

# Chicken Keeping at the UW Farm

A Handbook for Student Farmers



The University of Washington Farm

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*First Edition, 2016*

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# Chickens on the Farm

The UW Farm is a student run farm at the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture. Founded by UW students in 2005, the UW Farm has been growing fresh produce for the UW community for over a decade. Now, the UW Farm is welcoming our first flock of hens in recent years. These chickens are an essential part of our farm system, providing the farm with nutrient rich manure, pest control, soil improvement, and of course fresh eggs.

This handbook was developed by UW student farmers and the farm managers to act as an all-encompassing guide to taking care of the UW Farm chickens.

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[This handbook is a work in progress, and will be revised and built upon once the logistical details of the UW Farm's hen program are figured out. This handbook should also be updated as new student projects involving the chickens take place on the farm.]

The UW Farm

# Our Coop

*and how to maintain it*



Our coop was created by Ballard based coop designer Berg Danielson of Saltbox Designs. It is essentially a teardrop trailer, designed to be moved easily around the farm to provide the chickens with fresh foraging ground and nourish the soil. This section of the handbook will provide you with the basic information on how to care for our neat little coop.

# Cleaning the Coop

## *“Health sticks to clean chicks”*

One of the most important things we can do for our coop is keep it clean. Not only will this help keep the coop fresh and in use for many years to come, it will help protect our chickens from illness and better their quality of life. Barring any majorly messy event, our coop should really only need a total cleaning once a year, in the spring time. However, there is still regular cleaning that needs to happen to keep things optimal for healthy birds.

The waterer and feeder will need to be cleaned regularly, because the chickens will be interacting with them many times a day every day. Chickens tend to scratch dirt, feathers, bedding, poop, and whatever else lands on the floor of their coop, into their water and food trays, so thoroughly rinsing those out (and completely drying the feeder) will be a regular part of coop maintenance. Use the hose to spray off the mess and then let the feeder dry out before you refill it with food. Refilling the feeder while it is wet can cause the food to mold or become very stuck to the feeder, which will just make it harder to clean later.

During the coop's spring cleaning, we will need to disinfect the coop, using bleach and hot water. The ratio is **1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of hot water**, do not use any more bleach than this in your mixture, or it may be harmful to the chickens. Remove all of the bedding, manure, perches, eggs, chickens, etc., then spray this solution on the feeders, waterers, perches, nest boxes, and walls and let it all air dry. This will get rid of nearly all of the harmful bacteria that builds up over the year.

# Collecting Eggs

*they're gonna be some of the best eggs you've had*

The eggs that our chickens lay will need to be collected regularly, otherwise they could fall prey to rats, rodents, snakes, or other critters. They may also be cannibalized by the chickens if they've got beef with each other, so make sure you collect all eggs when caring for the hens. One of the perks of taking care of the chickens is that you get to share in the bounty of their eggs! If you've cared for the coop, please take home some eggs! But please don't hoard all of the eggs, leave some for other farmers to enjoy. The rest of the eggs should go into a carton and stored in the designated egg area. **Before you enjoy some of our hen's eggs, please give them a good wash.** Chickens lay eggs from their cloaca, which is also where they excrete all of their waste, so a nice rinse before cooking up your egg is a good idea.

# Bedding

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Bedding will need to be replaced in the nest boxes semi-regularly. **Bedding needs to be changed immediately when it gets wet**, otherwise it will mold. Fresh bedding can be added on top of dry older bedding for a while (no more than 3 months), which will make a comfortable and warm nest box for the hens, but eventually, all of the bedding should be cleared out and replaced. Wood shavings make for excellent bedding and should be kept fluffy and dry to maintain it's insulating properties.



# Storage

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All of the feed and bedding materials should be stored in a secure, dry space that prevents pests and water from getting inside. We have a large metal box, located near the coop, that will hold all of our feed. It should be locked and you can get the code from the farm manager. This box will protect the feed from rats, raccoons, strange humans, and the elements, ensuring that food doesn't spoil or go to waste. Please ensure that the storage box is closed and secured before you finish caring for the coop for the day.

You can find any tools you may need in the main farm building, which will need to be unlocked by the farm manager, using the labeled **F4795**. **If you are a regular volunteer, you may ask the farm manager for a copy of the key.** Any tools used should be cleaned using the wire brushes and disinfected with bleach water spray before being stored, to prevent rust and wear.

# Coop Care Checklist

Please make sure the following is completed before you wrap up caring for the coop.

- Check the coop for any obvious damages and report any to the farm manager
- Ensure all waterers and feeders are operational
- Make sure there is an adequate amount of bedding for the chickens
- Collect all eggs
- Make sure storage boxes are packed up and locked, and any tools used are properly stored

The UW Farm

# Our Chickens

*and how to care for them*



note: not actually our chickens

## General Information

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During the initial run of the UW Farm's new chicken program, we plan on keeping 15 hens in our coop, which'll be rotated on different fields throughout the seasons to keep things interesting for our ladies and to nourish the soil of our entire field. The chickens will provide all sorts of ecosystem services to the UW Farm by scratching at the soil, eating pests, fertilizing the fields, and helping reduce our green waste.



# Water!

## *hydrate or die*

Without a doubt, water is the most crucial thing our chickens must have. Especially in the summer months, our chickens will need to have a constant supply of fresh water. It is very possible for chickens, especially young chickens, to die if they go more than a day without water, especially when it's hot out. If you are tending for the chickens, use the hose (located near the wash station) to refill their waterer. *Make sure you refill the chicken's water supply before you are done caring for them for the day.*

# Feeding Time

## *hungry hungry hens*

After water, the most important thing you need to provide our birds is feed. Our gals are hungry ladies, and they need feed to supplement their foraging. They'll be able to scrounge up insects and grass on their own once they're out of the coop, but we also need to provide them with feed. The feed is located in the metal storage box, mentioned earlier in the handbook. Unlock the box and add feed to their feeder. There will be differing feed amount for the different stages of the hens' lifecycle, so make sure to check in with the farm manager about what to feed and how much of it to give to our chickens. If you notice signs of pests or mold in the feed, please contact the farm manager. The feed isn't cheap, so please be careful with it as well, and try to avoid grossly overfeeding the hens.

# Bedtime

*ZZZZ*

While our chickens will be able to roam within the confines of the field during the day, they will need to be secured in their coop at night, to keep them safe from predators. They will naturally head into the coop in the evening, so on most occasions, putting them to bed is really just a matter of locking the door behind them. Sometimes however, a chicken won't be in the coop at bedtime, and in that case it's your job to wrangle the chicken and deposit them safely in the coop. Be gentle with the chickens, and make sure you are supporting their body weight when you carry them, and never lift them by the wings.

# Predators and Safety

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If you are caring for the chickens and you notice that one or more are missing, look around the entire area of the coop for signs of predation. This can include, a dead chicken, a pile of feathers, chicken parts, or animal tracks within the enclosure. In the event that a hawk or eagle managed to grab one of our chickens, there likely won't be signs of predation, as the eagle will most likely will just carry off the chicken. If you find any of these signs or a missing bird, contact the farm manager immediately.

# Injury, Illness, and Death

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Unfortunately, some of our chickens will inevitably get injured or die. It's a reality of farm life, but not the end of the world. Please refer to the ICE page at the end of the handbook for the contact information of the Farm Manager, who should be your first call if you find a chicken that has been injured or killed. HOWEVER, if there is a dangerous situation on the farm that has led to the death or injury of a chicken, DO NOT attempt to intervene in the situation. Call the UW Police (911) immediately and get somewhere safe. If you notice a *fowl* smell, take a look around for an injured or deceased hen.

While you are caring for our chickens, give them all of look-over and check them for any obvious signs of injury, disease, or distress. Check for things like limping, keeping one or both eyes shut, holding a wing out at a strange angle, and any limbs or body parts that appear obviously broken, bleeding, or infected. If you notice any of these signs of injury or illness, contact the farm manager immediately.

(Yes, this is the saddest section of the handbook.)

The UW Farm

# General Care Checklist

Here are some general tasks that you should be sure to complete when caring for our chickens:

- Say hello to the chickens
- Let the chickens out of the coop (if you're the first to visit them that day)
- Make sure all birds are accounted for
- Check the birds for obvious signs of injury and illness
- Refill water supply
- Feed the chickens
- Lock up the chickens in their coop for the night (If you're the last to visit them that day)

The UW Farm

# In Case of Emergency & Contact Information

*who you gonna call?*

In the unlikely event of a chicken related emergency, do not hesitate to call for help.

If the emergency is life threatening or dangerous, call 911 before anybody else, the UW Police will respond. For issues that are not necessarily immediately life threatening, still call 911, but **if you are calling from a cell phone you need to ask to be directed to the UWPD and tell them you are at the Center for Urban Horticulture.**

For non life threatening emergencies or issues, contact the Farm Manager. This can include an injured chicken, vandalism of the coop, theft of chickens or supplies, wild animals on the farm, or any scenario in which you think the safety of the farmers or chickens could be at risk. Do not approach any wild animals on the farm, even if they are threatening the chickens. We can always raise more chickens, but we can't un-give you rabies from a raccoon.

Sarah Geurkink, Farm Manager  
(206) 550-4169

Seattle Animal Control  
(206) 386 - 7387



# The UW Farm

# Work Schedule Template

*Team work makes the dream work*

[illegible]