

WRSA project: Rabbit production development in response to the earthquake disaster in Haiti



Interim Report to the WRSA



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Executive Summary

On January 12th at 4:53PM, a devastating earthquake shook the heart of Haiti altering millions of lives forever. This came on the heels of decades of degradation and 4 violent hurricanes in 2008. In the last several years, the Haitian people have taken a keen interest in adding rabbit meat production to their arsenal in their fight against poverty and hunger. Among the most determined of the Haitian people are the university students who see education as a road to a brighter future for themselves and their country. Thousands of students found themselves scattered in every direction, fleeing the destruction of Haiti's capital, Port au Prince and surrounding cities. Twenty-eight university campuses were destroyed completely and 97% suffered damage. Of the more than 40,000 Haitian university students, as many as 6,000 may have perished. Approximately 200 professors and university administrators perished, and many more left the country, resulting in a serious "brain drain" that will affect Haiti for years to come.

Within 4 months of the earthquake, the universities reopened. Most were relocated into safer buildings, while other classes were held in tents. Housing was and still is a big problem in Port au Prince, but the students made it work. Initially, a project was designed to set students up with home rabbitries that would provide a learning opportunity as well as a source of food and income for their families.

In the aftermath of the quake, many students feared they would never be able to finish their studies, which motivated several agronomy students to approach Makouti Agro Enterprise for help. During the 4 months that the students interacted with Makouti's founding leader, Benito Jasmin, who found ways and funds to involve students on field trips. These trips took the students to many small villages where Makouti held training programs and offered ongoing technical support to farmers, including many rabbit producers. The experience was so enlightening and motivating that it has changed the course of education in Haiti's agronomy programs. Haitian university education being completely theoretical left the students lacking in hands-on experience with real world situations. The field trip experiences motivated many students to return to the villages on their own time to work with village farmers and to request more hands-on learning. Thus, the idea of rabbitries at universities came to be.

In 2010, the ongoing rabbit programme was expanded with the helpful aid of monies donated by the World Rabbit Science Association (WRSA). The objective of the "rabbit project" was to further expand the programme by improving the technical knowledge on rabbit production and the purchase of breeding stock and equipment. In response, 8 major training sessions have been conducted *in collaboration with* Partners of the Americas, Farmer to Farmer volunteers, Makouti technicians, village rabbit producers, and university agronomy students. A rabbitry has been built at the Universite de Notre Dame d'Haiti in Les Cayes and a second one will soon start at the Universtie d'Haiti in Port au Prince. This program continues to grow and is helping to strengthen the foundation of the expanding meat rabbit industry in Haiti.

A recent survey revealed that 9 out of 10 Haitians would like to eat rabbit meat (up from 28% in 2008) and 3 out of every 10 Haitian farmers would like to raise rabbits (80% of Haitians are farmers). Makouti currently has 327 successful, income producing rabbitries in their membership. Historically, in the aftermath of disasters, food distribution systems always fail in Haiti. However, this project has been successful in that many families have attributed their survival to their rabbits. The most common expense that Haitians have been spending their new rabbit income on is educating their children.

The assistance of the WRSA in donating nearly \$7,500.00 is greatly appreciated and will continue to improve many lives in Haiti for years to come.

Meci m'zanmi! (Thank you, my friends)

Contributors

Participating organizations:

Makouti Agro Enterprises is a Haitian run organization started in 2004 and spearheaded by Benito Jasmin, the Haitian field agent for the Partners of the Americas (POA)'s Farmer to Farmer program. The mission of the organization is to unite farmers, allowing them to pool their resources to overcome obstacles.

Partners of the Americas' Farmer to Farmer program is focused on providing technical assistance to agricultural producers, producer organizations, and agribusiness in several developing countries. US agricultural volunteers travel onsite to share their knowledge with local farmers. This program is run independently of the US POA Chapters since the volunteers come from all over the country.

DG Educational Services is a nonprofit dedicated to agricultural education and natural sciences for children and adults. It is located in California, USA and frequently acts as a fiscal agent and project manager for Haitian agricultural projects.

World Rabbit Science Association (WRSA) is an organization of international rabbit scientists and producers whose goals are to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience among persons in all parts of the World who are contributing to the advancement of various branches of the rabbit industry. They promote the extension of knowledge by encouragement of teaching, scientific research, practical experimentation, the collection and publication of statistics and documents in relation with rabbit production.

Responsible Individuals:

Myriam Kaplan-Pasternak DVM, 10 time FTF volunteer in Haiti for rabbit production since January of 2007. In the US she and her husband run a ranch with a 6,000 rabbit, meat production project serving local restaurants. They are one of the largest rabbit producers and distributors on the west coast and co founders of DG Educational Services.

Benito Jasmin is the founding leader of Makouti and the primary field agent for Partners of the America's Farmer to Farmer program in Haiti. He is an agronomist educated in Honduras. He currently has a 100 cage (known as holes) rabbitry near Cap Haitian. He is also an expert beekeeper, tackling successfully the health problems of Haiti's bees, and is experienced in crop production, reforestation and more.

Herve Alciner is an agronomy graduate and a rabbit production instructor. He is the present executive director of Makouti and is developing a specialty in cacao processing.

Gerard Michel Joseph is a lawyer with an agronomy background and a field agent for POA's FTF program. He is trained as a rabbit production specialist, meat quality assurance inspector, IPM specialist, coffee producer and exporter and is a founding member of Makouti. He serves as a translator for FTF volunteers.

Anderson Pierre has a degree in administration. He has also been trained in beekeeping, rabbit production, horticulture, meat inspection, accounting. He is in charge of commercial operations for Makouti. Currently he is responsible for the rabbit projects in Baptiste, Riviere Froide, and Sigueneau. He also serves as a translator

Donations received from WRSA and members

WRSA (World) UDS	3,978.00
WRSA-Italy (ASIC) USD	1,264.89
WRSA-Sub Saharan USD	500.00
WRSA-German USD	498.00
WRSA-Mexico USD	470.20
Don Higgins	100.00
James McNitt	500.00
Rene Denis Branckaert	150.00
Total	\$7,461.09

Expense Report

University Notre Dame of Haiti (UNDH- Les Cayes)		
Shelter materials	\$975.00	7/2010
Cages (48 holes)	\$1,000.00	
Rabbits (27 does, 9 bucks)	\$675.00	
Subtotal	\$2650.00	
Field Trip training in Grand Boulage (32 students,64 farmers)	\$2410.00	7/14/2010
Field trip training (2x) in Cap Haitien (38 new & 28 experienced producers)	\$ 1310.00	7/18-19/2010
Field Trip Training in Grand Boulage (42 Students, 30 farmers)	\$1500.00	7/26-27/2010
Field trip training (2x) in Cap Haitien (75 students, 42 farmers)	\$2500.00	
Field Trip training in Quartier Morin (42 students,17 farmers)	\$ 980.00	9/15/2011
Subtotal	\$8700.00	
University d'Haiti Damian (Port au Prince)		
Shelter Materials	\$1000.00	
Cages (48 holes)	\$1000.00	
Rabbits (30 does, 10 bucks)	\$750.00	
Subtotal	\$2750.00	
Total	\$14,100.00	

The WRSA monies (\$7,461.09) were used as part of the \$14,100 expenses of the total programme.

DISCUSSION

The following are excerpts from the field reports of several FtF volunteers who participated in the training sessions with the university students and farmers that involved WRSA monies:

Brian J. Rude, Ph.D. of the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences, Mississippi State University traveled to and in Haiti supported by The Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and the Americas (FAVACA) from June 6 through June 21, 2010. His comments as follows:

Grand Boulage. A training session was organized to host 50 producers and students on Monday, June 14, 2010. A total of 66 attendees were present, it was estimated that approximately one third were students, and the rest were farmers. The training session split into two sessions; morning and afternoon. The morning session spent time with explanation of different digestive systems (monogastric, ruminant, and non-ruminant herbivore), what nutrients were digested down to, and then absorbed as. The first 2½ hours were didactic, but then attendees were divided into groups consisting of 7 or 8 and asked to identify two things they learned and five questions they had. A leader was selected from each group to read their discussion topics. There was not enough time to allow for their questions to be answered. The afternoon didactic session focused on the nutrient composition of major feedstuff classifications, and what animals require. Following this, a less formal question, answer, discussion period lasted for about 1½ hours. In total the training lasted from 10:00 AM to about 5:00 PM.



Cap Haitien. A training session was organized to host 25 new or potential producers on Friday, June 18, 2010. A total of 38 new or potential farmers were present. The format was similar to the training session at Grand Boulage, but there was time to answer the questions the groups came up with. The training lasted from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM.



Cap Haitien. A training session was organized to host 25 experienced producers on Saturday, June 19, 2010. A total of 28 experienced farmers were present. The format was similar to the

training session at Grand Boulage, but there was time to answer the questions the groups came up with. The training lasted from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM”

“ The students seemed genuinely interested in learning and working with producers.”

“While producers need knowledge to be productive and economically viable, it is important to have resources that producers can use when questions, problems or issues arise. Training “students” to become resources for these situations is very desirable. These individuals should not only be knowledgeable about the biology of animal production, but also have an intimate understanding of the production setting, culture, and constraints. To that end, training individuals who have grown up with exposure to these situations would benefit animal production in Haiti. These trained individuals will also need to possess excellent written and oral communication skills.

The following comments are from Robert Spencer FtF volunteer in Food Safety and Food Quality:

I guess the two things that impressed me most about this project were:

(1) The pride the students took in their project; they definitely took ownership in maintaining a clean environment, record-keeping, and a desire to better understand how to make the project a success. (2) I asked them what they liked about the rabbit projects, they responded by saying this project consisted of math, biology, record-keeping, and learning responsibility. It was the girls who were more outspoken about and involved in the project rather than the males.

In addition, a recent survey revealed that 9 out of 10 Haitians would like to eat rabbit meat (up from 28% in 2008) and 3 out of every 10 Haitian farmers would like to raise rabbits (80% of Haitians are farmers). Makouti currently has 327 successful, income producing rabbitries in their membership. Historically, in the aftermath of disasters, food distribution systems always fail in Haiti. However, this project has been successful in that many families have attributed their survival to their rabbits. The most common expense that Haitians have been spending their new rabbit income on is educating their children.



The following comments from Dr. Steven Lukefahr:

S.D. Lukefahr, General Secretary for Rabbits in Developing Countries (WRSA) traveled to and in Haiti from July 24 through August 4, 2010. Excerpts from his report are as follows: The volunteer spent 10 days in Haiti with the mission of providing training and evaluating the status of rabbit production on farms. Three days were spent in Grand Boulage and six days in Cap Haitian. Twelve farmers and four rabbit farm managers were visited and received on-farm training. Formal training was provided to sixty-three students, professionals, and farmers. In Grand Boulage, 6 hours of rabbit training was provided to 3 farmers (1 male and 2 females) and 19 students (18 males and 1 females) from three universities: Damian, Universite Notre Dame d'Haiti, and Uniq Universite Quisqueya), which was held in the mission's church. In Cap Haitian, 31 students (25 male and 6 females) from 5 universities (Ecole Moyenne d'Agriculture de Rouge Morne, Universite Polyvalente d'Haiti, Universite Charetienne du Nord d'Haiti, Universite Roi Henry Christophe, and Universite Publique de Nord d'Haiti), as well as professionals and rabbit farmers from Quartier Morin and other regions of the country received rabbit training.



Rabbit lectures covered vital aspects of small-scale production (e.g., low investment costs, in-kind loan of breeding stock, farm-based feeding, and production targets, including calculations of *per capita* protein intake). A set of 140 slide photos of rabbit production around the world was also presented. Based on these photos, lessons were learned on basic topics such as suitable forage species and other feedstuffs, proper housing materials and design, appropriate genetic resources and breeding practices, and health management. Active discussions ensued and trainees appeared to be very pleased by the new knowledge gained. These training costs partially involved the funds from WRSA donations.



Students also visited farms to supplement their new knowledge with the on-farm challenges and realities of rabbit production. On several farms visited, farmers were not providing a suitable diet to their rabbits and production was low. In a positive light, it was good that students had the opportunity of observing the impact of poor nutrition on performance. This experience obviously stressed the importance of good nutrition. It is anticipated that students will focus on appropriate practices (e.g., establishing forage plots, planning for dry season feeding, and feeding a variety of suitable foods every day) by farmers that will ensure good nutrition.

The following excerpts are from Benito Jasmin's recent report:

Visits and Training with Haiti's University Students (March 2010)

Sustainability is possible but only if a lot of people understand and participate. These include:

- Producers
- Entrepreneurs
- Professionals
- Highly Skilled Technicians



Rabbits are becoming a major commodity with the demand rapidly expanding. The more people know about rabbit the more they want to buy it. Rabbit meat is becoming well known in Haiti. The demand exceeds the supply.

Involving agricultural students is an effective strategy to maintain good progress.

- Having them know about the potential of rabbit production
- Having them involved in rabbit production
- Having them understand the real challenges of rabbit production and the opportunities for alleviation of hunger and poverty
- Giving them the opportunity to be part of the promotion, production and study of rabbit production while being a student so that rabbit production will be improved country-wide.

Seventy students have participated in the first 6 visits to rabbit project sites. They have been able to:

- Visit farms to examine the different styles of structures used as sheds in production
- Prepare land and plant sweet potatoes, leucaena, benzolive and help in water management and cleaning involving more than 21 families
- Take part in the improvement of rabbitries
 - i) Building new cages
 - ii) Building new shelter structures
 - iii) Understanding and help resolving water and food issues
 - iv) Eating rabbit meat

From the budget above, \$2,650 and \$2,750 were used from WRSA donations to purchase materials, cage wire, and breeding stock. Materials are mostly wood pole and timbers and aluminum sheets used to construct simple and effective sheds. Also, \$8,700 was used for training of farmers and experienced rabbit producers, and university students, which included costs of travel, food, training supplies, photocopies, etc.

CONCLUSION

The Farmer to Farmer program and Makouti would like to thank WRSA for their participation in the rabbit production project in Haiti. The preliminary data show very promising results. Much of this is due to the ongoing efforts of Makouti and the repeated visits of WRSA members over the years. The earliest visits from Dr. Peter Cheeke and Dr. James McNitt left their positive imprints. The seed was planted and continues to grow today reaching many parts of Haiti. Extending this program into the university system will help ensure continued growth and the ongoing possibilities for more Haitians to receive technical assistance on rabbit production, increasing the quality and quantity over the years.

As families increase their income, they first spend money on educating their children. When combined with a healthier diet, which now includes rabbit meat, the future looks brighter for Haiti's children. Thank you for making this possible.

CONTACTS and DOCUMENTS

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The Challenge for Haitian Higher Education: A post-earthquake assessment of higher education institutions in the Port au Prince area

Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED) March 2010 (www.INURED.org)