

# Running With The Chickens

Contributed by

Of course, not everyone sees it the way I do.

I simply call it "free range" – I've read that it helps improve egg quality, omega content, and increase the vitamins and minerals.

But the neighbors, especially the ones in the apartments next to us, don't necessarily look on those long-ranging chickens with the same affection and appreciation as our family does. In fact, over the past year we have had countless comments – and even a phone call or two, "Hey, did you know your chickens are wandering around the apartment complex?"

No kidding... they're "FREE RANGE!"

Our immediate neighbor has donated more than one of his garden plants and decorative flowers to the health and well-being of our growing flock. And, in case you are wondering if flowers change the taste of the eggs... they don't. He got fed up with it and finally put a fence with smaller links around his back yard. Lucky for the chickens, he only put a 3 foot high fence and the chickens, who roost at about 14 feet up in the barn rafters had no problem hopping over the fence and continuing their feast.

Sunday, while visiting with some of the children from the apartments, I was even informed that several of those wild roaming hens were trying to check the mail – or at least had gotten up on top of the apartment's mail box and were pecking, cackling, and producing biological waste products. Humm, the mailbox is about a block away from our property... that's definitely "free ranging."

But that is all about to change...

Now, it is not like I'm trying to keep chickens in a 20'x20' backyard. I mean, we have almost 2 acres of property. But, it's a funny thing... those blasted "free range" chickens seem to be magnetized to everyone else's property and seemed compelled to go to great lengths to get into their properties. Well, at last, with winter coming on, I determined that enough is enough.

"At the crack of dawn tomorrow morning, we are going to rebuild the chicken coop and create a large-scale run that the chickens will never be able to get out of," I declared to the children on Friday night.

So, Saturday, the sun peeked over the eastern mountains to find five of my children by my side in the barnyard huddled up and making plans for the incarceration of our hen colony.

"Joshua and Esther, dig through the scrap wood pile and find me three boards 7 feet long each – if they are longer, we'll cut them down."

"Jared, you and Tony (that's the neighbor boy from one of the apartments who loves helping us work on the farm), you guys go round me up some more tee-posts. I think there are a couple by the cherry tree and then a few more back by the first gate."

"Hyrum, get me the wire cutters, the nails, and the hammer."

"Isaac, will you take this bowl into mom and then bring me out some water? We'll need that too, before long... and HURRY! everyone – there is a good storm coming and I'd rather not do this project in the rain."

So, off they went while I began measuring fencing and designing the run. Within a few hours we were digging holes for fence posts, making gates, pounding tee-posts, hanging chicken wire off the barn roof and generally working up a good sweat working on the project.

As I drilled the corners of the new gate together I looked up to see my children. Some were helping with the gate, others cutting baling wire, and other scooping manure into the wheelbarrow. The thrill of the moment was rich and satisfying. Into my mind came the scriptural edict given to Adam and Eve when they were cast out of the Garden of Eden:

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread..."

I also thought of the scripture that says,

&ldquo;Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer.&rdquo;

And finally, the rather poignant wisdom from Proverbs that mixes no words:

&ldquo;Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:&rdquo;

In all of these work is the central theme. I couldn't help wonder to myself if I was really teaching them the values of hard work ethic &ndash; or, as Solomon puts it &ndash; the ways of the ant.

Maybe I was. Maybe, that morning as we were running around with the chickens, we were all learning a little more about getting the job done, personal sacrifice, self sufficiency and the thrill of straining your muscles and bending your arm for a worthy cause.

Maybe, in years to come, the day with the chickens would be long forgotten, but the principles embedded in my children would carry them through the tough times that lay ahead. No doubt, one day they would be tasked with raising children, providing for a family, doing an honest day's work for an employer, serving others when it was uncomfortable, or giving of their time when they really didn't want to.

Maybe, just maybe, in those times when life called on them to give their all, the lessons they learned today will empower them to rise up and claim the greatness they were born to inherit.

So, while not everyone &ndash; very few in fact &ndash; can have 2 acres, 50 chickens, and 40 apartment residents to serve as a peanut gallery, I can't help but believe that all parents everywhere can find a way to have their own &ldquo;day with the chickens&rdquo; and teach their children how to work.