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SURVEY ON PRODUCTION RESULTS OF SMALL SCALE RABBIT FARMS

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Introduction

Since 98 to 99 % of Hungary's total and exported meat rabbit production are produced on small scale farms, it is important to survey their managing conditions and levels of production. In the present investigation we aimed at revealing the changes that have occured in breeding, keeping, and feeding conditions since 1984 year of our previous survey (Kustos et al., 1987).

Material and Method

To obtain data on small scale rabbit farms, the authors published a questionnaire in the issue of one of the Hungarian journal. The questionnaire was similar to the one prepared by Csonka and Kustos in 1984. Proper for evaluation, 585 questionnaires have been returned to the authors. The data have been evaluated by the application of the statistical data processing program package.

Results and Discussion

1. Producers

Out of the people included in the test, 22 % are retired, 46.4 % are manual workers, 15 % are brain workers, and 9 % are students. The number of retired persons has decreased by 50 % since our previous survey. The proportion of manual workers has increased by 11 % and that of the others has increased by 9 %.

The mean age of the producers is 41.2 years; 10 years less than on the previous occasion. 51 % of them have begun their rabbit operation within the recent five years. The relevant figures are 14 % for those who started 6 to 10 years ago, and 21 % and 24 % for those who began their operations

10 to 20 or more than 20 years ago, respectively. It can be seen from the data that quite many new, rabbit breeders, i.e. about 20 % of farmers the total number of producers, start working in this field every year. However, since the national output does not show a similar increase, it is probable that those giving up their activity amount to the same number, approximately.

As to place of living and level of qualification, the producers included in the survey represent the composition of the whole population of the country.

2. Rabbitry and its equipment

Table 1 is to show the answers with regard to housing conditions. The figures indicate a step forward as compared to 1984. Nevertheless, there are still numerous producers who use hutches set up open-air or keep their animals in outdoor rabbitries. 47 % of the buildings are stated as new by the producers.

The average number of breeding animals at one farm is 17.7, which represents an increase of 4.1 animals since 1984.

Regarding cage types, a stepforward has occured as well due to the declining tendency of wooden hutches, and hutches with solid floor. The 25 % proportion of industrially manufactured wire cages is remarkable if we compare it to the previous survey. At the same time, we have to consider that among those operators using more than one type of cages, there were also many who used industrially manufactured wire cages at that time. Home-made cages have a share of 69.1 %, while 5.8 % and 12.8 % of the cages have been purchased in a shop or in the frame of some bargain-sale. 10 % have been bought from other small producers.

3. Management

On the average, the breeding stock consist of 14.7 does and 2.7 bucks on the surveyed farms. As it is shown proportion of small operations keeping 1 to 5 does. An increase has been found, however, in the proportion of those farmers managing more than 20 does.

The proportion of the New Zealand White and the Californian breeds has risen as shown by the data in Table 4, and these two breeds amount to 81 % of the total stock.

The genetic ability of the whole population of the country is decisively affected by the breeding work carried out on every single farm. Since a

serious selection work is hard to conduct on farms with a small stock, it is essential to keep an eye on the origin of the breeding animals. The figures in Table 5 suggest that there have not been any remarkable changes in this respect during the past decade.

The number of litters per doe per year has proved to be 5.3 on the surveyed farms. This value indicates a slight increase as compared to the figure 4.6 achieved in 1984.

Weaning is mostly carried out (75 %) at the age of 5 to 6 weeks, i.e. 5.5 weeks, on an average. In most cases (76 %), the freyers are moved to a new cage. The growing rabbits are 13.7 weeks old when they reach the average body weight of 2.650 grs for delivery. The number of growing rabbits per doe per year sent to slaughter is 30.9, which is better than the result of 27.4 achieved in 1984. Calculating this, and supposing an average litter size of 8 at birth, 27 % suckling mortality can be derived.

4. Feeding and nutrition

Feeding conditions are important to watch, because feeding costs form the biggest part of the production costs of rabbit meat.

Regarding feeding of concentrates, wheat, barley and maize are applied most frequently. 40 % of the producers put these components into to diet in some ratio. 9.95 kgs concentrates and 5.1 kgs hay are fed to the growing rabbits until they reach their delivery weight of 2.65 kgs. Concentrates contain 67 % pellet, 7.7 % wheat, 8.1 % barley, and 4.8 % maize. The per unit feed intake for one kg delivered rabbit meat is 3.75 kg concentrates and 1.93 kg hay.

Twice-a-day feeding is the most usual procedure (85 %), and metal or wooden feeders are mainly applied for this purpose, in a proportion of 41 % and 18 %, respectively. Self-feeders are used only by 18 % of the rabbit breeders.

5. General questions

The questions included in this section had to be answered by giving scores from 1 to 5. Score 1 was the worst and score 5 was the best value. The real score averages are presented in Table 6.

Appreciation of work, quality of pellet, and veterinary supply are judged as "under the average" by the producers. Information supply and delivery/ buying-up prices are considered the most troublesome factors. Performance

of the breeding stock and collaboration with the integrator are deemed highly satisfactory.

As a summary, we can conclude from the foregoing that the average farm size (number of does per farm) has increased, and the keeping conditions have improved, as to both buildings and cages, during the recent five years. More litters have been obtained from one doe, and, as a consequence, more meat rabbits could be delivered.

References

Csonka I. - Kustos K. - Ábrahám M. (1985): Kisüzemi nyúltelepek gazdálkodásának elemzése. ÁTK Közleményei, Gödöllő. 448-453.

Kustos K. - Csonka I. - Ábrahám M. (1989): Analize des conditions the production dans les petits élevages culicules en Hongrie. Cuniculture

Table 1

Housing conditions at small scale rabbit private farms

	1984	1989
In hutches at open air	15 %	12 %
In sheds	16 %	21 %
Closed wooden stall	14 %	17 %
Bricken building	33 %	41 %
Different types of keeping	12 %	9 %

Table 2

Cage types used at private farms

	1984	1989
Wooden cages with solid floor	31.2 %	24.6 %
Wooden cages with slatted floor	17.5 %	11.7 %
Wooden cages with wire floor	5.6 %	9.2 %
Wire cages made at home	14.2 %	20.8 %
Wire cages (industrial)	6.1 %	25.4 %
Other facilities (two or more cage types used in 1984)	25.4 %	8.2 %

Table 3

Farm size on the basis of number breeding of does

Number of does per farm	1984	1989
1 - 5 does	15.1 %	14.6 %
6 - 10 does	51.1 %	33.4 %
11 - 15 does	20.8 %	21.3 %
16 - 20 does	7.0 %	12.7 %
above 20 does	6.0 %	18.0 %

Table 4

Composition of breeding stock by breeds

Breeds	1984		1989	
	Distribution of			
	does	bucks	does	bucks
New Zealand White	47.0 %	45.0 %	58.0 %	52.0 %
Californian	18.0 %	18.0 %	23.0 %	20.3 %
Wienna Blue	3.0 %	2.0 %	1.4 %	2.0 %
Hungarian Giant	7.0 %	10.0 %	4.1 %	6.3 %
Others	25.0 %	25.0 %	13.4 %	18.4 %

Table 5

Origin of breeding does

	1984	1989
Reared at own farm	47.4 %	52.9 %
Bought from other private breeders	36.6 %	25.5 %
Bought on bargian-sale (not included in 1984)		16.3 %
Purchased from large-scale farms	7.0 %	6.1 %
Others	9.0 %	9.0 %

Table 6

General questions, answers between 1-5 points

	Average points give
How are you interested in meat production	3.31
How do you feel your work is appreciated	2.91
How do you estimate the producing traits of your stock	3.73
Quality of pellets	2.77
Veterinary supply	2.74
Information supply	2.62
Estimation of the work of buyer-up	3.25
Opinion on buying-up prices	2.21

Summary

As a result of our estimating work it can be seen that in the last five years the breeding stock's data, have risen the keeping conditions have improved both building types and cage types.
There has been found a more intensive breeding rhytm of does thus increasing the meat production at slaughter age per one doe.