

RABBIT PRODUCTION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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In developing countries the question of food supplies has the highest government priority, since on this depends many other problems especially those associated with health, education, the efficiency of labour and of well being in general.

In most cases hunger has a greater qualitative than quantitative perspective, especially as regards the insufficiency of protein in the human diet, of animal origin, which is the principal cause of a low growth rate in children with consequent on the physical stature and resistance to disease in adults.

The solution to this problem of poor growth in developing countries which do not have adequate means of production, requires a strategy for animal production aimed principally at the great majority of the rural or semi-rural population. In defining of such a strategy is not merely a technical or economic one, above all it is a political decision which depends on the active participation of the people in the production process.

In Mozambique, a developing country, which has had but 3 years of liberty from the Portuguese Capitalist Colonial Domination, the situation regarding food supplies, health and education is extremely serious, a direct result of the selfish politics and inhuman exploitation carried out to extremes by this foreign power.

When FRELIMO party, which is the vanguard of the Mozambican people assessed the situation, it defined the first priority of the Government as the development of the agricultural sector, to provide essential supplies, the most important of which was food.

The eleven million inhabitants of Mozambique have a very low intake of protein of animal origin especially in rural areas, where in many parts it is restricted to game animals.

The cattle, which supply the major part of the meat eaten in Mozambique are raised in only 30% of the country and their meat supplies mainly the urban areas. Studies reveal that 93% of the rural population and 78% of the urban population are deficient in animal protein.

Confronted with this problem the party and the government gave top priority to the rapid development of small species, amongst which the rabbits, for production mainly in communal villages, cooperatives, schools, hospitals, military establishments, etc. In this programmes of livestock production in Mozambique, the rabbit holds an important place because of its special characteristics, such as:

- a) Rapid multiplication, low cost of production and the possibility of concentrating production into small areas. Eighty tons of rabbit meat can be produced annually by 1,100 females on 20 hectares, whereas the same output of beef would require 5,000 cattle and 20,000 hectares under Mozambique's conditions.
- b) Good rabbit production technology is perfectly within the ecological and material conditions of the country and can be adapted to little rural or urban production.
- c) Good installations using local material can be made, avoiding the dependence on manufactured articles and reducing costs. Installations should be adapted to technical levels from the industrialized urban centres to the rural exploitations for local sale or home consumption.
- d) Good nutrition can be obtained from local by-products and natural pastures, without sophisticated technics and variations of concentrates. Besides this, the nutrition of rabbits does not compete with humans.
- e) The intensive system of production collectively organized and with high returns in the markets, stimulates the organization of the rural population in communal villages and the scientific investigation of new technics which in turn will contribute to the rational nutrition for animals and men opening new ways of development.
- f) The absence of tropical diseases in this species in Mozambique is an advantage over other domestic animals.

- g) Rabbit meat is rich in protein, has a low cholesterol content and is easier to digest, which is an advantage to old people, children and the sick.

The implementation of rabbit production in Mozambique is divided into 3 phases:

- 1 - Technical trials, training of personnel and production of breeding stock.
- 2 - Installation of regional infrastructure and the collection of data.
- 3 - Production in collective units.

During the first phase a National Centre was established with the following functions:

- 1 - The study of the most appropriate technology at different economic levels and climatic conditions.
- 2 - The standardization of the buildings, breeds and management for each type of technology, e.g.
 - Sophisticated technology needing imported material
 - Intermediate technology using local wood and netting
 - Basic technology for rural areas using all material acquired locally.
- 3 - Production of breeding stock to supply the various provincial centers, by crossing local breeds with imported males of the Californian and white New Zealand breeds.
- 4 - Training supervisors, which are essential for operating the provincial centers and production units. These supervisors will train workers from the production units and other persons engaged in rabbit production.

A manual was produced in the first phase for distribution to the persons responsible for rabbit production in the units. These manuals were written in simple language and profusely illustrated for permanent consultation.

In the second phase we established provincial centers in each of the ten provinces of the country. These centers have the same function as the national center but at a regional level.

These provincial centers function as units of multiplication for the breeding

breeding stock to the units of production. They also function as training centers for the peasants. During this phase a selection of the production units was made. This selection was made through the agricultural regional structures, so they can meet minimum standards to respond positively to the campaign. Their personnel assumed a solid dedication.

In the case of cooperative they must have a high level of organization ability. A part from this characteristic they must have minimum conditions such as:

- easy access so that technical assistance can be continuous and effective.
- sufficient water and forages.

Once the cooperatives are selected the peasants come to the provincial centers for technical courses. These courses are at regular intervals for all personnel of the units.

In the third phase of this campaign, called decentralization phase, the peasants return to their units and establish installations in the units. The installations will conform with the basic or intermediate technology, according to the grade of development of each unit.

Following this stage is the introduction of the animals provided by the provincial centers.

In the beginning these units receive a permanent assistance from the supervisors. This assistance will stop to be continuous when its own production is established and they are able to become independent.

Following this strategy it will be possible in the next year to make a second selection of more units to be included in the campaign, because the technical assistance for the first group of units are decreasing and can be directed forwards new units.