

J. Rafay - V. Parkányi

Research Institute of Animal Production, Nitra, Czechoslovakia

The Rabbit Breeding in Czechoslovakia

According to different sources, the rabbit appeared on the territory of today's Czechoslovakia as long ago as XIIIth century. As came here as a hunting object from Germany. It was kept in viaries in enclosed preserves./leporaria/. The leporarium at Kratochvíle u Netolic became famous. Later, the rabbit moved to the stables where it lived among big animals. The rabbit as a farm animal was first mentioned by F. Fusz in 1810, F. Špatný in 1864, and, last but not least, by F.S. Kodyma in his book "Introduction to Economy"./1869/.

A remarkable development of the rabbit breeding started after the Prussian-French war in 1871; it included breeding of foreign large strains, new mutation types and colour hues. The rabbit becomes an advantageous commercial article. The literature concerning the rabbit breeding starts appearing at that period /E.A. Melis, 1873; V. Šir, 1887 etc./ and the first rabbit breeding associations are being founded /Měcholupy u Žatce, 1875; Kolín, 1874 -1875/. J. V. Kálal laid down the first foundation stones of modern rabbit breeding at the turn of centuries. The first Czech rabbit breeding club was founded on 9th October 1898 at Bernatice u Tábora. The Central Association of Czecho-slowien Rabbit Breeders was founded in 1902. The breeding work, brought into a line, resulted in new breeds that became the genetic basis of the original Czechoslovak strains /Czech Spotted, Mo-

ravian Giant, Czech Tester, Czech Albino etc./.

The first association of small-scale breeders in Slovakia that included also the rabbit breeders was founded in Holíč/1923/. Similar associations were founded in Trnava and in Bratislava in 1924 and 1925 respectively. The first journal for small scale breeders named "Slovenská farma"/Slovak Farm/ appeared in 1927.

Before and after the IIInd World War, many small, economically unimportant rabbit farm appeared in Czechoslovakia. Unsuitable microclimatical conditions, strains with low performance parameters, and other aspects of management and veterinary care were reasons of unprofitable production of rabbit meat on large scale. Most of the rabbit production came from small farms in the country. The average production in 1939 to 1945 was about 30 mil. rabbits. It decreased in the fifties and sixties to a minimum of 12 mil. rabbits in 1975.

Nowadays, the average yearly rabbit production in Czechoslovakia varies between 18 and 20 mil. rabbits. After unsuccessful experiments with the large scale production, most of the rabbits are produced on small scale. The main producers of rabbits for meat, skin and wool are organized and non- organized small scale breeders who sell a part of their production to the State. There are two bulkbuying organizations : Poultry Industry / in Bohemia and Moravia/ and Branko - common agricultural enterprise /in Slovakia/. They offer profitable prices, and they also grant the breeders granulated feeds for the rabbits, buy breeding animals from abroad, and distribute them among the breeders.

Although the average yearly production of rabbit meat in Czechoslovakia amounts to 30,000 tons in a total value of 1.4 billions

Kčs, there are only about 10 % exported. Most of the production is being consumed by the producers or sold to the domestic market. A part of meat rabbit production comes from large scale farms and co-operatives. The biggest farm is owned by agricultural enterprise Branko in Nitra. The planned yearly production of 90.000 rabbit broilers is only a part of the activities of this farm. It also offers parent stock of double-strain cross-breeds thus helping to spread the specialized strains among the producers. Apart of this farm, there are some smaller ones with a total capacity about 2,000 females of the basic population. The most frequent breed is New Zealand White and its specialized zootechnical units. The breeds Cal, French Silver and Czech Spotted are also used for meat production; Nitra Breed is also kept in some areas. The non-organized breeders also use multi-breed crossbreds of the above mentioned breeds.

The beginnings of the Angora rabbit breeding go back to the first half of 20th century when this mutation got spread. One of the most important promoters was P.J. Šafárik who published a work concerning the breeding of Angora rabbit in 1934. Thanks to promotional activities, the production of angora wool increased, and, after World War II, Czechoslovakia ranked very high within Europe. There were about 250 tons of angora wool increased produced in 1967. This quantity brought between 30 and 40 mil. Kčs from its export. From that year on, the production decreased gradually, for several reasons, to the contemporary level of 30 tons yearly.

The production of the rabbits skins quantitatively meets the requirements of the processing industry. The qualitative requirements, however, are higher and concern mainly the ripeness of the

skin, a higher proportion of white mutations, and the size of primarily treated skins. The biggest processor of the shear hair in Czechoslovakia, TONAK, processes 12 - 13 mil. tons pcs of skins for hat products. The bulk buying is organized through the enterprise Zberné suroviny with nationwide activity. The most of the production is being bought in local bulk-buying centers and by travelling agents.

The sports rabbit breeding take place in two national Breeders Unions, namely Czech Breeders' Union and the Slovak B.U. that take care of all kinds of breeders' activities. The two Unions have about 170,000 members; about 50 % of them are rabbit breeders. In 1986, they kept about 690,000 rabbits of 69 breeds for sports purposes. Within the two Unions, there are two Rabbit Breeding Commissions with special representatives in 123 counties who lead methodically the work of the members of the Unions. The purposive organized rabbit breeding materializes in five qualitative levels:

- standard breeding with registration of breeding animals
- rabbit breeding of advanced breeders in clubs
- thoroughbreeding
- stock breeding
- research breeding

The standard exterior and interior traits and characteristics of rabbits are being evaluated in comparison with criteria published in the Pattern Book of Rabbit Breeds / J. Fingerland: Vzorník plemen králiků, 1986, 10th edition, published by SZN Praha/, Unlike the previous issues, this one contains standards of breeds valid in the countries members of the Party Commission

/Czechoslovakia, GDR, Hungary, Poland/.

The objective application of 100-point rabbit bonitation system is being taken care of by a Board of Assessors. The members of such a board meet regularly at sessions where the evaluation of the exterior of the individual breeds is being explained in details, new breeds are added, and new experts are trained.

The breeders take part in specialized exhibitions of various levels / local, district, regional, national/ that are organized in regular intervals.

The only scientific research institution in Czechoslovakia that takes care of the further development of the production of broiler rabbits is the Research Institute of Animal Production in Nitra. Beside the RIAP, also several chairs of the Agricultural Universities and several producing enterprises work on solving the genetic problems, breeding biology, veterinary care and on economics of rabbit breeding. There is a research plan aimed at solving the problems concerning the breeds that are suitable for large scale meat production, testing the optimal combinability with use of all parts of genetic variability, optimalization of veterinary prevention, early diagnostic and successful treatment of diseases of rabbits under large scale farming conditions, as well as determination of conditions and criteria of profitable production of rabbit broilers.

Other scientific institutions do not work specially on the problems of rabbit breeding. The breeding base of the RIAP in Nitra co-operates with other zootechnical, pharmaceutical and medical institutions.

The agriculture universities have special chairs of small animal breeding where a limited number of students work on diploma works concerning the rabbit breeding. The specialized chairs have small rabbit populations bred for experiments in the field of epidemiology and biochemistry.

Most of the working places with biological orientation use the services of the laboratory animals producing enterprise VELAZ. Beside that, several producers of biological preparations have agreements with small scale producers of special rabbit breeds.

The breeds most frequently used for the experimental purposes are the middle-size breed NW, Chinchilla, Czech Spot and Ni.

It is estimated that some 50 000 rabbits are used for experimental purposes nation-wide.

In view of limited possibilities for the specialists in rabbit breeding, there are no courses organized for the graduates in this specialization.

Most information concerning the rabbit breeding can be found in the special journals /Chovatel/, special publications/ BRANKO, R.I.A.P., Poultry Industry, Breeders Unions Reviews/, and in books: Dvorřák: Chov králiků / Rabbit breeding/, Barát: Chováme krábiky, Malík, Moderný chov králikov a kožušinových zvierat, Konrád; Choroby králiků/ etc. They all deal with basic zootechnical requirements for a successful breeding of rabbit for meat, skin, fur, wool and for sports purposes.

