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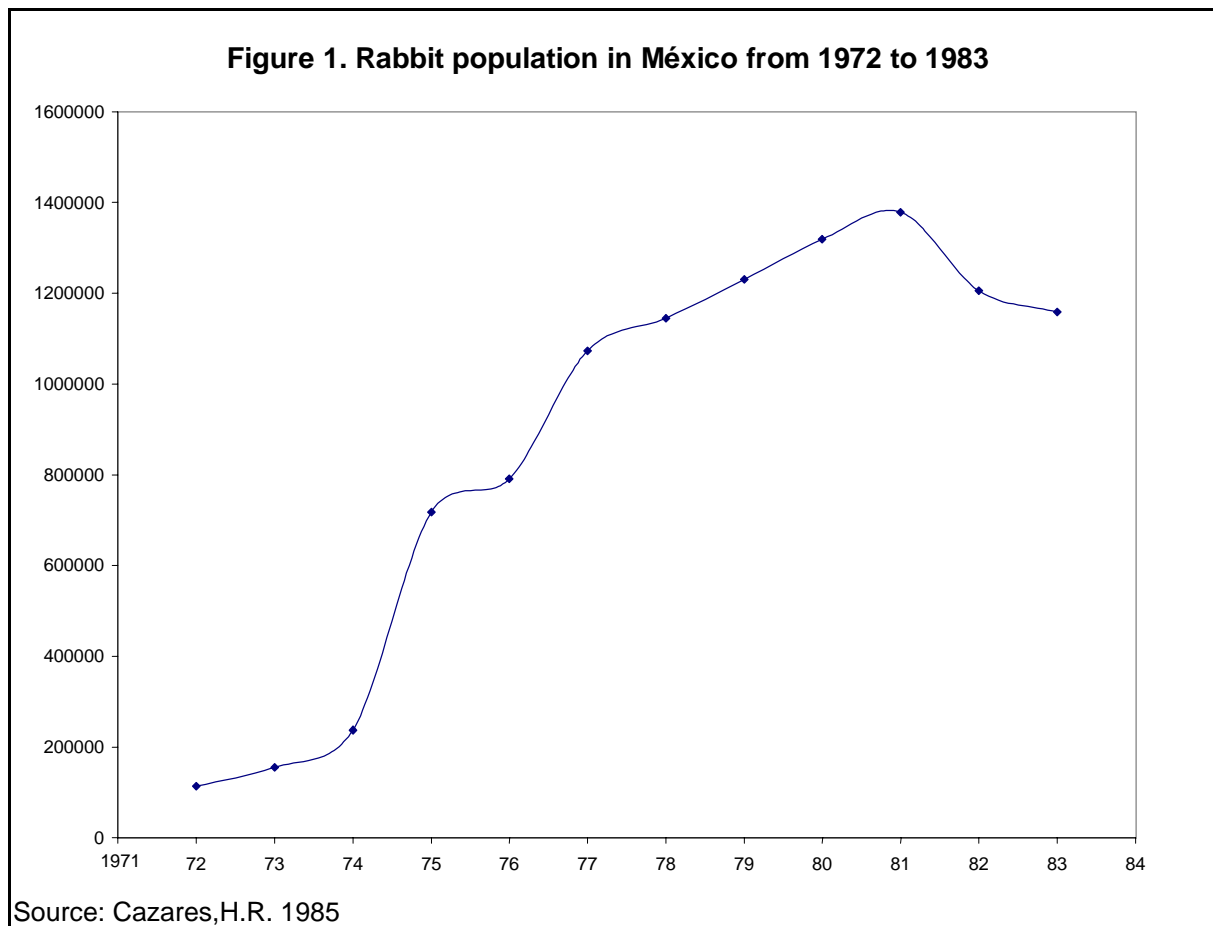
## **ABSTRACT**

Storing centres and its relevance to the rabbit production system in the Valley of Mexico are analysed and discussed in this paper. A survey was carried out in order to know the functioning of rabbit storing centres. These were located in three towns in the proximity of Mexico City. Up to 2200 rabbits are marketed per week in the places mentioned. Buy and selling occurs from 7:00 to 14:00 hours once per week in each location. Price per kg of live weigh range from 1 to 1.3 US Dollars. The contribution of storing facilities provided by big retailers mentioned in this paper might be appropriate under the current conditions. However, policies to boost the production system must be accompanied of efforts to help producers to gain autonomy and thus improve their incomes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mexico City is situated at an average altitude over sea level of 2000 metres. Temperature ranges from  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  up to  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$  with an annual mean estimated on  $17^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Rainfall is distributed from May to October. Variations on temperature and precipitation depend on the area, altitude and particular years. The production, sale and consumption of rabbit meat and fur in Mexico City are an event recently developed. Until the year of 1972 its consumption was marginal, estimated in 353 tons of meat and 70 tons of fur compared to the amounts reported for 1985 calculated in 3221 tons of meat and 464 of fur (Cázares, 1985).

A series of factors have historically contributed to the expansion of rabbit production systems in Mexico. Amongst those elements, we can mention the gradual acceptance of the meat, the promotion and support from the government until 1982 (Figure 1). The adoption of the rabbit by the backyard producers and the creation of a marketing system capable of absorbing the production from the backyards as well as from the small-technified farms, have been two additional factors.



The storing centres constitute an important component of the rabbit's market in the Southeast of Mexico City. This paper describes these storing centres and discusses its relevance for the rabbit production systems in the Valley of Mexico.

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

A series of interviews and structured questionnaires were applied randomly to rabbit producers and retailers located in their production units, households and in some local markets. Questionnaire application never took more than 10 minutes, previous identification of the interviewer, mentioning the strict confidentiality of the information provided. Few pilot surveys were first applied and once tested, full application was carried out (Scheaffer et al., 1990). Results of the interviews are described and commented below.

### **RESULTS**

Rabbit production in the Valley of México is mainly carried out in backyards with variable number of animals. Production is autoconsumed or sold in some local markets that later on will take the product to supermarkets and to restaurants of the so-called touristic corridors (López et al., 1999).

The storing centres are located in three small towns, one within the state of Puebla (San Martín Texmelucan) and two others in the State of México (Ozumba and Chalco). Selling and buying rabbits is made in the weekly local markets one day per week. Thus, Tuesdays it occurs in San Martín Texmelucan and Ozumba and Fridays in Chalco. The process of selling

and buying rabbits is next described as it occurs in each town.

### **San Martín Texmelucan, Puebla.**

The storing centre of this town is located in a house nearby the local market, or *tianguis*<sup>1</sup>. People take there their rabbits once per week as they are coming from their households by bicycle, truck or by foot. Commercial activities are performed on Tuesday and some 800 to 2000 rabbits are sold to the retailers. Animals are sold alive and the price per kilo fluctuates from 1 to 1.3 US Dollars. Selling and buying of the rabbits starts about 7:00 hours and finishes around 14:00, depending on the number of marketed animals.

The retailers are well organised and these are a couple of brothers that accumulate most of the rabbits sold. These animals will be commercialised later on to restaurants and supermarkets. After reception, the retailers sort the animals by size and colour and place them in plastic cages. The brokers, a couple of brothers, utilise a couple of paid workers when the demand and supply of rabbits is higher, usually by the summer holidays and Christmas time. These workers help them to sort and place the animals into the cages.

The usual scheme for selling and buying rabbits is the described above, however, some rabbit producers, specially women, go to the weekly market to trade their rabbits and with the money obtained, buy food for the week. Then they sell their product to sub-intermediaries that later on go and sell to the big retailers, the two brothers. In this process the sub-intermediaries could earn from 0.1 to 0.2 US Dollars per kg of live weight.

### **Chalco, Estado de México.**

Storing of rabbits in this market place is carried out in the weekly tianguis of this town in the animals' section. The main retailers in Chalco are the aforementioned couple of brothers and another retailer, who controls most of the exchange.

In contrast with the method used to weight the animals in San Martín Texmelucan, retailers and producers use the method called «bulto» or bulk. The retailer estimates the weight of the rabbit and then pays the corresponding amount. Likewise in the San Martín Texmelucan market place, there is a sub-intermediaries system in Chalco's tianguis. The retail volume is lower than in San Martín and it is estimated in 80 to 100 rabbits per week.

### **Ozumba, Estado de México.**

Exchange of rabbits in this town is carried out in a similar fashion to San Martín Texmelucan. The main retailer is the elder of the two brothers that also control de Market in the San Martín market place. Rabbits are bought using the «bulto» system, exchange starts about 7:00 and finishes at 14:00. There are also sub-intermediaries in this market place. The exchange volume is similar to that one reported for Chalco.

The retailers above mentioned also make periodic visits to backyard producers and to small farms following a pre-established route. Visits occur more often depending on the demand

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<sup>1</sup> Tianguis is a the Pre-Hispanic word for market place. It is still used today for the local markets that settle once per week in a place and then change. The Tianguis of Chalco has existed since pre-hispanic times.

from the market, which usually increases by the summer holidays and Christmas time.

### **Slaughterhouses**

In order to complete the storing and re-selling cycle, some of the retailers have set up slaughterhouses. Although small these facilities are well made and sacrifice of the animals is carried out under acceptable hygienic procedures. Slaughterhouses are inspected periodically by the government in order to control that all the procedures comply with the sanitary laws. Once sacrificed, eviscerated and properly cleaned, rabbits are transported in plastic containers with ice to the supermarkets and to the restaurants of the touristic corridors.

### **DISCUSSION**

Several Points are interesting for discussion in this paper. First, the relevance of the retailers to the whole rabbits meat production and consumption systems and second, the need of policies to stimulate the production of rabbit meat and fur.

It is out of doubt that the present conditions of the market do not allow the small producers, both backyard and small-technified farms, to reach the level of production to supply in volume and frequency required the demands of supermarkets and of the restaurants of the touristic corridors. Thus, in the present conditions, the presence of the intermediary seems to be necessary for the sustainability of the system. However, in the extent that production increases in number and importance, producers might be able to organise themselves and form their own commercialisation facilities. None of these changes will occur if there is not a firm government policy to promote rabbit production and consumption. Touristic corridors might be an experimental place to organise promotion of the activity.

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