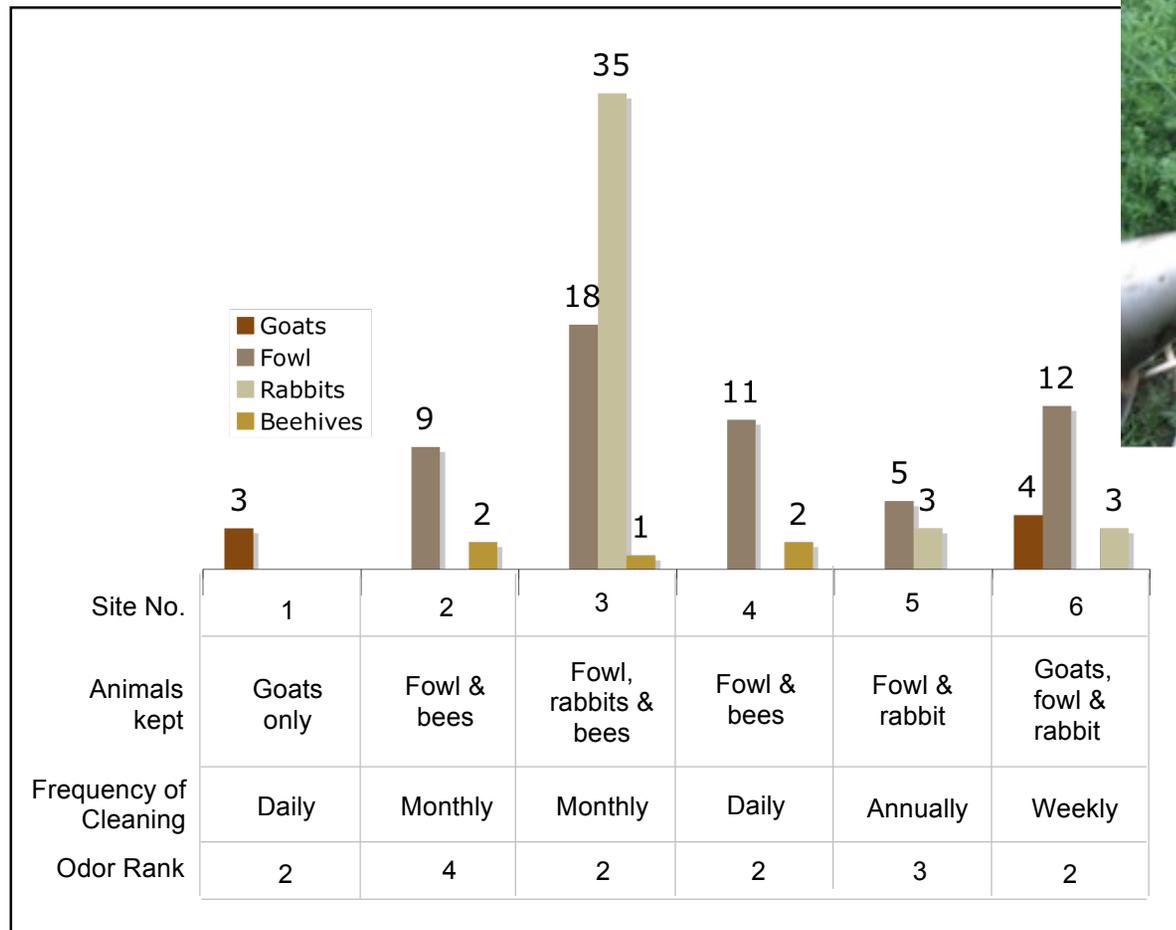
Impacts on Neighbors: Negative



Have their neighbors complained?

When asked if a neighbor had ever filed a complaint against them for keeping livestock, over 80% of Oakland respondents reported that they had never had a neighbor complain about their animals. Of the six respondents that reported having neighbor complaints, 3 reported complaints over noise (in two of these cases, the noise was caused by roosters which are actually illegal in Oakland). In addition to noise, other neighbor complaints included pests, odors, and fear of injury/disease. Respondents were asked to rank the degree of odor that emits from their livestock areas, where 1 is odorless and 10 is noxious and distracting. Sixty-one percent of Oakland respondents ranked the odor at 2, 19% ranked the odor as 1, and 14% ranked the odor at 3.

Animal Type, Number & Odor Rank for Sites Receiving Complaints



While the practice of keeping urban livestock in Oakland has increased over the last five years, it is by no means a new phenomenon. Historically, urban livestock, like other forms of urban agriculture, was an integral presence in many American households, providing city dwellers not only with companionship, but also with food and income, particularly during periods of economic hardship.⁶ The resurgence of urban livestock ownership in recent years, however, is largely due to growing public concern over the detrimental impacts of the industrial agri-food system on the environment and human health. Under the dominant industrial model (“factory farming”), animals are raised in confinement with little room to move around, never seeing sunlight. These crowded conditions lead to outbreaks of disease, requiring heavy doses of antibiotics. High concentrations of waste result in air and water pollution and outbreaks of *E. coli* and other pathogens. In addition to the inhumane treatment of the animals, such operations are detrimental to the physical and mental health of workers. Furthermore, the industrial agri-food system hides these grim realities of egg, meat, and milk production from urban consumers.⁷

The majority of urban livestock keepers are seeking a “better food source”, an alternative to the industrial agri-food system. They believe that the honey, eggs, milk and meat they produce are of higher quality, safer and more humane. They have also discovered that keeping urban livestock fosters conversation and community, strengthening relationships with neighbors.

This exploratory research reveals that urban livestock owners in Oakland and across the US are conscientious and proactive in the care of their animals. They mitigate possible negative impacts on neighbors and on the animals. They provide their animals with permanent homes and standards of care that exceed existing California welfare laws. They do not burden the city with complaints or animal control.



To conclude, urban livestock bring myriad economic, social, and ecological benefits to Oakland residents and are an integral part of a sustainable food system. We hope that the City of Oakland will take note of the findings in this report and will continue to allow its residents the freedom to make productive use of their property and access fresh healthy and humane food.

Notes and References

¹ Butler, W. 2011. Welcoming Animals Back to the City. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, & Community Development* (forthcoming).

² LaBadie, KT. 2008. Residential Urban Chicken Keeping: An Examination of 25 Cities. University of New Mexico; DePaul University Chicken Ordinance study (www.eatwhereulive.com/chicken_ordinance_report.pdf);

³ The 36-question survey was sent to urban livestock owners in Oakland and across the US via email and list-serves (Community Food Security Coalition, Illinois Local Food and Farms Coalition, Institute of Urban Homesteading and Bay Area Homestead Hook Up) using a snowball sampling method.

⁴ See Schlosser, E. 2005. *Fast Food Nation*; Pollan, M. 2007. *The Omnivore's Dilemma*; Patel, R. 2008. *Stuffed and Starved*.

⁵ Blecha, J.L. 2007. Urban life with livestock: Performing alternative imaginaries through small-scale urban livestock agriculture in the United States. PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota.

⁶ Ibid.; McClintock, N. 2010. Why farm the city? *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy, and Society*

⁷ Imhoff, D. (ed). 2010. *The CAFO Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories*.

Resources and Links

- [Oakland Food Policy Council \(oaklandfood.org\)](http://oaklandfood.org)
- [City Slicker Farms \(cityslickerfarms.org\)](http://cityslickerfarms.org)
- [Bay Localize \(baylocalize.org\)](http://baylocalize.org)
- [East Bay Urban Agriculture Alliance \(eastbayurbanag.org\)](http://eastbayurbanag.org)
- [Sustainable Economies Law Center \(selc.org\)](http://selc.org)
- [Pluck & Feather \(pluckandfeather.com\)](http://pluckandfeather.com)
- UrbanFood.org

