

MINUTES OF THE FOLLOW-UP MEETING OF THE SSA-WRSA

Date: Saturday, 8th November, 2008.

Time: 10.00 A.M. to 2.30. P.M.

Venue: Board Room, Faculty of Agriculture, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

Key/Guiding Questions:

1. How do we consolidate and strengthen our branch?
2. How do we mobilize all stakeholders and target groups?
3. What are the R&D strategies to mobilize backyard rabbit farmers?
4. What is the way forward?

Agenda proper:

	Time
1. Registration and welcome	9.45 – 10.00 Hrs. Local Time
2. Briefing by the Interim Coordinator	10.00 – 10.20 Hrs.
3. Contributions from attendees of the 9WRC	10.00 – 10.40 Hrs.
4. Discussion (Session 1)	10.40 – 11.30 Hrs.
a. Update: the journey so far – achievements, challenges, constraints, etc	
b. A comprehensive agenda for the operation of the SSA-WRSA	
c. Reports from various institutions	
d. Programme for mobilizing all stakeholders	
e. Election of officers/steering committee to run the affairs of the branch	
f. Create new committees to address various priorities	
g. Annual membership dues	
h. Calendar of activities	
5. Coffee/Tea break (plus a taste of rabbit meat)	11.30 – 11.45 Hrs.
6. Discussion (Session 11)	11.45 – 13.45 Hrs.
g. Research agenda for the SSA-WRSA	
h. Publishing in the WRS Journal	
i. Promotional strategies (lessons from the FAO Family Poultry Devt)	
j. Outreach programmes/awareness campaigns (merits of backyard rabbits)	
k. Strategy to mobilize and involve all stakeholders and target group	
l. A Flyer/logo for SSA-WRSA	
m. Networking/linkages with other WRSA branches in the developing	
n. Wrap-up of the Meeting	
o. Special acknowledgements/appreciation	
6. Lunch	13.45 – 14.15 Hrs.
7. Departure	14.15 Hrs.

Rapporteur: Dr. J. A. Odedire

MINUTES PROPER

1.0 ATTENDANCE

- a. Dr. A.M. Orheruata (University of Benin) – Chaired the meeting
- b. Dr. G. T. Iyeghe-Erakpotobor (NAPRI/ABU, Zaria)
- c. Mr. T.T. Samuel (NAPRI/ABU, Zaria)
- d. Dr. O.A. Aderinola (LAUTECH, Ogbomoso)
- e. Dr. O.O. Ojebiyi (LAUTECH, Ogbomoso)
- f. Dr. T.A. Rafiu (LAUTECH, Ogbomoso)
- g. Dr. O.A. Abu (Univ of Ibadan)
- h. Dr. C.A. Chineke (FUTA, Akure)
- i. Dr. F.A.S. Dairo (UNAD, Ado-Ekiti)
- j. Dr. (Mrs.) S.M. Odeyinka (OAU Ile-Ife)
- k. Dr. S. O. Oseni (OAU Ile-Ife)
- l. Dr. J.A. Odedire (OAU Ile-Ife) – took notes
- m. A. Ajayi (OAU Ile-Ife)
- n. M. Popoola (OAU Ile-Ife)

2.0 Preliminaries

The meeting started at 10:20 A.M. when most of those who indicated interest in coming have arrived. The Coordinator (Saidu Oseni) asked the gathering for a final approval/ratification of the agenda before the commencement of the meeting. An extra item “Reports from various institutions” was added to the agenda. After this, the meeting started in earnest. The Coordinator requested Dr. A.M. Orheruata (University of Benin) to chair the meeting, to which he gave his consent.

3.0 Briefing from the Interim Coordinator

The Coordinator gave a detailed briefing to the house about how it all started sometime in 2005 with a mail from Dr. Steven Lukefahr, the WRSA President, stressing the need to mobilize rabbit researchers to form the sub-Saharan Africa branch of the WRSA (or the SSA-WRSA). Ever since, some of the major accomplishments of the branch include:

- a. establishing an umbrella body for rabbit scientists in SSA to come together to address crucial R&D issues affecting rabbit production in SSA,
- b. growing membership, as well as growing interest and participation in issues related to rabbit R&D programmes in poverty alleviation,
- c. a group e-mail service where members share and exchange ideas about rabbit science,
- d. a web-site for the group,
- e. an occasional newsletter detailing research and development activities related to rabbit production
- f. attendance and participation in the 9th World Rabbit Congress, Verona, Italy,
- g. membership and participation of the branch in the WRSA council meeting at the 9th World Rabbit Congress in Italy,
- h. recognition as a formal branch by the Council of the WRSA, and consequently, a voting member of the Council,
- i. sourced for group support and sponsorship for four (4) members to attend the 9th WRC in Italy, etc, etc.

Some major challenges facing the branch, as mentioned by the Coordinator include the following:

- a. making the SSA-WRSA a stable and functional branch over time, which implies full participation in WRSA activities, publications in WRS (Journal), strengthening R&D programmes with a focus on poverty alleviation etc.
- b. establishing a research mission, mobilizing stake-holders and adopting a clientele approach to R&D, an arrangement that is similar to the Mekarn Project in SE Asia,
- c. setting up an organizational structure to coordinate all the challenges above.

4.0 Reports from various institutions

- 4.1 **University of Ibadan.** A report on rabbit research activities from the University of Ibadan was presented by Dr. O. A. Abu. Research activities involved the use of roots and tubers (cassava and potatoes) as feed resources for rabbits. Other research activities involve the use of exogenous enzymes, as well as the assessment of mycotoxins on rabbit performance. Challenges facing the group include poor funding, dilapidated structures (rabbit houses, cages and animals). Currently, some colleagues are sourcing for funding through the McArthur Foundation to conduct on-farm research and development using rabbits as tools for poverty alleviation.
- 4.2 **University of Benin.** A report on rabbit research activities from the University of Benin was presented by Dr. A.M. Orheruata. He is solely in-charge of the Rabbit Unit. Stocks were sourced from rabbit farmers. Stocks appear to have originated from Dutch and New Zealand White breeds of rabbits. Research activities include nutrition research including forage intake, as well as the effect of feed deprivation on performance. Other studies include rabbit processing with emphasis on value addition to the product.
- 4.3 **Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso (LAUTECH).** The report was presented by Dr. O.O. Ojebiyi. According to him, the membership of SSA-WRSA at LAUTECH is strengthening, ever since the first contact that was established by Dr. Oseni in 2006. Initially, the state of the rabbit unit was deplorable. A lot of effort was made recently by researchers, and things are beginning to improve. Active research areas border on nutrition and physiology of rabbits. Nutrition research involves the evaluation of various types and combinations of forages and concentrates on rabbit growth and development.
- 4.4 **National Animal Production Research Institute, Shika, Zaria.** The report was presented by Dr. (Mrs.) Grace Erakpotobor. The unit got their foundation stocks from Ibadan and Ife some years back. The initial stocks were a 'cocktail' mixture of Californian, Chinchilla and New Zealand White. Research interests cover nutrition, breeding and physiology. Specifically, researchers at the unit are interested in nutrition and environmental effects on rabbit breeds and their performance. The original stock of animals have been used and used over and over again across several generations. Thus, the greatest challenge facing the unit is the high level of inbreeding in the unit, leading to a marked deterioration in prolificacy and survival rate of the kits. It is such a serious problem that attempts have been made to import pure breeds from France, in spite of the logistics and costs involved. Other challenges include: (a) pests (especially rats) that eat up the

kits or bite off their ears, leading to some deformity (e.g. ear-less or one-eared rabbits); (b) cage design; (c) Feeding: determining appropriate combinations of forages and concentrates (forage-based diets being more common among farmers); (d) sourcing for purebred stocks and the enormous logistics involved with importation; (e) Funding being a major constraint.

4.5 **Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.** The report was presented by Drs. Odeyinka and Oseni. Essentially, the research work covers two major areas: nutrition (by Drs. Odeyinka and Fatufe) and breeding/genetics (Dr. Oseni). Studies are conducted under on-station and on-farm conditions. The nutrition work is focused on the evaluation of *Moringa oleifera*, a multi-purpose plant as a forage for rabbits. The breeding and genetics studies are focused on: (a) genetics of adaptation and heat tolerance for a heterogeneous population of rabbits and involves recording traits such as rectal temperature, respiration rates, pulse rate, ambient temperature and relative humidity, calculating temperature-humidity index and relating such indices to performance (e.g. fertility, conception rate, litter survival, ADG and growth rate). (b) Other studies are focused on the evaluation of a heterogeneous population of rabbits for performance under on-station and on-farm conditions. Some justification for the use of these stocks include: (i) they represent stocks used principally in backyard systems; (ii) possess some degree of adaptation to sub-optimal management; (iii) they give some acceptable level of performance under improved management.

4.6 **Federal University of Technology, Akure.** The report was presented by Dr. Chineke. He started the unit with the help of a research grant given by his University. With this grant, he built the rabbit house, constructed cages and got foundation stocks. Critical challenges include dwindling funding and sustainability of research activities.

4.7 Discussion of the reports from various institutions:
The following summary was drawn from the reports from various institutions: (i) Rabbit research suffer from problems of poor or zero funding. This results in cases of dilapidated infrastructure and consequently, this affets the zeal of researchers. (ii) In institutions where research activities are going on, funding is mostly external (e.g. the IFS in the case of OAU Ile-Ife and the McArthur Foundation grant, in the case of the Univ. if Ibadan, and the ARC in the case of NAPRI, Zaria). (iii). A suggestion was made that members should be more aggressive in sourcing for funds (from local and external sources) in order to boost their rabbit research activities. This was a general suggestion to all those present at the meeting. Interestingly, members who attended the meeting were also those championing and promoting rabbit research and development in their various institutions.

A question was raised by Dr. Oseni as to what extent do researchers interact with rabbit farmers. The following responses were received. (a) Two institutions (OAU and LAUTECH) are involved with on-farm research (with regular interaction with rabbit keepers). (b) NAPRI had some regular interactions with farmers in the past and hopes to revive such interactions again. (c)

Researchers from the University of Ibadan plan to initiate some on-farm monitoring with a McArthur grant.

In summary, research works in a number of institutions are mostly on-station with minimal interactions with farmers. In this regard, Dr. Oseni noted that this trend must change because of the following reasons: (a) research with farmers have a direct impact on the farmers, (b) Funding agencies are likely to support research that are clientele-based, with clear deliverables. Members were therefore advised to give this line of research a thought.

5.0 Programme for mobilizing stakeholders:

In addressing the issue of stakeholder mobilization, a question was raised: “who are the stakeholders in rabbit research and development?” An answer to this question was seen as a good starting point in stakeholder mobilization. The following stakeholders were identified: researchers, target groups (rabbit farmers), government (at the local, state and federal levels, including Ministries of Agriculture, Agricultural Development Projects or ADPs, etc) and NGOs (local and international), religious groups (particularly Christian Missions), Donor agencies, Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARC). A major challenge was finding a strategy to mobilize all these agencies with the singular purpose of furthering the course of rabbit research and development as a tool for sustainable livelihoods. In this regard, members concluded that a programme for mobilization of stakeholders should involve the following steps:

- a. **Consolidation** of the SSA-WRSA as a stable branch of the WRSA,
- b. Define a framework for such mobilization, with clearly defined objectives and goals,
- c. A farmer awareness and sensitization programme to run *pari passu* with (b) above,
- d. A comprehensive programme to mobilize all groups and tap on their resources and expertise.

The issue about the name of the branch was also raised, bearing in mind the fact that the SSA has over forty eight countries, with wide geographical spread, and considering other major issues relating to logistics and coordination of members. The conclusion was that members from Nigeria should operate the Nigerian branch of the SSA-WRSA, while reaching out to our members from other countries in the SSA. A similar arrangement operates in S E Asia where the WRSA branch covers the entire region. This point was to be confirmed from the WRSA.

A question was raised by one of the attendees regarding the requirements for memberships of the WRSA. The answer was given as follows: that anybody that is involved in R&D programme with rabbits – production, processing, marketing, etc can be a registered member. Again, this point needed further clarification from the WRSA.

6.0 Election of officers to run the affairs of the branch

The following positions were created in the interim and by general consensus, the following people were appointed to fill the positions

Position	Holder	Address	E-mail
President	Dr. Saidu Oseni	Dept of Animal Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.	sozeni@oauife.edu.ng
Treasurer	Dr. O.A. Abu	Dept of Animal Science, University of Ibadan	ohiahmed@yahoo.com
Public Relations Officer	Dr. G.T. Erakpotobor	National Animal Production Research Institute, Shika, Zaria	gtierak@yahoo.com
General Secretary	Dr. J.A. Odedire	Dept of Animal Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.	oadeolu@oauife.edu.ng

7.0 Committees to address various priorities:

The following areas were identified as priorities for the SSA-WRSA: (a) Rabbit promotion and extension, (b) Rabbit nutrition, (c) rabbit breeding and genetics, (d) rabbit physiology.

The following committees were set up to address the afore-mentioned areas of specialization:

- a. Rabbit promotion and extension:
 - a. Dr. O.A. Ajayi
 - b. Prof. J.G. Adewale
 - c. Mr. T.T. Samuel
- b. Rabbit nutrition
 - a. Dr. S.M. Odeyinka
 - b. Dr. A.A. Fatufe
 - c. Dr. O.O. Ojebiyi
 - d. Dr. O.A. Abu
 - e. Dr. J.A. Odedire
 - f. Dr. T.A. Rafiu
 - g. Prof. G.O. Farinu
 - h. Dr. F.A.S. Dairo
 - i. Dr. O.A. Aderinola
- c. Rabbit Health
 - a. Dr. B.O. Oyebanji
 - b. Dr. A.F. Ajayi
- d. Rabbit Breeding & Genetics
 - a. Dr. A.M. Orheruata
 - b. Dr. S. Oseni
 - c. Dr. C.A. Chineke
 - d. Dr. T.R. Fayeye
 - e. Prof. W.A. Hassan

- e. Rabbit Physiology
 - a. Dr. G.T. Iyeghe-Erakpotobor
 - b. Dr. O.A. Sokunbi
 - c. Dr. O.A. Amao
 - d. Dr. S. I. Ola
 - e. Dr. V.A. Togun
 - f. Dr. V.M. Omoyakhi
 - g. Dr. A-M Yakubu

How were these committees to address the above stated priorities? They were told to brainstorm and come up with proposals in their various areas of specializations, regarding critical research needs.

8.0 Annual membership dues

It was noted that the annual membership due was \$10. It was further noted that some expenses were incurred in the general running of the branch (web-site development, photocopy, correspondence, etc associated with the running of a Secretariat for a branch). After extensive deliberations, it was agreed that members should pay the sum of three thousand naira as annual membership fee. The Treasurer (Dr. O.A. Abu) went round to collect dues for members. A total of twenty four thousand naira (=N=24,000.00) was collected. A designated account is to be opened with the United Bank for Africa, PLC.

9.0 Calendar of activities

A calendar of activities was agreed upon. The calendar will involve Annual Conference/National meeting of the SSA-WRSA. Such annual meeting/conference will be designed to bring together rabbit scientists and stakeholders to discuss issues related to rabbit R&D. The proposed date is first week of June every year. This date was carefully chosen in order not to coincide with other annual meetings in Animal Sciences.

Appointment of contact persons:

The following members were appointed as contact persons for SSA-WRSA for their institutions:

Institution	Person
Ladoke Akintola UNiv of Tech, Ogbomoso	Dr. O.O. Ojebiyi
University of Benin, Benin City	Dr. A.M. Orheruata
University of Ibadan, Ibadan	Dr. O.A. Abu
National Animal Production Research Institute, Shika, Zaria.	Dr. G.T. Iyeghe-Erakpotobor
Nasarawa State University	Dr. A-M yakubu
Ile-Ife	Dr. S. Oseni
Akure	Dr. C.A. Chineke
Sokoto	Prof. W.A. Hassan
Univ. of Uyo	Dr. I.F. Etuk
Univ. of Ilorin	Dr. T.R. Fayeye

Also, the entire country was divided into the following zones for effective coordination of activities:

Zone	States, Cities & Towns	Leader
Ogbomoso	Ilorin, Ogbomoso	Dr. Ojebiyi
Ibadan	Ibadan, Igbo-Ora, Iwo, Abeokuta, Ayetoro	Dr. Abu
Benin	Benin, Delta	Dr. Orheruata
Zaria	Zaria, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto,	Dr Iyeghe-Erakpotobor
Nasarawa	Nasarawa, Abuja, Jos	Dr. A-M Yakubu
Ile-Ife	Ekiti, Ondo, Ilesa, Esa-Oke	Dr. Chineke

10.0 Research agenda for the SSA-WRSA:

Various committees were advised to come up with research agenda in their areas of specialization. Such agenda should involve problem-solving research, with clearly defined deliverables that also accommodate target groups and stakeholders, in a multi-disciplinary setting. The following people were appointed to propose some agenda for the key areas of research that were previously identified:

- a. Rabbit Breeding - Dr. A-M Orheruata
- b. Physiology - Dr. Iyeghe-Erakpotobor
- c. Nutrition - Dr. F.A.S. Dairo
- d. Extension & Promotion - Prof. J. G. Adewale

11.0 Publishing in the WRS Journal: Dr. Oseni provided the following information regarding publication of manuscripts in the World Rabbit Science (WRS) Journal. He noted that the WRS represents the foremost journal for research outputs in all aspects of rabbit science and production, with a high Impact Factor. He further noted that publication in the WRS is free of charge and that Dr. Lukefahr, The WRSA Secretary for Developing World promised to assist in vetting/editing papers for the WRS before submissions. Members were therefore encouraged to publish their papers in this very reputable journal.

12.0 Promotional strategies (lessons from the FAO Family Poultry Devt)

The group was also briefed by the coordinator, about FAO's comprehensive programme for the development of backyard family poultry in many developing countries, as a means towards family welfare and sustainable livelihoods. There was a suggestion that there may be some lessons here that may facilitate the development of backyard family rabbit programmes, especially with the current threat of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) affecting backyard family poultry units all across the developing world.

13.0 Outreach programmes/awareness campaigns (merits of backyard rabbits) – The PRO office, in conjunction with other executives are to draw up a programme of promotional campaign to actualize the outreach programmes of the branch.

14.0 Strategy to mobilize and involve all stakeholders and target group

- a. One suggestion on ways to accomplish this involves the organization of a "Rabbit Show or Field Day" in order create awareness of the merits of raising rabbits

as well as the contributions of backyard rabbit units to improved family welfare, especially for impoverished families. Another suggestions

- b. Another suggestion was the vigorous and aggressive promotion of rabbit meat among the populace, through radio jingles, writings in popular press, and the preparation of rabbit meat using local recipes.
- c. Past experiences of the National Rabbit Programme (NRP) in Ghana could be a guide. Dr. Lukefahr was acknowledged for making the manual of the NRP available to the branch.

15.0 A Flyer/logo for SSA-WRSA:

It was decided that a logo/flier be designed for the SSA-WRSA, with inserts of pictures of local rabbit farmers. Members were to provide such pictures.

16.0 Networking/linkages with other WRSA branches in the developing

The Coordinator briefed the house about the need to establish networks with other branches of the WRSA especially in other developing countries. Already, the names of the entire membership of the SSA-WRSA has been entered into wrsa@kralek.com, which represents the e-mail group of all members of the WRSA globally. Through this medium, members can share information and be kept abreast of developments in rabbit R&D globally.

17.0 Wrap-up of the Meeting: Special tribute was paid to Drs. Dairo and Abu for initiating the follow-up meeting. Special acknowledgements of members of the LOC, whom Dr. Oseni described as one family. All those who made contributions in cash and kind were acknowledged. These people include Prof. Omitogun (the Head of Department of Animal Science, OAU, Ile-Ife, who provided coffee, tea and bottled water for the lunch), Dr. Odeyinka, who provided substantial financial support to the tune of six thousand naira, Dr. Asaolu who contributed the sum of two thousand naira, Dr. Fatufe (who provided four live rabbits), Dr. Oseni contributed four live rabbits, 40 file jackets, one crate of bottled water, as well as the general coordination to ensure successful hosting; Dr. Odedire who volunteered a live goat, Dr. S.I. Ola contributed a whole pack of writing pens, Dr. Agboola and Mrs. Dudusola each paid for a crate of Malt drink while Mrs Betiku provided snacks for the coffee break, the Dean of the Faculty who allowed us to use the Faculty Board Room for the meeting, while Dr. Ola provided a full pack of pens. The entire plan reflected a family-like arrangement. The President expressed his utmost gratitude to all these people who made the programme a success.

18.0 Special acknowledgements/appreciation was given by Dr. Dairo who acknowledged Dr. Oseni specially for all his efforts in coordination and according to him, whose efforts 'gave birth' to the association, as well as his spectacular efforts in facilitating attendance at the 9th World Rabbit Congress in Verona. In addition, a special vote of thanks in appreciation of the successful hosting was given by Dr. O.O. Ojebiyi.

19.0 Lunch time: A meal of Iyan (pounded yam with rabbit meat) was presented.

20.0 Adjournment: The meeting was brought to a close at 2:19 P.M.