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## Pandemic Feeds Demand for Backyard Chickens

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Some chicken **breeders** and **poultry** groups say the coronavirus pandemic has led more people in the United States to start raising their own chickens. The **practice** provides people with a new interest, animal friendships and a continuous supply of fresh eggs.

Chicken-keeping has become more popular in recent years as people seek ways to help the environment by carefully investigating the food they eat.

Businesses that sell young chicks, **coops** and other supplies say they have seen an increase in demand since last March. That is when U.S. health officials ordered people to stay home to help stop the spread of the coronavirus.

Allison and Ron Abta live in Marin County, California. They had talked about setting up a chicken coop for years. They finally did so this summer.

The couple's three children were excited when their parents finally agreed to buy chicks.

"These chickens are like my favorite thing, honestly," said 12-year-old Violet. "They actually have **personalities** once you get to know them."

The baby birds lived inside the family's home for six weeks before moving into their **yard**. A wire enclosure now houses the five hens and protects them from bobcats, foxes and other animals that could harm them.

Mark Podgwaite is a chicken breeder in Vermont who heads the American Poultry Association. He said he and other breeders have noticed an increase in demand for chicks since the pandemic began. His organization has also seen an increase in new members.

“It just exploded. Whether folks wanted birds just for eggs or eggs and meat, it seemed to really, really take off,” Podgwaite said.

The Abta family bought their chicks from Mill Valley Chickens. The farming business sells chickens, feed and supplies. It also builds coops. Owner Leslie Citroen offers classes for first-time chicken keepers. She estimates her sales grew 400 percent in 2020.

“I don’t think it’s going to slow down,” Citroen said. “I think this new interest and **passion** in chickens is permanent.”

Citroen said most of her buyers in 2020 were first-time chicken keepers. Some of them are parents looking for something to keep their children busy while at home. Others are “preppers” -- people who want their own supplies of things in case the world falls apart.

“Demand is just **through the roof** right now,” Citroen said.

I’m Jonathan Evans.

*Terence Chea reported on this story for the Associated Press. Jonathan Evans adapted this story for Learning English. Ashley Thompson was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**breeders** – *n.* people who breed an animal or plant

**coops** – *n.* cages or small buildings in which chickens or other small animals are kept

**passion** – *n.* a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something

**personalities** – *n.* the set of emotional qualities, ways of behaving, etc., that makes something different from other things

**poultry** – *n.* birds such as chickens and ducks that are raised on farms for their eggs or meat

**practice** – *n.* something that is done often or regularly

**through the roof** – *idiom.* to an extremely or excessively high level

**yard** – *n.* an outdoor area next to a building that is often bordered by shrubs or fences

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