

RABBIT HUSBANDRY IN THE TOGO

by

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Several factors have led the father of the Togolese Nation, General Eyadema, to give priority to the development of animal husbandry in the Togo. These are: the increased national shortage of animal proteins; the high prices of meat products imported from neighbouring countries (Niger, Upper Volta, Mali, etc.); families in rural villages not being able to eat meat more than ten times a year; the fairly common sight of children with nutritional deficiency symptoms.

Recently the number of rabbit breeders in Togo has increased and there are now more than two hundred. Rabbit production operations can be divided into three different types:

- (1) Non specialised family type operations,
- (2) Farms specialising in rabbit production,
- (3) Semi intensive commercial rabbit operations.

(1) Family type operations

In this kind of rabbit production system, the number of animals is generally less than ten. Enclosures of 2 x 4 m covered by corrugated iron, or wire-netted cages of 1 x 1 x 0.65, are used. The rabbits are weaned when they are six weeks old and left in freedom in enclosures until they are sold.

The main feed given to the rabbits is crushed corn and grass. There are no or little sanitary measures.

(2) Farms specialising in rabbit production

In this kind of farming system, the number of animals is usually between 50 and 200 and there is generally one male for 10 females. The rabbits are housed in two-storey wire-netted cages, placed in buildings which floor is made of cement and roof of corrugated iron or straw. Droppings are collected about once a week and spread on the fields as manure. Very often rabbit breeding is a subsidiary to poultry, sheep and goat production. The farmers usually have a fair knowledge of rabbit husbandry. They know how to avoid inbreeding, the weaning follows the recommended pattern and they can optimize the number of litters per year.

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(a) Feeding

The rabbits generally receive, at 7.00 hours in the morning, a diet based on wheat bran, crushed corn, rice bran, spent brewer's grain, peanut oil-cake and fish meal. In the afternoon, between 16.00 and 17.00 hours, they receive wild herbage and dandelion leaves. Rabbits seem to like dandelion leaves very much, which are rich in proteins and whose Togolose name is Aninonsigbé. The weight of feed distributed every day to each rabbit is about 250 grammes. The feed is prepared on the farm with what is available to the farmer.

Since the beginning of 1976, it has been impossible to feed rabbits well as a drought destroyed everything; the lack of grass provoked the increase in price of compounded feeds. The shortage of feeds caused the closing down of many rabbit operation. Some nutritional disorders thought to be caused by poor nutrition were observed, such as loss of weight, sterility, abortion and stunting.

(b) Sanitary conditions

Besides the usual rabbit diseases, there are many problems linked to the insufficient feeding, and to the environment. Rabbits are regularly given a prophylactic for the two forms of rabbit coccidiosis. The product used is Nivaquine which is added to the drinking water on a daily basis. The rabbits are treated for parasites every three months.

(3) Semi intensive rabbit operations

There are three important intensive rabbit operations in the Togo: BENA DEVELOPMENT, BETANIA and the CENTRE D'ELEVAGE ET DE FORMATION DE BATOME. The people in charge are specialists who have been trained in Europe and the operations are of high technical standard. Their equipment is relatively modern compared to the other two forms of rabbit operations in the Togo. The rabbit hutches are similar to the ones used in Europe and can house between 500 and 1 000 rabbits. The same sanitary and feeding problems existing in smaller farms are also encountered in these larger operations.

Rabbit husbandry in the Togo is developing. The main difficulties are:

- Lack of wire-netting used for the construction of breeding cages;
- Inadequate nutrition resulting in a poor mating response in females;
- Lack of selected breeding rabbits;
- Inbreeding;
- Sterility lasting 3 to 4 months (caused by inadequate feeding).

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### Rabbit hutches

The wire-netted cages used by Togolese farmers have adequate dimensions generally but their floors are not suited to rabbits. The ordinary wire-netting (which tends to be thin and not smooth) causes paw problems, sores and abscesses. The equipment inside the cages (feeding troughs, drinking bowls, nests) is built from local materials: bamboo, rattan and clay.

### Feeding

The main problem which caused the ruin of many Togolese rabbit operations is that the compounded feeds are made of low quality ingredients and stored under unsuitable conditions. Also, they do not exist in sufficient quantity for large-scale production. This is currently the main limiting factor to the development of rabbit production in the Togo, and also to the development of poultry, pigs, sheep and goat production. Animal husbandry in the Togo will really start only when proper animal feed producing facilities have been set up. Until then the present situation causes desperation among Togolese farmers.

### Rabbit health

The health of rabbits is influenced by the environment (climate, housing, management) and by feeding.

Besides sores, abscesses and paw problems, transient respiratory diseases occur. Scab is endemic in badly run rabbit operations.

Coccidiosis, diarrhoea caused by feeding too much fresh grass, parasites and nutritional disorders are found in Togolese rabbit operations. These have been cured by appropriate treatment.

There is no myxomatosis in the Togo. Great care is taken when breeding stock is imported (quarantine under the surveillance of the Department of Animal Health and Animal Production). Any stock showing disease symptoms or suspected of suffering from any disease is destroyed immediately.

One of the most worrying diseases in the author's experience is a nervous disease known as Cénurose. The symptoms of this disease are that the rabbit starts to scream, whirls round during two to three minutes and then becomes paralyzed while the whole body is shaking. The rabbit remains paralyzed until its death 48 hours later.

Several treatments have been tried without success, including coccidiostats. Several post-mortem examinations were executed by the author and by the Department of Animal Health, but the results were always inconclusive. Since a competent laboratory for investigations concerning rabbit diseases is not available in the Togo, assistance from Europe will have to be sought.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RABBIT KEEPING AND BREEDING IN THE TOGO

To be realized with the help of the International Foundation for Science (FIS):

- The creation of a modern Centre for Rabbit Husbandry. The aims of the Centre should be:
  - (a) Extension services, including demonstrations;
  - (b) Production of good breeding rabbits to popularize rabbit husbandry in the country;
  - (c) Erection of an animal feeds mill;
  - (d) Supply and assembly of materials for rabbit keeping.