

## Farm Fresh Eggs



**Cleopatra four days after her hatch**

As I have come to the conclusion that the average American lifestyle of the late 90s will not be possible in the future, I have taken several steps toward living more sustainably. I believe energy prices will be much higher in the future. I use compact florescent light bulbs, own energy star appliances, and have installed ridge vents and a radiant barrier on my roof. In 2009, I took the step of purchasing a motorcycle that gets 55 mpg and I drive it as often as I can. This year, I decided to go one step further by planting a small garden and buying some chickens for my urban back yard.

I am not sure exactly what it was that prompted me to make the decision to start raising chickens. After all, I grew up in Houston and have lived in big cities my entire life and the only pets that I have ever owned were dogs. I am not even sure if my high school had a Future Farmers of America Club. It just seemed like a good idea, and my three months of being a backyard chicken rancher has been fun and something I expect to be doing many years from now.

My journey started by reading *Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens*. I really enjoyed adding the word pullet and vent (where the eggs come out) to my vocabulary. I was also surprised to learn that all breeds of chickens are descendants of the wild red jungle fowl of Southeast Asia.

Another great resource for an aspiring backyard chicken rancher is the Dallas Backyard Poultry Meetup Group. They can be found at <http://www.meetup.com/DallasBackyardPoultry/>. They often meet at North Haven Gardens and provide lectures and even organized The Urban Coop Tour this year where you could drive to different homes across Dallas and see how others raise their

I often contemplate what it would be like if I was born in a third-world country. What would I be doing for a living? Would I own a house? A car? Would I have been able to go to college? Unfortunately, I still do take things like air conditioning, food on every corner, and modern transportation for granted. With the reality of peak oil and billions of people competing for the same resources, will we always be able to keep growing our standards of living?

As I have come to the conclusion

flocks. I have only been to one meeting so far. I was impressed by the sophistication of the 75 person audience and the selection of breeds that they brought to display. The speaker, Leslie Halleck, was very entertaining and told us how much her chickens enjoy the spaghetti (sans sauce) that she cooks for them.

On a cold day in March in East Texas, I decided to take the plunge. If, like me, you have never been to a feed store before, I highly recommend it. They sell all sorts of things that I have never seen. Where else can you buy a giant nipple to nurse your pony or a varmint trap? I had decided to buy five New Hampshire Reds, but the clerk in the store accidentally put six in my box. My wife couldn't bear to pick which chick was not going to get adopted that day, so we ended up taking home all six. I was pleasantly surprised that the



Shakira strutting her stuff in the backyard

day-old chicks only cost \$2.50 each and that a 50 pound bag of feed costs \$9. Once home, we had a really nice time listening to them cheep, watching them lift their head to the sky as they swallowed their water, and letting them fall asleep in the warmth of our hands. Interestingly, chicks' eye-lids close from the bottom up.

I decided to buy a metal rabbit hutch to start out. I put a bright light bulb on top of it to keep them warm and put the cage in the middle of my living room. Each day, I would throw out the newspaper with the droppings onto my compost pile. This worked well for about six weeks until the chicks had grown up to be young ladies, or pullets. They were starting to get crowded in the hutch and their feathers were escaping their cage all over the living room floor. It was time to decide what to do for their permanent home.

I own very few tools and am not that handy so I decided to purchase my coop on Craig's List. I was amazed to see how many nice coops are for sale in the Dallas Metroplex. If there is one thing that I would have done differently, it would have been to purchase the coop before buying the chickens. Several sellers included chickens with their coops. I chose a coop on wheels so that I could easily move my girls when it is time to mow and to fertilize different areas of my yard. Unfortunately, my yard isn't getting all that much fertilizer because my two dogs like to eat chicken poop like I like to eat ice cream. This has forever changed my relationship with my two dogs. I didn't see this coming and just the thought of them devouring mass quantities of poop still makes my stomach turn.

With any new hobby, you never know whether it will be a lifelong passion or quickly fizzle until you try it. How many of us have an old racket ball racket, fishing pole, or bicycle that hasn't been



My girls' coop

touched in years? After three months, I still find my hens interesting and don't regret my step into urban farming. We treat them like pets and often let them free range in the evening when we get home from work. It is still entertaining to listen to them cluck (they no longer cheep) and watch them take dirt baths.

Chickens are very social animals and they can be very funny. We have all

heard of the pecking order. Well, I haven't figured out exactly how it works just yet, but I have witnessed several times a behavior that I describe as "puffing up." Most of the time the chickens roam the backyard very close together even though they have plenty of room to spread out. Occasionally they will separate and then one will run full speed—wings flapping, right up to another's face. At this point, they both lift their wings and puff out their feathers to show the other which is more dominant. This lasts for about two seconds and then they go back to eating grass.

The other ritual that I have found most surprising is that at dusk, Cleopatra goes into the coop and begins clucking to the other chickens that it is time to get to safety before it gets dark. They complete this routine every night and all I have to do is shut the door behind them and count them to make sure everyone is there. It is sometimes difficult to count them because they like to cuddle close together as they sleep.



Cleopatra and LaDonna demonstrate the proper technique for "puffing up"

According to *Storey's* my ladies should be laying eggs in two more months at five months old. I should get an egg every 25 hours per bird; except during the winter when the shorter days cause them to stop laying. Not growing up on a farm, I didn't realize that you don't need a cockerel to get eggs. That is fortunate because the City of Dallas does not allow you to have them. Healthy birds will lay eggs for 10-12 years. My breed will produce brown eggs and there are even breeds that produce blue-green eggs. *Storey's* states that there is no difference in the nutritional value of brown, white, or blue-green eggs.

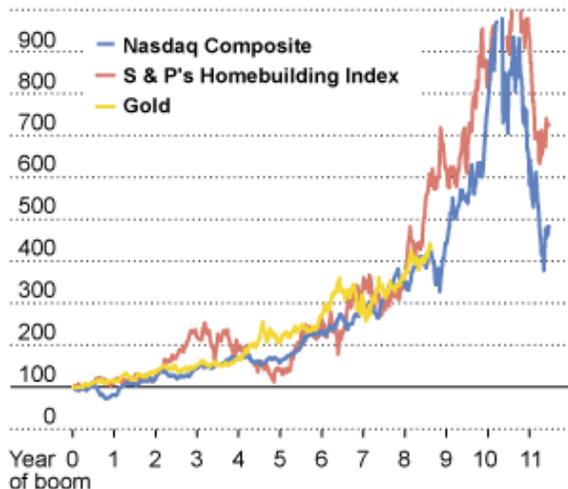
I haven't yet experienced cannibalism, sickness, or my girl's first molt. There will be a lot more to learn along the way. So far, they have required very little care and have been a fun experience for the Gonzalez chicken ranchers. At current prices, I am not saving any money over store bought eggs. However; it will be nice to know where my food comes from and in my estimation chickens make great pets.



**Cleopatra and Ethel discuss Judge Feldman's decision to uphold the constitution**

## Going Vertical?

The price of gold over the past 8 1/2 years, compared to the first 8 1/2 years of the Nasdaq and housing bubbles.



Note: Indexed to 100: Gold prices as of 2001, Nasdaq composite as of 1990 and Standard & Poor's Homebuilding Index as of 1995.

Source: FactSet Research Systems

Source: [The Wall Street Journal](#)

George Soros that gold will eventually be the “ultimate bubble.”<sup>2</sup> I just don't think we are there now.

The very bearish Richard Russell recently stated, “I think the key element behind this great bear market will be the complete destruction of all fiat currencies. This has been a long time coming. Fiat currencies are “wealth” created by man. They are created without sacrifice, without labor, without risk, and without sweat. Basically they are an immoral device, created by secretive bankers.”<sup>3</sup>

The extraordinarily accurate, Dr. Marc Faber, stated that “I buy gold; I don't know what else to buy.”<sup>4</sup> Predicting the short term price of gold will prove difficult, but I believe that gold will see much higher prices in the years to come. If Faber and Russell are right about what the future holds, gold may be the best investment we ever make.

## Markets

Spot gold recently hit an all time high in dollar terms of \$1,265. The record price has caused a lot of ink to be spilled about how gold is in a bubble. I emphatically state that gold is not in a bubble and all of the recently minted “bubbleologists” out there don't understand economics or history. Next time you are with a group of friends, ask them how many of them own a single gold coin. My experience has shown me that most Americans have never even held a gold coin before. This hilarious video by Mark Dice shows the cluelessness of the average American in relation to gold:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk5aRIz17fk>

The *Wall Street Journal* recently did a series of articles on gold. I particularly like the chart featured to the left.<sup>1</sup> The chart to the left makes a case that if gold is going to be a bubble; it has a lot more room to run. I whole-heartedly agree with

<sup>1</sup> [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704792104575264863069565780.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704792104575264863069565780.html?mod=googlenews_wsj)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/davos/7085504/Davos-2010-George-Soros-warns-gold-is-now-the-ultimate-bubble.html>

<sup>3</sup> [www.dowtheoryletters.com](http://www.dowtheoryletters.com)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.zerohedge.com/article/marc-faber-i-buy-gold-i-dont-know-what-else-buy>



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