

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Conclusions concerning the workshop

The workshop on rabbit husbandry in Africa was, in the opinion of the participants, an unqualified success. This was considered to be due to:

1.1. The excellent support and hospitality received from the Tanzania National Scientific Research Council and Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Sciences, which was extremely important, and also that from the International Foundation for Science without which the workshop could not have taken place.

1.2. The response and level of support from the participants who came from several different countries.

1.3. The broad spectrum of participants, which included farmers, extension workers and scientists, representing a wide range of experience and viewpoints.

1.4. The arrangement of a pre-conference tour, which was especially useful in allowing many of the participants to know each other on an informal basis before the start of the formal sessions. This facilitated a freer and more enthusiastic interaction and exchange of ideas and information.

2. Recommendations concerning specific areas of rabbit husbandry

2.1. Breeds. No particular breed can be recommended but the wide variety of improved meat breeds available can be used both in their own right and to improve 'local breeds'.

2.2. Breeding. Breeding stations should be set up by governments to provide a supply of improved breeding stock to farmers. The kind of breeding policy employed is highly dependent on local circumstances and no particular system can be recommended.

2.3. Feeding. There is a considerable potential for the achievement of reasonable levels of rabbit production based on available feeding materials. These include herbage

2.4. Housing. There is considerable scope for the construction of housing suitable for use in a variety of climatic conditions using locally available materials, provided that the following principles are followed:

2.4.1. The rabbits must be confined and prevented from escaping;

2.4.2. The rabbits must be protected from predators;

2.4.3. The rabbits must be protected from bad weather;

2.4.4. The housing must be easily cleaned;

2.4.5. The housing should be easily maintained and reasonably durable;

2.4.6. The rabbits should be comfortable;

2.4.7. Easy access should be provided for the farmer.

It was noted that where building materials for housing rabbits are not available, rabbits can be raised with reasonable success on the ground. The above principles should still be observed.

2.5. Health. Common diseases can be avoided by a high standard of hygiene and careful management. There is a need for local veterinarians to become more interested in rabbit diseases and their treatment.

2.6. Escaped stock. If domestic rabbits escape on the African mainland, there is very little danger of them becoming pests because of natural predators and a lack of adaptability to a tropical environment when unprotected.

2.7. Equipment. Nest boxes are essential and should always be provided in breeding cages. They should provide privacy, adequate room for a doe and her litter and the sides should be high enough to prevent very young rabbits getting cut. Nest boxes and also other items of equipment such as feeders and drinkers can be constructed satisfactorily from locally available materials.

2.6. Acceptability of rabbits. Although rabbit meat is acceptable in many African countries and there appears to be no religious taboos concerning it, more promotion is needed to make rabbit meat more generally accepted.

2.9. Provision of employment. Because rabbit husbandry is in general a labour intensive operation in many African countries, it is suitable for the creation of employment and should be encouraged in areas where unemployment is high.

3. Future action necessary

3.1. There is a need to form national associations and branches of the World Rabbit Science Association in African countries to facilitate the further exchange of ideas and information. The International Foundation for Science is willing to aid this by the payment of either one individual or one group membership for each African country. It is recommended that those countries represented at the workshop take advantage of this and encourage other countries to take similar action.

3.2. There is a need for more literature dealing with extension, management and research on rabbits. The participants recommend that scientific papers and articles related to rabbit production are submitted for possible publication in Tropical Animal Production.

3.3. There is a need for more research on all aspects of rabbit husbandry but in particular urgent attention is needed in the following areas:

3.3.1. Feeding and nutrition, especially in the investigation of locally available tropical feeds;

3.3.2. Major rabbit diseases occurring in African countries.

4. The participants of the workshop on rabbit husbandry in Africa recommend that in two years time there should be a similar meeting held in an African country.