

### HUNGARIAN RABBITS IN EGYPT

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Rabbit was a native animal in Egypt at least it seems to be proved by seeing Pharaonic remains. We can meet the configuration of the rabbit on carvings on the walls of the pyramids, mastabas and temples or on papyrus sheets of the ancient Egypt. Rabbit is the main figure for instance in the cartouche of Pharaoh Unas, a ruler of the Old Kingdom what we can see in Sakkara. Rabbits living in wild we can still find in the mountains surrounding the Red-Sea coast in Egypt. Rabbit was domesticated by the Egyptian fellahs with a „keeping technology” very similar to its natural living conditions. They dug holes into the soil or made burnt-clay jars to accommodate the rabbits inside their mud-houses keeping them as „family members”. This ancient technology is still existing especially in Upper-Egypt, a good evidence for that was a recently published tender invitation for a rabbitry working with this method. Mainly native so called „beledi” rabbits are kept in this way as for example Beledi Red, Beledi Black or White Giza. Great majority of the rabbit production is still coming from this source. About 90% of the estimated total rabbit population of 5 million of Egypt is kept in these traditional household units.

Application of new technologies i.e. cage-type keeping and introduction of imported varieties as New-Zeland, Californian or Buscat started only in post-war times in small hobby-farms of scientists and members of the Poultry and Pet Breeder Society.

The first steps towards the large-scale rabbit farming were taken just about eight years ago and – without boasting – we can proudly state that the Hungarians and most of all our company, AGROBER-AGROINVEST played a pioneer and eminent role in the introduction of it.

We started to plant the idea in Egypt at the end of the 1970'ies.

With tremendous efforts in the acquisition and scientific debates we had to convince not only the Egyptian scientific society but a part of the Hungarian one as well. There were – and not only few – Hungarian experts and scientists too who were worried about the different climatic and hygienic conditions, lack of experience and referring to the high sensitiveness of the rabbit tried to withhold us from this „unfortunate venture”.

We succeeded to sign the first contract in April, 1980 with Nahda Co. belonging to the Ministry of Land Reclamation. The subject of the contract was the establishment of a 10,000-doe broiler rabbit farm together with a grandparent-stock farm of 1,350 does and a rabbit-feed-mill of a

capacity of 2.5 t/h. The keeping and production technology was based on the system of the Bikal State Farm, the biggest Hungarian rabbit grower that time. „Fehér Gyöngy” i.e. White-Pearl hybrid broiler rabbit was ment to be produced in 50 prefabricated houses equipped with universal flat-deck cages. Much to our regret a sudden reshuffle in the Egyptian ministries brought an „easy-end”-the contract was terminated. The indirect and main cause of the failure was the victory of the opponents of the new method.

The same misfortune happened to our next contract with a private company for the establishment of a 1,350-doe breeding rabbit farm and the reason was still the same.

That was the moment when we decided to elaborate a „new strategy”. The main idea was to prove in smaller scale the viability of the new technology with smaller risks for both parties. In the framework of this new concept in 1983 we started the exportation of small-scale household rabbit cages and breeding rabbits through private companies and concluded a contract with Sharkia Governorate for the set up of a pilot large-scale unit with 200 does. Our main base and partner in this combat was the „Petőfi Cooperative of Dunavarsány” with the biggest large-scale farm of the world.

The result was splendid success on both fronts. During the period of 1983-85 we exported 1600 household cage-units adequate for 3 does 1 buck and their progeny and more than 1600 breeding rabbits. The pilot project was put into operation in May, 1984 and producing well ever since.

The pilot rabbit house is a basic unit of the large-scale farming. In the prefabricated stall of 450 sq.m. ground-area there are 640 universal cages (size: 600x550x350) arranged in two rows and in double-deck pyramid form. The manure removal is done by water flushing from manually operated tilting tanks through the longitudinal manure canals, drinking by nipple drinkers while feeding from feeding carts into hanged feeders manually. The glass-windows all-along the side walls provide for the natural illumination and ventilation. Three Woods-Mezőpér ventilating-humidifying units - capacity 10,000 cu.m/h each - enable the artificial ventilation and adiabatic cooling. There is broiler production going on here with the crossing of New-Zeland does and Californian bucks. The production results -especially during the first year of operation while we could render regular management assistance - were above our highest expectations. From litters of 8-10 bunnies the average yearly production per doe reached 37 broiler rabbits.

We have collected valuable and generally positive experience from the second farm of ours as well established by Noba Farm Investment private company in West-Noubaria. This rabbit plant consists of 5 prefabricated rabbit houses with a total accomodation capacity of 1200 does, 150 bucks and their progeny. The buildings and the technological equipment delivered by us are partly different from that of the pilot project. Contrary to our advice the Investor insisted to apply mechanical manure removal by longitudinal scraper and cross-wise auger as well as „Pad” type adiabatic cooling on the basis of previous poultry keeping experience.

It is proved now that it would have been better to remain by the original technology offered by us in both cases. The manure scraper cannot properly remove the urine from the floor of the manure duct and in lack of regular and adequate maintenance the mechanised system is often

cause of unnecessary headaches. Although the crosswise exhaustion ventilation and cooling system is very effective but it is the main cause of sneezing and pasteurellosis as well. Luckily the big size openable side-wall panels enable natural ventilation most of the time in the year. The stocking-in of this farm was in May, 1987 when 220 grandparent and 1130 parent breeding rabbits arrived from Hungary. The productivity of the stock is very good as the average litter is 9-11 pcs/dropping but due to high mortality the average production was bellow 30 grown up rabbits/doe in the first year. The farm is run from the beginning without our management assistance as contrary to the contract it was not required by the Buyer mostly due to financial reasons. We still hope and try to find a way of a closer cooperation – possibly a period under our management – in order to help this farm to bring the possible production results in the future.

Basicly the successful production in the pilot project and the growing emphasis put on the development of the rabbit farming by the Egyptian Government led to the signing of the contract with the owner of the pilot plant, San El Hagar Agricultural Co. for the establishment of a huge rabbit farming complex in Sharkia. According to this agreement a 10,000-doe rabbit farm, a rabbit slaughterhouse with a capacity of 200 pcs/h, a feed-mill of 6 t/h capacity and a water purifying plant of 70 cu.m./h will be built there. The 39 houses – including the pilot unit – will be set up in three different locations. The basic technological arrangement of the houses will be generally the same as that of the pilot house but already improved according to the local requirements and experiences. 36 houses will serve for broiler production while a separate unit consisting of three houses will be the breeding base for self supply and sale. The final aim is to establish an integrated rabbit production system with small-scale farming similar to the organization of the Dunavarsányi Integration.

However the settlement of all the necessary approval and financial arrangements took more than two years from the signing of this contract now I can report with great pleasure that the implementation of the project is on the way and most probably next year this time we can see „an old dream to come true”, a real big large-scale integrated rabbit project built in Egypt by Hungarian cooperation.

Cairo, June 3, 1988.

