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**RABBIT BREEDING IN ROMANIA
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

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RABBIT BREEDING IN ROMANIA – past, PRESENT and future

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ABSTRACT.

Until 1970, rabbit were bred for their furs. A new stage began in year 1979, when new lines of rabbits were imported from France. As a consequence of the improvement activity, in 1986, two commercial hybrids “Super-Cuni” were created: P.310 and P.320, which constituted the biological material to start a program for the broilers breeding in industrial farms and partially by private farmers. Due the development program, Romania exported in 1988 to France, about 12.5 % of the rabbit meat imports of this country. After the democratic revolution of the year 1989, rabbit breeding know an unfavorable stage. The total stock of rabbits in years 1993 and 1994 were only 829 000 head *versus* 2 520 000 head in 1988 year. Rabbit meat production was only 8 122 tons, *versus* 32 400 tons in year 1988. The number of the rabbits continues to diminish considerably and in year 1997, there were 646 00 rabbits and meat production was of 7 979 tons, all of it in the private sector. Species future depends on the adequate program of measures to increase and improve rabbit breeding, especially by private farmers.

History

Until 1970, rabbits were bred in Romania for their fur. A new stage began in year 1979, when new lines of rabbits were imported from France. In order to accomplish the breeding program, ICPPAM Balotești included new research themes about the productive and combinative capacity of pure lines, the improvement of the reproduction methods, the elaboration and the improvement of the technologies to keep the rabbits in cages (Rebreanu, 1983). The program included also the improvement of the diets depending on hybrid line, maintenance system, the breeding in people’s farms and the efficiency of rabbits breeding on industrial farms.

As a consequence of the improvement activity, in year 1986, two commercial hybrids “Supercuni” were created : P.310 and P.320, which constituted the biological material to start a program for the broilers breeding in industrial farms and partially by private farmers.

Quantitative production

As a result of the national program for developing rabbit breeding, the number of rabbits present at the same time in Romania during years 1987 – 1988, was around 2.5 million heads (Bâlbâie *et al.*, 1988).

National data census shows (table 1) the slight decrease of the total number of rabbits between 1987 and 1988. Nevertheless the number of breeding does and of meat rabbits increased in industrial farms of the Central Poultry Production organization.

Table 1 : Evolution of the number of the rabbits present in 3 main social – economic sectors in Romania for year 1987 and 1988 (thousand of heads).

Production sector	Year	Total no.	Rabbits reproduction		Youth reproduction		Rabbits for meat
			Male	Female	Male	Female	
Total in Romania	1987	2589	294	771	128	260	1136
	1988	2520	275	759	136	252	1099
Central Poultry Production	1987	1043	28	208	37	123	647
	1988	1161	38	268	56	131	668
Cooperative Agricultural Units	1987	31	2	12	1	2	12
	1988	36	4	17	1	3	12
People's Farms	1987	1428	258	531	86	123	429
	1988	1234	226	451	75	109	372

Source : Animal census in years 1987-1988

On total economic agriculture, the rabbit meat production was about 31 700 tons in year 1987 and 32 400 tons in 1988. Romania exported an important quantity of rabbit meat, *e.g.* about 12.5% of the total import of France, in years 1987-1988.

After the democratic revolution of December 1989, breeding rabbits sector, as well as the whole economy, was confronted with a difficult situation. The transition had a negative influence on rabbit sector both on the number of animals and on meat production. In the last four years, Romanian rabbit production from the big state or cooperative farms have been sold to private farmers or have stopped their activity.

In 1993-1994, the number of the rabbits diminished considerably. The total stock of rabbits in 1994 was only 829 107 heads *versus* 2 520 000 heads in 1988. Rabbit meat production was only 8 122 tons, *versus* 32 400 tons in 1988. The number of rabbits continued to diminish considerably and in 1997 there were 646 006 rabbits and meat rabbit production was only 7 979 tons, all of it in the private sector.

Rabbit meat production, by comparison with poultry meat and red meat production, is of minor importance in Romania. The slaughter weight of the growing rabbits is on average 2.0-2.3 kg at 11 - 12 weeks.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY AND EDUCATION

The researchers from Institute Balotești studied a complete set of scientific works concerning selection for growth traits especially for rabbit meat production. Feeding studies were directed to the evaluation of the nutritive value of forages and by – product ingredients, the use of feed additives such as synthetic amino-acids. In addition other researches were conducted as for example the optimization of the protein level in growing rabbits and researches concerning the early weaning of the "Super-Cuni" rabbits. Technological works dealt with rabbit breeding in cage, breeding of meat rabbits under semi-intensive system production in private farms etc...

In order to improve the reproductive performances of rabbits were studied mainly the following points: effect of dilution medium on morphological and biochemical properties of seminal material in rabbits, semen evaluation, intensive and semi-intensive reproduction

system etc.

Also were elaborated researches concerning economic analyses of rabbits raising in state farms such as investigations on reducing production costs in meat rabbit farms.

For students education there was four State Agricultural Universities (Bucharest, Iassy, Cluj-Napoca and Timisoara) where were offered courses on rabbit science.

In universities were investigated works such as the appreciation of yield and prolificity depending on exploited breed; effects of parturition number on breeding performances of two strains of broiler rabbits, morpho-histochemistry of the portal space of the liver in rabbit intoxicated with sodium nitrate and nitrite; chronic nitrates intake, risk factor in rabbit breeding etc...

In Romania rabbits are also used as laboratory animals in various areas of research, such as genetics, reproduction and veterinary science.

CONCLUSION and FUTURE

The future of this specie depends on the elaboration of adequate program for the increasing of the number of rabbits and the meat production too, especially in the private sector of the agricultural economy.

The following measures can be proposed to promote rabbits breeding in Romania :

1. The improvement of the biological material for reproduction by development of the selection rabbits farm at Balotești Institute
2. The distribution of rabbits to the private breeders at accessible prices.
3. The establishment of subventions by Ministry of Agriculture for rabbit meat exports.
4. The modification of prices for meat and the establishment of stimulating ones related to the quantity of meat for export.
5. The modernization of the existent slaughter houses in order to correspond to the standards of European Union.
6. The establishment of a partnership between the Cooperation and the Industry for compound feeds in order to ensure pelleted feeds availability for the private breeders at communal level.
7. The privatization of the factories of combined feeds production for birds and rabbits in order to ensure about 5-6 millions tons of combined feeds production for the next 3 years.
8. The organization of exhibitions and fairs at national and county levels.

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