

Popularity of raising chickens spreading to neighborhoods

By Ben Miller, Reno Gazette-Journal

When Julie Peterson's children asked her if they could have a pet eight years ago, she didn't just want a cute critter to pet. She wanted a pet that would give back.

She came home with chickens.

"I thought they'd be utilitarian," the Galena resident said.

And utilitarian they are: Today, Peterson's flock of more than 100 chickens, about 25 ducks and two geese yield 15 to 20 eggs per day. Besides having a steady supply of eggs to cook with, Peterson trades them to friends, neighbors and coworkers. Her family regularly enters the birds into show competitions for prize money and has raised two to be eaten. The chickens eat her weeds, clear bugs from her yard and leave fertilizer on the ground. They also chow down on scraps from her kitchen and the hospital where she works.

"I probably take home 20 pounds of green garbage a week that I give to my chickens," Peterson said. "And they love it."

Though she lives in Reno, Peterson is hardly alone when it comes to raising poultry.

While Nevada doesn't see quite as many chicken enthusiasts as California and the eastern half of the country, the chicken culture is growing – fast.

"It's new, it's growing and it's growing rapidly," Peterson said.

For example, Peterson belongs to the Northern Nevada Poultry Fanciers Association, which involves about 20 families spread across Northern Nevada and parts of California, she said. When she got involved with the group five years ago, the organization got about five inquiries a year about raising chickens. These days, the association is more likely to get five inquiries a month.

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