

Proceedings of the



4-7 july **2000** – Valencia Spain

These proceedings were printed as a special issue of WORLD RABBIT SCIENCE, the journal of the World Rabbit Science Association, Volume 8, supplement 1

ISSN reference of this on line version is 2308-1910

(ISSN for all the on-line versions of the proceedings of the successive World Rabbit Congresses)

Mahendrarajah. E. S.

**OPPORTUNITIES AND NEED FOR RABBIT RAISING
IN THE TEA GARDENS OF SRI LANKA**

Volume B, pages 117-119

OPPORTUNITIES AND NEED FOR RABBIT RAISING IN THE TEA GARDENS OF SRI LANKA

Mahendrarajah. E. S.

Gnanammah Integrated Research farm
7/4, Kings Street, Matale. # 21000
Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

In Sri Lanka rabbit meat is eaten by all communities but the vegetarians. The availability of the meat is restricted due to lack of production and distribution. Many Non Governmental Organisation projects have failed due to lack of commitment, and ignorance of socio-cultural norms. The tea estate sector has the highest protein-energy malnutrition and the least animal protein intake per capita. Rabbit breeding can be successfully introduced in this area. Planting of fodder shrubs on the contours of the tea gardens, while providing valuable feed to the rabbits, can help in preventing soil erosion and enhancement of soil fertility. In general, feeds necessary for rabbits are obtainable from the lands as grass, legume or tree leaves. It is suggested to promote knock down type modular cages built with a mix of modern and traditional materials. Maintenance of breeder units would provide easy access to farmers to renew their stocks.

INTRODUCTION

So called wild rabbits or hare, have been eaten by farmers and forest dwellers since the dawn of history in Sri Lanka. Though Hinduism and Buddhism, the two predominant religions of the Island prohibit killing of animals for food, a sizeable population belonging to both religions are non vegetarians. Some are squeamish about eating rabbits, because of the so called childlike appearance of the carcass. Therefore it is suggested that the meat be sold in dissected portions to avoid public resentment. Furthermore there have been plenty of instances of no sensitivity of project proposes to the cultural and religious norms of the people. The introduction of sericulture in predominantly Buddhist areas - which failed so miserably - is just one example. A sociological study of these subjects are a necessary corollary to further-development activities.

TEA GARDENS OF SRI LANKA:

The tea gardens of Sri Lanka are a fine subject for studies of contrasts. This is the area, which produces the largest slice of the net foreign exchange earnings to the country. In opposition to the clean image of the factories and offices of the industry, the dwellings of the workers in general, are a far cry from anything that could ever resemble a house. While illiteracy is rampant, malnutrition stares one in his face. Animal husbandry, especially rearing of cattle and goats, have been part of their culture. Introduction of rabbit breeding to these people wont be an hazardous effort, provided proper training and infrastructures are provided to them.

OPPORTUNITIES:

The planting of fodder shrubs on the contours of the tea gardens, while providing valuable

feed to the rabbits, can help in preventing soil erosion. They can also enhance soil fertility. People are attuned to rearing animals and will prefer the raising of rabbits. In the tea estates, there are a number of abandoned factories and buildings, which could be profitably turned into nucleus units.

The fertilizers can be converted into valuable vermicomposts and then added to vegetable gardens of specialty fruits such as straw berries etc.

METHODOLOGY:

The main impediment to progress has been the lack of suitable housing for the animals, low cost needn't be associated with low quality or poor workmanship. Most development agencies failed to achieve their goals due to their wrong attitudes toward cost of materials. For example, though locally available wood may be cheap for the slatted flooring, the life time cost is much more than welded mesh of a suitable type. My suggestions had always been to promote knock down type modular cages. A mix of modern and traditional materials can be utilized to produce such durable hutches. Such units can lessen the cost in transport, and ease management practices. Thus uniform extension methods become practicable.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

Since each tea garden is a couple of hundreds of hectares, and the workers too, number a few hundreds, the best way forwards will be to initiate a nucleus breeding unit at the centre, and outgrowers at the periphery. The workers can gain their experiences from the well staffed breeding centre. Later on, they can go in for their own breeding programs.

FEEDING:

The major feeds are obtainable from the lands as grass and legume leaves. Food scraps from the table and kitchen too could be fed them. The concentrates presently given rabbits are those available on the market as broiler finisher pellets. No studies have been made to test cattle feed concentrates, which has a higher fibre content. Feeding broiler concentrates is a wasteful practice. A small pelleting mill can provide the necessary feed concentrates needed by a group of farmers. Such a mill can utilise locally available raw materials.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Rabbit breeding which while being profitable can also fulfil the nutritional needs of vulnerable communities.
1. Aid agencies wishing to embark on rabbitry projects should be able to focus their activities on suitably motivated target groups
1. Opportunities for rabbit raising on tea estates are plentiful. The recipients should be adequately trained on scientific methods
1. Suitable breeder units should be maintained at different locations - to maintain a supply of improved breeds.

CONCLUSIONS

Rabbit breeding in Sri Lanka can be a success, only if the project is suitably sited-in receptive areas. Initially the farmers should be like out growers of broiler chicken. Hutches should be of knock down type, and if possible mass produced. Maintenance of breeder units provide easy access to farmers to renew their stocks. Proactive evaluation principles should be developed with the assistance from foreign scientific institutions.