

# Chickens in the Park

The time is overdue for the Parks Department to look a few gift horses, cows and chickens in the mouth—or more specifically, to face up to the gift-giving facts of the proposed children's farm in Prospect Park. Ostensibly, the Department has adopted a policy of no longer accepting gifts that represent a greater expense to the city than to the donor. The decision is one of simple common sense in a city so short of funds that its unsolved operational and human crises have become a permanent way of life.

The farm involves a well-publicized gift of \$90,000, to which the city must add the far greater amount of \$137,923, and carry maintenance costs of about \$95,000 a year, destined inevitably to rise with time, only part of which would be defrayed by admissions. The sum to be spent by the city would, in the first year alone, amount to almost three times the size of the gift.

This does not mean that we are against children, cows, chickens or the pleasures of a bit of bucolic make-believe. What we are against is a gift that is not a gift, but a financial liability disguised as a gift; and no amount of Mother Goose sentiment can fairly call it anything else. In recent years, through lack of funds, some of the finest historic urban landscape design in the world has been allowed to turn into sylvan slums.

Even if all the funds for the farm, including an endowment for upkeep, were in hand, as it should be, questions of policy and priority would remain. As things stand now, what the well-intentioned donors are giving the city is a large bill, with their name prominently attached, that will turn those cows and chickens into a permanent white elephant.