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## Tour de Coops offers look at local food

Urban chicken houses give S.L. an organic touch

By **Gina Barker**

Deseret News

Published: Saturday, June 26, 2010 11:41 p.m. MDT

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SALT LAKE CITY — This year, the Wasatch Community Gardens hosted its fifth annual Tour de Coops, a walking tour of the urban chicken coops around Salt Lake City. Avid gardeners and families wandered through the 17 yards featured in the walk, picking up tips on organic gardening techniques and watching the chickens cluck around their pens.

Some yards were orderly, with neat little rows of emerging vegetables popping out from the soil. Other yards were wild and overgrown, like a miniature jungle in the middle of Salt Lake City. But every yard had a small space reserved for clucking, wing-flapping chickens.

Julia Rabb, the youth programs coordinator for the Wasatch Community Gardens, handed out walking-tour brochures of every house that was featured in the Tour de Coops. Rabb said she wanted people of all ages to think about where their food comes from and to pick healthier options.

"We're trying to connect people to local food sources," Rabb said. "Whether it's gardening or growing their own chickens in their backyard, it's really about local food."

In all, the Wasatch Community Gardens had more than 300 people touring the various coops in hopes of raising awareness about sustainable living, organic foods and, most importantly, to get the community to eat better food that's locally grown.

Story continues below



Urban chicken coops have become an increasingly popular urban activity. Coops are going up in unlikely settings, nestled next to parking lots or busy streets. And the demand for raising chickens in Salt Lake City was reflected in the most recent city ordinance that loosened regulations for homeowners.

Starting a coop involves a few steps on the owner's part: Up to 15 chickens can be kept for harvesting eggs, roosters are not allowed, coops must have adequate indoor and outdoor space for the animals and coops must be predator-resistant.

Westminster College is now in its second year of growing and harvesting its organic garden, but this year is the first for its chicken coop. With five chickens, all just around 5 months old, the school's organic farm isn't collecting eggs quite yet. In about a month, students can take home fresh eggs.

Meghan Johnston, the campus garden coordinator at Westminster, is in her final year of environmental studies and is part of the original group that created the garden two years ago. Johnston said she liked the idea of having "measurable results" in her work.

"Here, it's like I planted this much, I grew this much, I fed this many people," she said.

Now the garden houses several types and varieties of plants, and more than 50 students, faculty and staff work in the garden. Johnston sees the garden as one more way of getting students to think and buy local. The eggs and produce are sold to students on campus to help fund the garden's progress.

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3 photos



Mike Terry, Deseret News

Meghan Johnston watches her chickens during the fifth annual Tour de Coops at the Wasatch Community Garden.

[GALLERY \(3 PHOTOS\)](#)

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