

Concord Monitor

A range of freedom

Teen sisters begin their own poultry business

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When the rooster crows, Two Spring Chicks, a free-range poultry enterprise in Weare, will be officially open for business.

Sisters Sarah and Jane Koski, 17 and 12, said they were frustrated by a shortage of free-range options in the area when they applied for a grant to get the business off the ground. The girls have 20 hens and plan to add a rooster to the mix this month.

In addition to offering eggs and live chickens, which they plan to sell at the Weare farmers market next summer, the girls will rent out incubators to schools and families who want to hatch their own chicks. They'll charge \$15 per rental and take the chicks back if people can't care for them, they said.

"We love chickens. We've always had them," Sarah said in the kitchen of the girls' Weare home as the smell of blueberry muffins - made with eggs fresh from the coop - wafted through the house. "It's a fun experience; we want to share what we do with other people."

Neither sister eats eggs plain ("It's just a taste thing," Sarah explained), but you can tell the difference between a Two Spring Chicks egg and one you'd find at the supermarket just by appearance, they said.

"When you crack open one of our eggs, it's firm and doesn't just fall apart," Sarah said. "You can see the difference in the yolk, too. Ours have a nice orangey color."

On a cold day last week, the hens congregated outside a small coop in the backyard, clucking calmly as the girls approached. Inside the hut, a lone hen hovered over her nest and pushed out an egg.

"There she goes," Jane said, quickly scooping up the egg and bringing it inside to be refrigerated. "It's funny because they all look the same but each have their own personality."

The flock produces between 10 and 12 eggs per day, and a steady clientele supports the business. Once the new chicks become hens, they'll have more eggs to process, but the sisters plan to keep it relatively small. They figure they can sustain a flock of about 30 chickens.

When the male chickens are grown, a butcher will slaughter them, and the meat will be donated to the New Hampshire Food Bank, they said.

The girls, who are home schooled, won an \$800 grant through 4-H New Hampshire and Youth Venture, an organization that lends funds to youth-led business endeavors. The grant covered start-up fees for incubators, feeders, fencing and water containers for the birds.

They also plan to distribute educational materials on free-range and sustainable farming practices by visiting classrooms, hosting community workshops and organizing camps through 4-H.

"We think people like knowing our chickens weren't confined to cages their whole lives, and that they didn't travel long distances to get here," Sarah said. "We like to say that we have happy hens, that they enjoy life. People want to know that."



KATIE BARNES / Monitor staff
Jane Koski, 12, checks on the chickens before closing the coop door Thursday in Weare. Jane and her sister, Sarah, 17, started a business called Two Spring Chicks where they sell free-range eggs to friends and family.

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