

The author's experience in 7 countries of West and Central Africa has indicated that at the village level, the housing recommended in the World Neighbors newsletter (1975) is best where those materials are available. In efforts to make rabbit raising available to other places, however, the possibility of raising them on the floor cannot be totally discarded, though more village-level research should be done to see how this method can be improved.

---

A P P E N D I X

Rabbit Raising in Saboba Area

by

Denice Williams

The Saboba Family Health Program, situated in north-west Ghana, has as one of its objective the encouragement of the village women to raise rabbits. Rabbits had never been raised in these villages and housing would prove a big problem. Rabbit hutches could not be constructed as wood is scarce in the savannah areas of northern Ghana. The women must walk miles into the bush just to obtain fire-wood for cooking. Bamboo is only found in the south of Ghana in the rain forests. Any type of screening or roofing material is very scarce and extremely expensive, thus completely out of the reach of the budget of the subsistence farming family.

It was therefore necessary to try to make do with what the

local type of housing and rabbits will probably never be raised commercially in this manner, but it seemed the only solution for a woman who wanted to raise a few rabbits for her family.

The traditional house of the Konkomba tribe around Saboba is made up of a round mud hut with a thatched roof. Chickens, pigs, goats and sheep are often housed in similar but smaller dwellings. In these small huts there is usually a small opening in the wall big enough for a small boy to crawl in and out of.

It is in this type of small round hut that the women keep their rabbits. The woman's first problem was to find something suitable to cover the hole to protect the rabbits from dogs and cats, both of which are natural predators of rabbits. More rabbits have been killed by dogs and cats than have been killed by disease. If the women are not very careful about securing the opening, the rabbits can and do escape. Some women have found a piece of zinc roofing, while others have used woven grass mats or pieces of boards to put in front of the opening. It is good if some light is allowed to enter through the opening.

One of the most important things to determine in trying to judge if a hut is suitable for rabbits is whether its floor is dry throughout the rainy season. This means that the grass roof must be in good condition. If the roof needs repair it must be done in the dry season when the grass can be collected. If the floor does become wet, the rabbits must be moved immediately. The opening of the hut should be large enough for a small child to enter and sweep daily and collect the rabbit manure. In places where the women were lax about sweeping and the ground was damp, the rabbits developed worms in their feet, some of which got infected and the rabbits died.

Some women have made an extension with mud walls about 1.25m high on each side of the opening, creating a small yard for the rabbits to come out into and yet be safe from dogs.

The buck and doe are kept together until the doe kindles and then the buck is removed. In some villages several women share a

buck on a rotational basis. There has never appeared to be a problem of the doe trying to fight off the buck as he is put into her hut. Perhaps it is because the huts are large enough so that they have adequate room to move around.

Clay pots placed on their sides are used as litter boxes. A large circular bowl originally used for bathing the children can be used, but a water pot with the rather narrow opening provides a more secure nest in which the female feels more secluded.

The best results for litters surviving have been in those huts where the rabbits were able to burrow deep holes. Of course, if they were surfacing outside of the compound, the holes must be filled immediately with rocks before the rabbits escape. In cases, however, where they burrow under the compound floor and the holes are dry, litters born there usually survive. It is not unusual for the doe to cover over the hole after the litter has been born so the babies are completely hidden. When she wants to feed them, she digs away the dirt and enters the hole. This pattern has been observed in about 6 instances. In one case, all six of the litter survived. If the doe has a choice between a clay pot and burrowing a hole, she always digs a hole. In some huts where the floor has been pounded down and covered with cow dung, the rabbit cannot dig and then is forced to use the clay pot. In the beginning the doe may reject the clay pot and just have the litter on the ground. In these cases all the young usually die.

A substitute for a clay pot is a wicker basket completely covered except for a small opening in the side, which the people use for carrying fowls to market.

The women are advised to watch carefully for any signs of illness among the rabbits and to immediately isolate those that are sick. Common illnesses observed include mites in the ears and on the nose. Coccidiosis has also been observed and a powder containing sulphamezathine has been put into the food to help to prevent the outbreak of the disease. As mentioned earlier, some have developed worms in the

feet due to dirty huts and damp ground. When discovered, the worms are removed by putting pressure on the leg and then the wound treated with gentian violet and sulphamide powder.

The rabbits are fed greens found locally. In the dry season the children must go far to find them but in the rainy season this is no problem. The residue from the local millet beer called "pito mash" is also given. Left over millet, guinea corn and groundnuts are given if food at the time is not scarce. Yam peelings are also given.

If the huts are well maintained and swept frequently they can be adequate to house several rabbits. There have been cases where the buck apparently ate the babies. These were where the buck was left with the doe after kindling in a small hut. It appears that in large huts, where the doe can defend her own territory (pot or burrow), this has not been too much of a problem. The mortality rate has been high among the babies, mainly where inadequate provisions were made for nesting. Allowing the mother to burrow seems to be more successful. Few adults have died, in spite of the conditions in which they live. Although this is a much less efficient method than is usually recommended, in this environment there seem to be few other alternatives due to the lack of building materials.

Thirty-five women in 13 villages around Saboba are raising rabbits in this way. Some of them have been doing it for over five years with enough rabbits to sell to their neighbours and to eat on special occasions.

R E F E R E N C E S

ADAMS, Richard. 1973. Watership Down, Puffin Books, Middlesex, England, 478 pp., p. 119-128, p. 352.

ATTFIELD, H.D. 1972. As a producer of protein the rabbit is bigger than it looks. World Farming, July 1972.

LAURSEN-JONES, A. 1976. 1,000 does to be axed. Commer. Rabbit, 4 (4), 4.

MAMATAH, N. 1976. Raising Rabbits in Ghana. An Information Support Unit Bulletin, Ministry of Agriculture, Legon, Ghana. 44 pp.

OWEN, J.E. 1976. Rabbit production in tropical developing countries: a review. Tropical Science, 1976, 18 (4).

OWEN, J.E., MORGAN, D.J. and BARLOW, J. 1977. The rabbit as a producer of meat and skins in developing countries. Rep. Trop. Prod. Inst., G108, v & 31 pp., p. 17.

REGIER, F.A. 1975. Some Planning Ideas to Remember When Considering Rabbit Production as a Church Development Project to Help Village Farmers. Unpublished paper - Service de Developpement Agricole, Nyanga, Zaire.

TEMPLETON, G.S. 1968. Domestic Rabbit Production, 4th edn. Danville, Illinois: Interstate Publ., 213 pp. (p. 51)

WORLD NEIGHBORS 1975. Raising Rabbits. World Neighbors In Action Newsletter, Volume 8, Number 2E. World Neighbors, 5116 N. Portland Ave., Oklahoma City. OK 73112. USA. pp. 2-3.

ZWAAN, J.A. (undated). Comment Soigner Vos Lapins. Note Technique du Centre de Formation Horticole et Nutritionnelle de Ouando, Porto Novo, People's Republic of Benin. 56 pp., pp 4-29.