



## Roosters as Commodities



Dotty, probably feeling pretty good, when he was taller than his pal, Marni.

**M**eet Dotty. He's one of Tamerlaine's most - beloved roosters. Known (to himself) as King of the Sanctuary, he's also our eldest statesman.

Dotty has favorite humans and comes running for snuggles when he sees them. Curled up in a lap, having his cheek stroked is his favorite spot to be. He makes friends with other roosters, hens, and, as you can see, even goats! As King, he works hard to keep his subjects happy.

Dotty arrived here with 18 other baby chicks who were born from a school hatching project. Of the 19 eggs the school purchased, 11 turned out to be roosters, despite promises to the contrary. That's not uncommon. At Tamerlaine, we get calls daily from people looking to rehome roosters they unwittingly raised, whether for class projects or backyard chicken coops. Many towns ban roosters, and farms don't want more roosters, either. In Dotty's case, the teacher promised us she would have no more egg hatchings in return for keeping Dotty and his siblings safe and sound.

First thing to know about Dotty: like all roosters, he's a male chicken. He isn't a different species at all. Like many animal species, Dotty is more colorful than his female

counterparts. A rooster's bright plumage and flowing tail make it easy to differentiate a rooster from a hen. And let's not forget the famous comb. Dotty's crowns him like the king that he is! If that's not enough, his signature crowing can be heard all around a farm, all day long, starting at—yes—the crack of dawn.

A flock functions like a family, and it's natural for every flock to have one rooster. They play a crucial role and take their responsibilities seriously. A rooster like Dotty will fearlessly protect his flock from predators. Roosters have been known to protect against hawks, foxes, raccoons, cats, and dogs without fear. In fact, their pugnacious pride means they often win against much bigger predators because they won't back down. Some roosters will sacrifice themselves for their flock rather than give up.

Like all roosters, Dotty forages all day to find food. When he does, he immediately issues a call of "took took took" with a little dance that researchers call tidbitting. Tidbitting involves lifting and lowering his head, picking up food and dropping it, and most of all, shaking his waddle around. Rumor (and research) has it that the ladies of the yard prefer a rooster with a big, wiggly waddle, especially if he tidbits a lot. It shows he can take care of them and their chicks. Once Dotty finds food and calls his hens over, he takes a step back so they can eat their fill first. Most roosters are not only brave protectors, but gentle caretakers. When a hen lets out a distress call, he will either crow so she can find him, or run to her. When a rooster finds a safe, inviting place for his hens to nest, he will purr to the girls, and may even demonstrate how to begin nesting. Each night, he leads his ladies into their coop and separates quarreling hens by roosting between them. Being a rooster is a tough job. Without one though, a flock has no glue to hold them together.

Chickens have been proven to be highly intelligent and to have complex social relationships. In fact, if a dominant rooster is nearby, a lesser rooster will tidbit



in silence—hoping to attract the attention of nearby hens without the dominant rooster noticing! Some males even *fake* tidbit, pretending they've found food when they haven't, in a bid to impress the hens. Suffice it to say, the hens catch on to this pretty quickly! We give those guys an A for effort, though!

Scientists have determined the meaning of about 20 sounds chickens use to communicate. Just as we name pets, chickens name their caretakers by assigning them certain sounds. Chickens have shown they feel empathy for those they love.



Alvin, another of Tamerlaine's roosters, whose happy place is roosting on the heads of his caretakers.

It's true that roosters are loud. For this reason, many towns have banned them. This is especially troubling as backyard chicken coops continue to grow in popularity. Online and in towns across the country, hatcheries and farms sell eggs, chicks, and full-grown chickens as egg-layers. The problem? It's difficult to determine the sex of a chick until it begins growing. Yet many are sexed the day they hatch, when there is a 10-40% rate of error. As a result, schools and backyard keepers wind up with some roosters who are all dressed up, with nowhere to go.

This is especially sad, because as any sanctuary worker will tell you, roosters just want to be part of a family—and it's as easy to fall in love with one as you would a dog

or cat. In fact, roosters were the inspiration that started Tamerlaine Sanctuary! Our founders, Gabby Stubbert and Peter Nussbaum, rescued a pair of roosters named Yuri and Jupiter. Within a day, the roosters were waiting alongside the dogs for their morning meals. Within a week, Yuri and Jupiter were following the family dogs, even jumping onto the couch with them, or snuggling up in their beds with them. They were leaping onto human laps and purring, eyes closed, when Gabby and Peter answered their demands for evening snuggles. Yuri and Jupiter were the flutter of the proverbial butterfly wings. Upon realizing just how like family pets these roosters were, there was no turning back for Gabby and Peter. Tamerlaine is now home to over 275 animals. Rooster love is a powerful thing.

Other chicken keepers will fall in love with the chicks they've raised, too, only to learn later that they're roosters, and that they cannot legally keep them. This situation is similar to breed legislation for dogs. It's devastating for those who love the dignified, funny little birds they've raised since hatching. The answer lies in removing chicken eggs from our food chain and our backyards. We can accomplish that together, but until such time, roosters shouldn't be banned from chicken coops.

The worst problem roosters face comes from the animal agriculture industry. On one hand, roosters are part of the 50 billion birds slaughtered each year as food. On the other, roosters can't lay eggs. Feeding and caring for roosters costs money on which there is no return for egg farmers. As a result, male chicks are sexed and quickly killed *on the day they are born*. In the United States, the "humane" method involves tossing the tiny chicks into a machine that grinds them up alive. Other methods involve stuffing them in bags, where they suffocate, or piping in carbon dioxide to poison them. About 7 billion "useless" male chicks are killed yearly around the world. In 2005, the American Veterinary Medical Association had to state the obvious fact that male chicks should be "killed prior to disposal."



It's someone's job, day in and day out to sentence these one-day old chicks to death. In our efforts to be compassionate to animals, the toll that working in animal agriculture takes on humans is often overlooked. Choosing which sentient beings to kill mere hours after their birth is not a job to which anyone aspires; this is why hatcheries are usually located in rural areas with few other options for employment. With few choices, workers are less likely to complain.



Male chicks falling off the conveyor belt and into the macerator. They are killed as soon as possible.

Finally, roosters are also forced to fight, a "blood sport" known as cockfighting. Knowing what we do about a rooster's resistance to backing down, it's easy to imagine how most of these fights end: with one rooster dead, and the other seriously injured. People who fight roosters breed them to be aggressive, and they're sometimes even given drugs to increase their fury. They are outfitted with three-inch long, razor-sharp spikes tied to their legs to make the damage they inflict even more deadly. Once placed in the pit, roosters have no way to escape. Those who survive suffer from punctured lungs, pierced eyes, and broken bones. This sickening form of "entertainment" has existed for centuries. Despite it being illegal in the United States, it continues. In 2017, for example, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department confiscated 7,000 roosters destined for the fighting pit from one location. It was the largest cockfighting ring broken up in the United States.

The food industry raise them to kill, the egg industry kills them as useless. Schools have nowhere to bring them. Backyard chicken keepers aren't allowed to keep them, even if they want to. But... hens need roosters. And what's more, roosters are honorable, loving, knights in bright feathers who deserve to live as naturally as possible.

From the roosters to the humans whose job it is to kill billions of them each year, you can help restore the dignity every living creature deserves: each time you choose not to eat chickens or their eggs, you are helping to normalize compassionate food choices. If you're afraid to jump right in, start small and see where it takes you. We think Dotty, Jupiter, Yuri, Alvin, and the rest of their feathered friends are worth the hard work of change. And if you met them...you would, too.



Yuri and Jupiter quickly became members of Gabby and Peter's family. The rooster is honored by a place in Tamerlaine's logo.