

Earth Month ...

## Of Coups and Coops: "Hattie Carthan" Brings Chickens to North Brooklyn

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Livestock breeding and farming has been practiced by the women in my family for years. According to my grandmother's accounts (a woman who raised hundreds of chickens at a time for consumption in her village of Berbice, Guyana, South America), when the women in our family got married, they were given five live eggs (as part of a sort of dowry arrangement) which were hatched (of course, roosters were allowed on those farms). They learnt how to raise those chicks, those chicks went on to become laying pullets and had other chicks. So the gift of fertilized eggs was the foundation of their livestock farm.

And a gift from Heifer International has created new foundations for learning and living in North Brooklyn. The Hattie Carthan Community Garden is raising chickens, thanks to Heifer's livestock management funding that supports livestock management in urban centers around the world.

Through the garden's partnership with Just Foods City chickens program, we were able to receive materials to build a large coop with a run for the animals and purchase chickens which will provide our young market with fresh eggs and youth interns with hands-on livestock management experience. The coop was built at the end of the last growing season and our thirteen hens arrived on March 18 at the community garden a few weeks ago.

The pullets were raised on the MimoMex Farm, which is located on 16 acres of the Black Dirt region in Goshen, New York, some 46 miles from North Brooklyn. Nestled within the bosom of the Northeast Appalachian ranges, this series of valleys is a combination of areas with rocky forest land and rich, fertile left over from an ancient glacial lake bottom. It is owned and operated by farmers Martin & Guadencia Rodriguez, natives of Mexico.

I feel truly honored to be raising the same breeds as my foremothers (Rhode



Island Reds). The first days of bonding with the hens and getting to know them was indeed humbling. With only a few days of training under their belts, the hens are already using the stairs to enter and exit the coop and are beginning to go into the coop once the sun begins setting, thus making the process a lot easier. We counted half a dozen eggs yesterday alone. Listening to that familiar sound that announces the arrival of eggs is just wonderful for us working.

Working with the chickens has been a welcome experience for me. To me, chicken-keeping is not an exercise in primitivism as it is an adventure in raising

animals in a humane way which puts quality care as the vision instead of profits. Tasting the difference between a fresh egg and one sold to us in supermarkets is a small part of the rewards. The eggs from our coop are silky in texture, very tasty and filling. Using humane approaches in our partnerships with animals is far more rewarding than inhumane approaches which creates huge profits. Our neighborhood youths are buzzing with excitement at the arrival of the birds and neighboring schools are calling to find out how the kids can get more involved

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## Chickens in the Coop

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in learning about these animals.

The eggs from our hens will be distributed in our discounted weekly mixed basket and dung will be added back to our compost. Please read more about our new weekly distribution programs in the market at [hattiecarthancommunitymarket.com](http://hattiecarthancommunitymarket.com).

We will be gathering our chicken committee to begin livestock training and logistics for community chicken care interns. Anyone interested in being on the committee that preserves the health and well-being of these hens, please download the online livestock volunteer form and submit that to us. We will upload our chicken care tip sheets to the Web site shortly and will update the status of our hens

in this section periodically.

Years ago, my grandmother passed on the gift of five fertilized eggs, start of a legacy that lives today. The MimoMex Farm has passed on the gift of thirteen pullets to the Hattie Carthan Community Garden under Heifer's motto of "passing on the gift of knowledge." We are happy to continue this act of giving by providing thousands of community residents and youth with valuable information and experiences around raising livestock in the city.

Feel free to stop by the farm to see the beauties if you find yourself in the neighborhood. Our coop faces the Lafayette Avenue side of our garden. The community is able to observe the birds from outside the coop during daylight hours.

To join our crew of market volunteers, please send us an e-mail at [hattiecarthangarden@yahoo.com](mailto:hattiecarthangarden@yahoo.com).