

The Geneva Egg Co-op: A Business Plan

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Executive Summary

The Geneva Egg Co-op is a new and exciting project being organized by Jeff Henderson. Based on the Zenger Farm Co-op in Portland, OR, this egg co-op will be comprised of a group of dedicated individuals who will share the responsibilities and rewards of caring for laying hens. Each member of the co-op will be responsible for a shift to take care of the hens. The eggs that the hens lay will be distributed equally among these members. However, the idea of an egg co-op has more value than just an alternative source of eggs. An egg co-op is an

opportunity for community engagement, education and sustainable practices. By participating in an egg co-op, a member has a chance to be more involved in community unity, sustainability and he/she will learn about animal care. A project like this also has the potential to open up pathways for more ideas that involve sustainable practices and community cooperation. Therefore, an egg co-op will be a valuable asset to the Geneva Community.



Business Description & Vision

Mission Statement: The mission of the Egg Co-op is to provide a medium for community engagement, education and sustainable practices through the cooperative care of a flock of laying hens. Through cooperation, the Egg Co-op fosters unity, commitment, and collaboration. Through the Egg Co-op, a group of committed individuals can not only participate in a local, sustainable form of urban-type agriculture, but also provide a venue for community involvement and education. The educational aspect of the Egg Co-op can be valuable to children and adults alike in learning about agriculture, sustainable practices, animal care and cooperation.

Vision/Goals: The vision of this Egg Co-op is to apply the aspects of the mission statement in a practical way. The short-term goals of the cooperative are to successfully house and raise a group of laying hens in order to provide a share of eggs to the working members of the cooperative. Future goals include incorporating other educational and sustainable aspects into the Co-op's activities. Educational aspects include providing "tours" or other activities for



schools and after school programs to allow children to learn about animal care as well as cooperation. Sustainable aspects include gardening, composting, beekeeping, alternative energy use and rainwater catchment. The Overall goal of the implementation of the Egg Co-op is that it will provide the Geneva community an outlet for community engagement, cooperation and sense of unity. This will lead not only to the possibility of enlarging the scale of this co-op to include more members (and more hens!) but to also start the ball rolling on cooperative and sustainable practices. The operation of this Egg Co-op could serve as a template for other egg co-ops and other agricultural co-op plans.

History: Jeff Henderson has acted as the community organizer in the plan to start the Geneva Egg Co-op. The inspiration for an Egg Co-op in Geneva came from Zenger Farm in Portland, OR. The Zenger Farm runs a successful egg co-op comprising of 35-40 laying hens and about 20 member shares. The model of the Zenger Farm Egg Co-op has served as a template for the Geneva Egg Co-op. Other contributors to the Geneva Egg Co-op project include James-Emery Elkin, CCESL, and Professor Christopher Gunn*. The Geneva Egg Co-op has gained approval from The City of Geneva Green Committee, and is searching for a location.

*This does not indicate that any of these parties endorses the Geneva Egg Co-op.

Definition of the Market

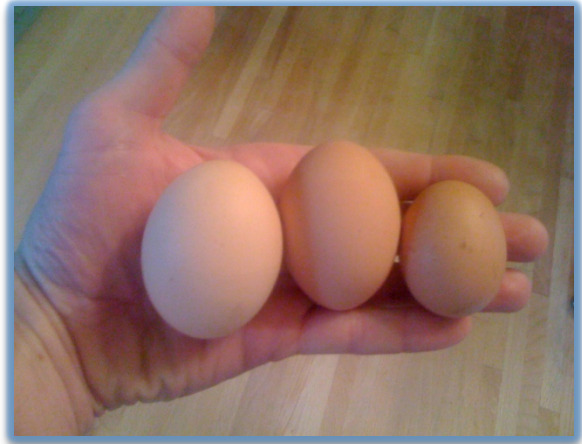
Who is the Egg Co-op for?: The Egg Co-op is meant to serve individuals who want to dive into sustainable practices and community involvement. People who are perfect for an egg co-op have some or all of the following desires.

- To promote sustainable environmental practices
- To be closer to and more involved in their own food production
- To learn about and participate in agriculture (urban or otherwise)
- To be involved in their community
- To provide educational experiences for those in their community
- To support local and more humane agricultural practices

Currently there are member shares available for 14 people or families. Jeff Henderson, the community organizer, evaluated the applications. Thirteen applications for membership were received. Roughly half of these applications were from a family applying for one member share. With the 13 applicants and Jeff, the 14 spots have been filled.

Description of Products and Services

What do you get out of an Egg Co-op?: Eggs of course! As far as tangible products that members receive from being part of an egg co-op, eggs are the main product. Each member share receives an equal share of eggs that the hens lay. This amount will vary with how productive the hens are. With good care, good laying hens can lay about 2 eggs every 3 days in the summer months (Damerow, 2002). However, in the winter months, egg production can slow significantly. Either way all members receive an equal amount of eggs. With the proposed 30 hens and 14 member shares, each share in the summer time will be approximately 10 eggs per week. Laying hens also have a significant reduction in their laying after approximately two years of age. At this point, the option of using the hens for meat is a possibility that can be decided upon by the members of the egg co-op.



More Than Just Eggs: Being part of the Egg Co-op will give you far more than just the tangible products. Participating in an endeavor like this can be a greatly rewarding experience. Members have a chance to actively learn through doing, create bonds with other members of their community, participate in education and work towards creating product that can be used. Although the hens will do most of the hard work, the members have an opportunity to see the fruits of their labor in more than just a share of eggs.

Organization & Management

Member Driven Operation: The idea of a consumer cooperative is that many consumers work together for a share in the goods that they produce (Adams,1992). In the context of an egg co-op this means each member will be responsible for caring for the hens and receiving a share of eggs in return. Care for the hens will be distributed equally and therefore so will the eggs. The community organizer has taken the responsibility for decision-making. However, after the Egg Co-op is established with its members, all members will have a say in decisions made.

Member Duties and Responsibilities: Each member will have certain responsibilities, mainly in the form of a shift. Care of the hens requires at minimum two shifts a day. One shift will take place at sunrise and one at sunset. Each member will be responsible for one standing shift. Therefore, the member must always be available during their shift time. If a member is not

available, they must find a replacement, possibly by trading shifts with another member. Caring for animals is a big responsibility, so there is a no tolerance policy for missing a shift.

Sunrise Shift: The time of this shift fluctuates with the time of year. Hens wake up with the sun so the person responsible for this shift must be able to do it at sunrise, no matter what time that is. Duties in the morning include letting the hens out of the coop, making sure the appropriate area is fenced, and filling up feeder boxes and a waterer. Also, the health of the hens and state of the fences and coop should be checked. Before leaving, the log must be filled out and any abnormalities noted.

Sunset Shift: The time of this shift also fluctuates with the time of year. Hens will generally go into the coop when it gets dark, but the person responsible for this shift needs to be available shortly after sunset no matter when it is. Duties in the evening include searching for eggs, herding hens into the coop and closing coop doors. Again, the health of the chickens and state of the fences and coop should be checked. Before leaving, the log must be filled out and any abnormalities noted.

Other Responsibilities: Typically, there are more tasks than what is covered by the day-to-day care of the chickens. These responsibilities include large group tasks and smaller individual tasks. These tasks will need to be distributed equally. For large group tasks, a time will be set and all who are able to participate are expected to. For smaller individual tasks, members will be able to volunteer based on their availability.

Group Tasks:

- Initial construction of coop and site set up
- Coop cleaning

Individual Tasks:

- Buying feed and other food supplies
- Picking up donated supplemental food

Financial Management

Lowest Possible Cost: Chicken care does take some inputs, but the lowest possible cost would be ideal. The main ways that cost can be lowered is to find creative solutions and parties willing to donate. However, things like chicken feed will still need to be bought. In order to pay for this, a small membership fee is probable. However, the membership fee would be as low as possible and most likely vary with the time of year.

Types of Costs:

Initial Costs:	Variable Costs:	Sporadic Costs
Fencing	Feed	Veterinary Fees
Coop Construction Materials	Litter	Meat Processing Fees
Storage Bins	Chick Purchase	Maintenance Costs
Water/Feed Containers		Electricity
Heat Lamp		

Initial Costs: These are costs that are required at the start-up. Construction costs are the main contributor to the initial cost of the project. Having a sturdy reliable hen house is essential. The co-op protects the hens from predators and the weather. Reliable fencing is also important for keeping out predators. Storage bins will keep feed and dietary supplements dry and fresh. Food and water containers should allow chickens easy access. A heat lamp is required in the winter. The heat lamp will keep the chickens warm, protect them from frostbite and increase wintertime egg productivity.

Variable Costs: These are costs that vary with the amount of output. Output of an egg co-op depends on the amount of hens being raised. With more hens, the variable costs also increase. With more hens, more feed is a definite. Below are some estimated feed costs for the proposed 30 hens. Litter is also a variable cost. It is important to have litter so the chickens have a place to lay their eggs. Litter also provides extra insulation in the wintertime. In the wintertime, clean litter can be placed on top of the old litter, but in the summer it is best to replace it. The purchase of chicks also depends on the number of desired hens. Hens will need to be replaced as they die. Chicks are purchased to keep the flock of hens to around 30.

Sporadic Costs: These are costs that are not necessarily linked to output, but are not fixed costs either. Electricity is required for a heat lamp in the wintertime and possibly as a way to keep the water for the hens from freezing. However, the amount of electricity used will vary with the temperature. If there is a mild winter, not as much electricity will need to be used. Occasionally a veterinary fee may be required if there are problems with the health of a chicken or the flock. Maintenance costs include fixing the coop or fencing and replacing or fixing broken items (i.e. a cracked storage container). Meat processing fees may also come into play if the members of the co-op decide to process hens that have slowed down their laying. The time at which hens slow down laying is variable, so it is unlikely that the hens will all be processed at the same time.

Feed Cost Estimates:

Chickens eat about 2-2.5 lbs of feed a week depending on the season (Damerow, 2002). Keystone Mills in Romulus sells 50 lb bags of chicken feed for 8.00\$.

Winter Estimate:

2.5 lbs feed per week/1 hen x 30 hens = 75 lbs of feed a week

75 lbs of feed per week x 8.00\$/50 lb bag of feed (16 cents a lb) = 12.00\$ a week

Summer Estimate:

2 lbs feed per week/1 hen x 30 hens = 60 lbs of feed a week

60 lbs of feed per week x 8.00\$/50 lb bag of feed (16 cents a lb) = 9.60\$ a week

Alternative Cost Solutions:

Food: Chicken feed is a necessary requirement, but a chicken's diet can be supplemented by many other food sources. Chickens are not picky and will eat a wide variety of things. In the summertime, when insects and

The logo for Reddy Jacket Orchards features the brand name in a stylized, red, serif font. The word 'Reddy' is on the top line, 'Jacket' is on the second line, and 'Orchards' is on the third line. The 'O' in 'Orchards' is particularly large and decorative.

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grass are plentiful, chickens will eat these. Insects provide a good source of protein for the chickens, which is essential to their diet ^[1]. Compost items are also a good supplement to a chicken's diet, and can be provided by the members of the co-op. Other sources of compost include donations from grocery stores or commercial kitchens. Red Jacket Orchards has committed to donating their leftover pomace as a food supplement and Stony Brook Whole Hearted Foods has committed to donating leftover seed cake as a protein supplement.



Construction Supplies, fencing and containers: Fencing and Supplies for the construction of a coop are a significant initial cost. However, donations of lumber and supplies are possible from hardware stores as well as spare supplies that members may already have. Old garbage cans would make excellent storage bins and food and many leftover things could be used for food and water containers.

Litter: Many different things can be used for litter; straw, sawdust, woodchips, old newspaper, etc. Many of these things could be donated from members or others.

Electricity: Depending on the site, electricity costs may be covered. If the site of the co-op is privately owned, the owner may waive the cost of electricity, especially because it would be minimal.

Veterinary Fees: For some health problems, there may be members or others who would be able to take care of the chickens free of charge. A common problem for laying hens is a passed vent, but some community members who raise chickens have the skills to treat this. Co-op members could also learn how to do this.

References:

Gail Damerow. *Barnyard in your Backyard: A Beginner's Guide to Raising Chickens, Ducks, Geese, Rabbits, Goats, Sheep and Cattle*. Storey Publishing, 2002. Print.

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