

Importance of Rabbit Farming

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SUMMARY

Rabbits are members of the Leporidae family indigenous throughout most parts of the world and raised in small-holder and large-scale for commercial production. Rabbit is preferred for meat production due to its short generation interval of six months and speedy weight gain. Rabbit is marketed as whole or half carcasses, although interest in cuts and ground meat is increasing. Rabbit meat has high nutritional value but in developed countries continues to be considered for rural usage or limited to ethnic groups despite its outstanding dietetic properties. Rabbit also produce wool (fur) the yield of which has gone upto 750-800gm per year per animal by German Angora. Rabbits can be raised on roughage diet solely without affecting productive and reproductive performance. Its meat is categorized as white (low fat and cholesterol) meat and universally accepted.

INTRODUCTION

Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) belongs to the order Lagomorpha, which has two families (Leporidae and Ochotonidae). The domestic rabbit is known as 'Cindrella' of livestock and good producer of white meat for human consumption throughout the world. Rabbit is preferred for meat production due to its short generation interval of six months and speedy weight gain i.e 1.5 to 2 kg within 2.5-3 months. Rabbit meat contains 1-2 percent more protein as compared to meat of other animals except poultry. Rabbit can convert feed into meat to the extent of twenty percent which is next to broilers. Rabbit also produce wool (fur) the yield of which has gone upto 750-800gm per year per animal by German Angora. Among the developed countries France is producing about 2.50 lakh ton of rabbit meat annually with per capita availability of 5kg rabbit meat. France, UK and Germany are the biggest importer of rabbit meat. Among the Asian countries China is the biggest producer and exporter of rabbit meat. Rabbit production received a major boost in Ghana as a result of a nationwide multimedia communication campaign backing the National Rabbit Project established in 1972 for the promotion of backyard rabbit breeding as a self help means of increasing meat supply at low cost (Osei *et al* 2012). In India rabbitry as an industry is popular in temperate region of country comprising states like Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh etc. Introduction of German Angora breed in early sixties brought revolution in rabbit production of India. An institute 'Division of fur Animal Breeding' Garsa (H.P) imported exotic breeds like New Zealand white (U.K), Angora, Soviet chinchilla, Gray gaint (USSR) and propagated them in Indian rabbitry.

Scope of Rabbit Farming

Rabbit farming has many scope because of the following reasons and benefits:-

- Rabbits can be raised on roughage diet solely without affecting productive and reproductive performance.
- Due to higher degree of diversity in gene pool, improvement in desired characters with wide range of adaptation is faster.
- Comparatively energy and protein required in feed per unit weight gain is low.
- Because of the rapid growth and faster reproductive rate, they produce more meat per unit time as compared to any other livestock except poultry.
- Their smaller size enables easy handling and care even by women and children.
- Their early sexual maturity reduces breedable rearing cost.
- Smaller carcass facilitates its use at a time with lower expenditure.
- Its meat is categorized as white (low fat and cholesterol) meat and universally accepted.
- In backyard rabbitries minimum housing requirement is needed.
- 10. The number of rabbit in a flock can easily match to resources of rabbit keeper . As a backyard rabbitry, one buck and three does can produce meat, which will suffice the need of average family.
- 11. The by-products like skin, wool can be efficiently used to manufacture mats, rugs, cloths, toys, novelties and manure as fertilizer for vegetables.
- 12. They can also be used as laboratory animals for research purpose.

- 13. Rabbit meat is wholesome, tasty which is rich in protein, certain minerals and vitamins and are low in fat and cholesterol.

Productive Features of Rabbit

For efficient rearing and economical production under various production systems, rabbit keeper should try to achieve the following production features from his breed or the breed should possess them with genetic potential.

Productive features of Rabbtries

S.No	Characteristics	Backyard Rabbitry	Commercial Rabbitry
1	Number of litters/doe/year	3-4	5-8
2	Litter size	4-7	6-11
3	Young one reared/litter	3-5	6-8
4	Number of young reared/doe/year	9-20	25-55
5	Weaning weight of individual in litter	800-900 g	1200-1500 g
6	Weaning weight of total litter	3-5 kg	8-15 kg
7	Weaning age	7-8 weeks	5 weeks
8	Market age (weeks) 2 kg weight	12-14	8-10
9	Feeding conversion ratio (FCR)	4-5:1	3-4:1
10	Dressing percentage	40-45%	55-60%

Different Breeds of Rabbit

There are about 38 breed and 19 strains of domestic rabbit throughout the world recognized by American Rabbit Breeder Association (ARBA). In India only 8-10 breeds are available.

- **New Zealand White**:- It is one of the best meat breed. It was developed in USA. It has three varieties white, black and red. The adult buck weigh about 3.5-4 kg and adult doe 2.5- 3.5 kg.
- **Soviet Chinchilla**:- It is a meat type breed which has a compact, coby medium body having only one Grey variety. Its adult buck weigh about 2.5-3.5 kg and adult doe 3- 3.5 kg.
- **Flemish Gaint**:- It is the largest among domestic breeds having well balanced body. It is a meat type breed originated in UK having seven varieties. The adult buck weighs 5 kg and adult doe weighs 5.5 kg.
- **Satin**:- It is originated in USA which is a meat type breed having six varieties. The adult buck weighs 3.5-4 kg and adult does weighs 4-4.5kg.
- **Californian White**:- It is a meat type breed developed in California from Himalayan and Standard Chinchilla cross. The adult buck and doe weighs 3.5-4.5 kg and 3.9-4.8 kg.
- **Rex**:- It is the most valuable fur producing breed of rabbit having seven varieties. The adult buck weighs 3.2 kg and adult doe weighs 3.5 kg.
- **Himalayan**:-It is originated in east and great number is found in China and Russia. It is a small fancy rabbit having two varieties Albino with extreme black and blue. Adult buck weighs 1-1.5 kg and adult doe weighs 1.5-2 kg.
- **French Angora**:- It is a wool type breed having longer and narrow head. It has two varieties. The adult buck weighs 3 kg and the adult doe weighs 3.2 kg.
- **British Angora**:- It was developed in Angora town of Turkey which is a wool type breed. It has much fine coat having two varieties white and coloured. The adult buck weighs 2.5-3.4 kg and the adult doe weighs 2.5-3.6 kg respectively.

CONCLUSION

Rabbit is a good producer of white meat for human consumption throughout the world. Rabbit is preferred for meat and wool production due to its short generation interval of six months and speedy weight gain.

REFERENCES

Osei D Y, Apori S O ns Osafo E L K (2012). Rabbit production in selected urban areas of southern Ghana: status and implication for policy and research. *Animal Production*, 14(2):131-140.