

## Rabbit Keeping

### Why rabbit?

1. Source of food-soft tender and highly delicious.
2. Source of income.
3. Hobby.

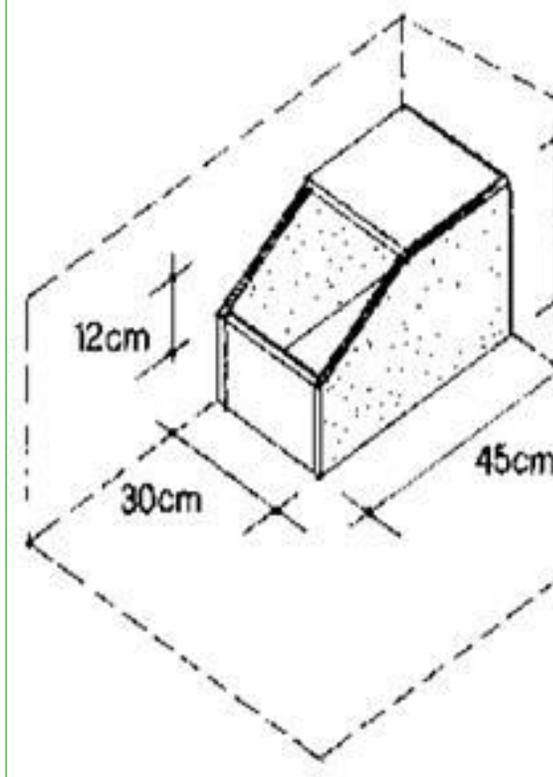
### Rabbit Housing Requirements:

- The house must protect the rabbits and keep them from escaping, predators and adverse weather.
- The house should allow easy, comfortable access for the manager
- The house must be self cleaning or easy to clean
- The house should be of reasonable cost, easy to maintain and be durable.
- Ideally, rabbits should be kept in cages either outdoor with extended roofs or indoor where the cages are kept inside buildings on platforms.
- A rabbit unit should be well ventilated, rain-proof and allows some sunlight
- Standard cages for rabbits should measure: L=80cm, W=60cm, H=45cm.
- For pregnant does or does with young kits, a provision for a nesting box of 30cm by 30cm.
- Usually weld mesh wire is preferred because of ease in maintaining cleanliness.
- Many farmers have thus resorted to using all-wooden cages or wooden plus weld mesh wire cages.
- Multi-tier cages are becoming popular because they save on space. More than two-tier cages are however not recommended because of difficulties in management.

Indoor housing with stacked cages	Nesting box:
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- The cages are stacked in order to save on space. The farmer in this case utilises both timber and weld wire mesh.



## Handling Rabbits

- Always grasp the ears and the skin close to the head with one hand while the other hand takes the full weight of the rabbit at the hips.
- For young rabbits up to about 3-4 months old, a suitable method is to grasp the animal across the loins.



## **Sexing**

A part from the sex organs, physically the buck is usually smaller than the doe and often has a broader head. In the buck, a protruding sex organ appears as a rounded tip, while in the doe the organ is slit-like or v-shaped, and will slope slightly downwards towards the anus. When the bucks are mature the penis and testicles are easily observed.

## **Identification**

It is important to properly identify your rabbits in order to help you keep records about them. The most common ways of identification for rabbits include tattooing and ear notching. Tattooing is the most relevant in rabbits due to their high turnover. For exhibition purposes rings with official marks are used

## **Breeding**

1. There are three (3) breeds of rabbits kept in Kenya; New Zealand white, California White and Chinchilla. Chinchilla, which is a grey/brown breed, is preferred as it has a larger mature weight.

## **New Zealand White**



New Zealand White Rabbit

This breed of rabbit was initially bred for meat and fur. They grow fast and the large one could grow up to 4 to 5 Kg in weight. Other than their meat and fur they are often used for laboratory purposes and are also very popular as pet.

The fur is thick around the body, shorter near the ears and long, straight up ears. The eyes are normally bright and range from pink to red in colour. One good thing about them is that they are resistant to most diseases.

## **Californian white**



Californian White Rabbit

The Californian rabbit breed is a meat rabbit bred from a cross between the New Zealand White and the Himalayan. Its round shaped body tends to be plump and fleshy meaning there's a good ratio of meat to bone. They weigh about 4 - 4.5 Kg and have a coat of dense white fur with black nose, ears, feet and tail. They have bright pink eyes.

### **The Chinchilla**



Chinchilla

The Chinchilla is a large sized rabbit breed developed as a multi-purpose animal for fur as well as meat. The coat is soft and beautiful. The rabbit breed attracts a lot of attention because of its large size and beautiful coat. People want to see it and most of all they want to touch it!

Adult Chinchilla rabbits weigh between 4 – 6 Kg. These stout rabbits have a slight curve to their medium length bodies, beginning at the nape of their necks and following through to the rump. They carry their ears straight and erect.

### **Rabbit feeding**

The cost of production will depend on the system of production selected as the major cost will be that of feed an example is given based on commercial pellets which can be purchased from animal feed manufacturers. The rabbits will consume about 25 g of pellets per day, which will translate to 2.25 Kg in 90 days. At 90 days the dressed

weight will be between 1-1.2kg. Therefore the feed/pellets will cost KSH 51 and you will be able to sell the meat at between KSH 200 and 300 per kilogram dressed weight.

Obviously you should add other costs i.e. labour, depreciation of the houses and other infrastructure, transport to market etc.

Rabbits can be kept in any part of the country so long as they are housed properly and protected from predators. The Ministry of Livestock Development in your area will be able to provide you with specific details i.e. where to source breeding animals from etc.

Rabbits are monogastrics/non ruminants (have single stomach) and feed on plant materials and require nutrients such as proteins, energy, minerals, vitamins and fats in specific measures to help rabbits grow well.

- You can feed your rabbits by providing the following
  - a) On a variety of green plants including grasses, weeds, sweet potato vines, desmodium, alfalfa and vegetables such as cabbages and sukuma wiki
  - b) Root crops such as carrots, sweet potatoes and cassava
  - c) Grains such as maize, wheat, barley and sorghum
  - d) Hay
  - e) Protein supplements e.g. soybean meal, peanut meal
- You can also feed your rabbits on commercially pelleted feed available from different manufacturers. When using commercial pellets, care should be taken to avoid aflatoxin contamination
- Commercial rabbit feed nutritional content normally vary as follows: Protein - 13-18%, Digestible Energy - 8-13% and fibre - 8-18%
- Feed requirements for rabbits vary with individual animals. Proper amounts should be fed to keep the animal in good physical condition without allowing it to become too fat.

- Reduce the amount of feed for the doe to one-half on the day of kindling and gradually but increased gradually from the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to the 7<sup>th</sup> day.
- After a week, the nursing doe and its litter should be provided with food at all times.
- Salt can be provided either by mixing into the feed at one percent or in the form of commercial salt cakes.
- Vitamins: vitamin A is available from root crops and hay, vitamin B in greens and roughage. Rabbits also get their vitamins from re-ingesting their droppings
- When using pellets, ensure they are fresh and not contaminated. NEVER feed your rabbits on mouldy hay or pellets
- It is advised that you feed up to 130g of pellets for adult rabbits per day in combination with other feeds. It is however important that amount of pellets is kept low to reduce cost of production
- Ensure that from the time of weaning, your rabbits are supplied with at least a handful of hay per day for to help rabbits digest better
- When feeding greens, allow them to wilt before feeding. At the time of weaning, introduce wilted greens a little at a time to avoid diarrhoea
- Rabbits produce soft and hard droppings. They re-ingest soft droppings which are rich in the B vitamins
- Rabbits need to be fed on dry matter (forage) and where possible supplementation with concentrates is advisable. Clean water should be availed on a daily basis. A new type of feed should be introduced over a period of a few days.

## **Records**

Keep proper records of all your rabbit unit activities:

- Breeding records
- Growth
- Sales and expenses

All these are important to help you understand your rabbit enterprise and for planning. Rabbits with breeding records help avoid inbreeding and can also fetch premium prices when sold to other farmers.

## **Rabbit diseases**

### **Common Diseases**

The commonest diseases in rabbits are:

#### **a) Coccidiosis**

This is a protozoal parasite of the genus eimeria.

characterised by:

- Whitish diarrhoea or blood stained faeces.
- Loss of appetite
- Dehydration.
- Death.

Does may pass the infection to unborn kids leading to liver coccidiosis by xterised by white spots on the liver at PM

### **Control**

1. hygiene

2 provide with feeds containing coccidiostats

3 . treating with sulphonamides e.g. norodine or intertrim injections or biotrim solution in drinking water.

**b) Ear Canker (mange)**

Mites cause this condition, and it affects the inner side of the rabbit ears.

The disease is mild but disturbs the animals. The earliest signs are: Constant head shaking and scratching of the ears due to irritation. There is a scab or crust formation on the inner side of the ear. Due to heavy infestation, the affected ears may drop downwards.

1. control mites by dusting the house using carbaryl.
2. treat the affected once using ivermectin injection sc.

NB. Rabbits are so sensitive hence avoid AMITRAZ WASH

**c) Pneumonia** - common during cold weather and in poorly ventilated hutches ,they respond well to oxytetracyclines.

**d) Gastro-intestinal complication** mainly arising from feeding ,treat by sulphur injections such as norodine.

**e) Internal parasites** like ascaris especially when fed on greens. Therefore regular de-worming at least 3 months is advisable. It is also important to avoid use of roadside forages to feed your rabbits as worms may infest them.

**f) Aflatoxins** : Caused by fungal contamination of feed i.e. Aspergillus flavus,A.fumigatus,etc.

The rabbits get depressed, off feed, lose wet, bloody diarrhoea, and characteristic yellowing of mucus membranes and death.

**Management:** withdraw the contaminated feed and administer antibiotics e.g. coopermycin from coopers.





