

Understanding “Animal Unit”

Ruth Beeker for the Neighborhood Infill Coalition, Summer 2015

The May 2015 draft of the **Sustainable Code Project: Proposed Urban Agriculture Amendments** utilizes Animal Unit, defined in Section 11.4.2 as “ A unit of measurement to calculate a maximum number of animals on a property.” An earlier draft stated its comparative basis was “waste generation.”

Given that Animal Unit is the basis for the City of Tucson’s approach to regulating number and type of small farm animals, it is important that the community understand its applicability to the urban setting. Wikipedia states: concept traditionally used in North America to facilitate planning, analysis, and administration of forage use in grazing livestock, but the term has also had other applications (in relation to odor control regulation, feedlot size, manure management, etc.). A google search found that numerous states utilize Animal Unit in their regulations: Arizona, Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin, Texas, North Dakota, Utah, and Nebraska. In state worksheet calculations, a 1000 lb. mature cow (with or without a suckling calf) is 1 Animal Unit. Chickens, if included as they were in the State of Minnesota worksheet, are broken into 2 categories: liquid manure system or dry manure system. Clearly the Animal Unit’s utilization in this case is for large commercial enterprises, not for urban backyards.

In the May 2015 draft, Section 6.6.5.F.3, Small Farm Animals’ Animal Units were chicken-one unit; duck-2 units; turkey or goose-4 units; miniature goat-5 units. Rabbits and rodents (guinea pigs) were removed from the assigned units of an earlier draft, given that they reproduce too quickly to be counted. A recommendation added that “miniature goats be raised in pairs or small groups for their well-being.” Apparently, Animal Unit is not grounded in specific small farm species animal husbandry.

When researching recommendations for urban agriculture on-line, a source often quoted is Gail Damerow’s **Backyard Homestead: Guide to Raising Farm Animals**. This publication is in the Pima Public Library. She does not mention Animal Unit. She does give detailed instructions on raising animals in an urban or semi-rural environment. **She points out that chickens and rabbits are the easiest to raise and the most reliable food source of those animals identified above as “small farm animals.”** Turkeys are much harder to raise than chickens (p.49). Waterfowl (ducks and geese) appear poor choices for an urban desert setting: besides needing a pond, “the primary downside to ducks is their eternal quacking. In a neighborhood where the noise could become a nuisance, the answer is to keep Muscovies, also known as quackless ducks. Geese also make a racket with their honking. . . people feel intimidated by their flat-footed body charge, indignant feather ruffling, and snakelike hissing.” (p. 71) On p. 174, she points out the Nigerian Dwarf goats produce less milk and meat than full-size breeds, and that the does must come from milking stock, not pet stock (p. 174). Goats lactate for 10 months after giving birth, so how to calculate the necessary reproduction numbers into the Animal Units above, if the miniature goat is to be considered a food source, becomes problematic.

A key question which must be addressed : Is Animal Unit the most practical, most relevant, most easily administered means to make sustainable animal food production legal in the City of Tucson?

