

SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF RABBIT MEAT PRODUCTION IN EKITI STATE OF SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the socio-economic characteristics of rabbit farmers and rabbit meat consumers that influenced the awareness and acceptability levels in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The experimental procedures were field surveys, personal interviews, and administration of structured questionnaires to farmers involving the characteristics of the people in 8 out of 16 local government areas of Ekiti State that were randomly selected for the study. Results showed a fairly high level of awareness of rabbit production (60%) with low levels of rabbit producers (0.70%) and rabbit meat consumers (17.0%). The producers which cut across the family status were largely in the age group of 51 – 60 years (26.0%) and >60 years (26.0%). Forty-seven percent of the producers were married and 7.0% divorced. About 66.7% raised rabbits with intention of sales for educational purpose (teaching and research), while 33.3% strictly raised rabbits for meat consumption. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents seldom consume rabbit meat, while 8.0% consume it on a daily basis. Rabbit consumption cuts across the social stratum but was more evident in the farmers group (32.0%), followed by civil servants and traders (29.0% each). Consumers preferred smoked meat (72.0%) to frozen or roasted. Production of the rabbit is at its infancy in Ekiti State, but with about 9.72 % growth, which is encouraging. Kitchen wastes only were used to feed rabbits by 22.0% of the rabbit producers, 37.0% fed forages alone, 33.0% kitchen wastes/forages and 8.0% pellets/forages. Most of the respondents (66.0%) used bamboo/wood hutches, while 1% kept their rabbits in welded iron cages. The family accounted for the major source of labour (96.30%) with no credit facility. Overall, production challenges identified were lack of good foundation stock, disease/pest infestation (notably mange), inability to purchase good quality feed, and lack of government support.

Key words: Rabbits, Social acceptability, meat consumption, Ekiti State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The animal protein content of a typical Nigerian diet is only about 17% of the total food protein, which is low when compared to 60% in diets in the United Kingdom and 71% in New Zealand (World Bank, 2001). Rabbit meat production has therefore been identified and proposed as one of the means to make for the shortfall of animal protein intake in the country (Dairo, 2008). However, there are challenges to overcome one of which is the social acceptance of rabbit meat in the diet of people in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Beef, fish, chevron, mutton and bush meat are generally the most consumed by the teeming populace which indicate their acceptance and implicitly explains interest in their production (Gambo *et. al.*, 2010). This study therefore identified the level of awareness and social acceptance of rabbit meat in the diet of residents of Ekiti State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of site of study

This study was carried out in Ekiti State Southwestern Nigeria. It is located within longitudes 4 ° 5' and 5 ° 5' east of Greenwich Meridian and latitudes 7 ° 15' and 8 ° 5' north of the equator. The population of the state is about 2.4 million having 16 local government areas, a landmass of 6353 km²

with tropical climate having distinct wet and dry seasons. The annual rainfall is about 1200 mm and average temperature of 27.12° Celsius. It is predominantly agrarian with a population density of about 375 per square kilometer (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Data collection, processing and interpretation

A total of 240 questionnaires were administered along with personal interviews and visitations starting from October 2010 to February 2011. Eight local government areas were randomly sampled out of the 16 from which 3 towns were selected with 10 respondents given the questionnaires. The local governments with towns in parentheses sampled were Ikole (Asin, Odo-Oro, Ikun-Araromi); Oye (Ilemeso, Ijelu, Ayebode); Ilejemeje (Obada, Eda-oniyo, Iludun); Ido/Osi (Aiyetoro, Osi, Ilogbo); Moba (Aaye, Ira, Erinmope); Gbonyin (Ilumoba, Iro, Egbe); Ikere (Oke-Ikere, Odo-Ikere, Oko-Oba) and Emure (Idamudo, Odo-Emure, Ariyasi). The questionnaires addressed the socio-economic status of the rabbit farmers, rabbit meat consumers and meat consumption, mode of finance and the production challenges faced by the farmers who have been raising rabbit in these areas. The primary data were ranked and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results in Table 1 showed more female (55.4%) respondents than male (44.6%). This is because women had been exposed to rabbit rearing during the aborted military government programme of “Better Life for Rural Women Development” in 1980s anchored by the State Agricultural Development Project. Out of these, 60.0% indicated awareness of rabbit meat and production while 40.0% did not. Many of the rabbit producers (66.7 %) raise rabbits

Table 1: Some indices evaluated for social acceptance of rabbit meat consumption in Ekiti State southwestern Nigeria (%)

Gender of respondents		Purpose of rabbit keeping		Labour for rabbit keeping		Level of awareness		Type of meat consumed	
Male	Female	Outright Sale	Meat	Family	Hired	Yes	No	Beef/Poultry/Chevron Etc	Rabbit
44.6	55.4	66.7	33.3	96.3	3.8	60.0	40.0	83.0	17.0

with intention to sell to educational institutions. This is because of the rise in the use of rabbits for research and training by tertiary educational institutions in the state that had been making purchases from neighbouring states, while 33.3% raise rabbits for meat consumption. Figure 1 shows the distribution of farming practices by respondents. About 0.70 % of the respondents (all on part-time) were engaged in rabbit farming, 47.0 % in crop production, and 5.6 % in other types of livestock production, while 46.7 % were practicing mixed farming.

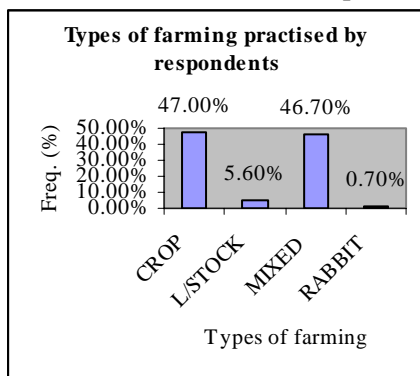


Figure 1: Distribution of farming practices of respondents

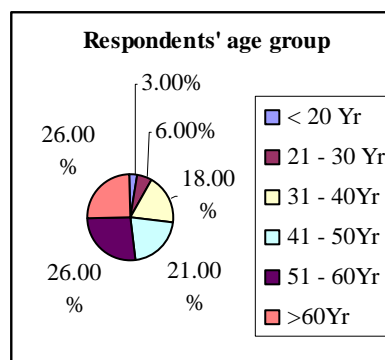


Figure 2: Age distribution of respondents

Figure 2 shows that respondents in age group above 60 years and age group 51 – 60 years were 26.0% each and constituted the larger percentage of those involved in rabbit production in the state. Even

though the spread covered all the age groups, the majority of those involved were retired civil servants and those about to retire from government jobs that chose rabbit keeping as past-time. Out of these, 47.0% were married, 26.0 % widowed, 20.0 % single, while 7.0% were divorced (Figure 3). This figure clearly shows that rabbit farming can effectively engage the different categories of family status for economic benefits if given policy priority, focus and monitoring by government agencies like the National Directorate for Employment, which could create jobs through production, marketing and other artisan services (Lukefahr, 2007).

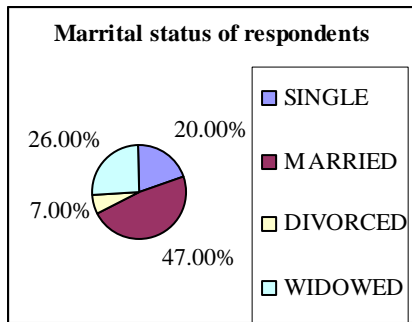


Figure 3: Marital status of respondents

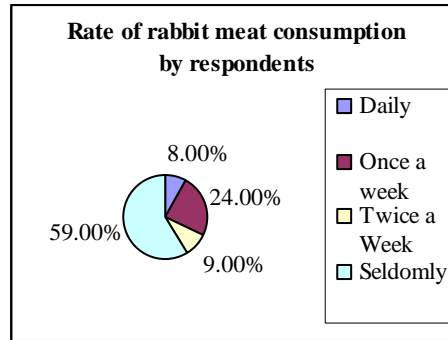


Figure 4: Rabbit meat consumption

Figure 4 shows that occasional rabbit meat consumers (59.0) % were more common than those on weekly (24.0%) and daily basis (8%). This is due to non-availability of rabbit meat. Consumers' status showed that civil servant and traders were 29.0% each, farmers 32.0%, artisan 7.0% and 3.0% students (Figure 5). This implies that consumption cuts across the social stratum which is an indication of acceptability among the income groups of the society. Figure 6 indicates reasons advanced for consumption of rabbit meat due to taste/nutritive value of the meat (78.0%), cheap source of meat (8.0 %), no alternative source of meat (6.0 %), while those that ate for medicinal value (heart patient)/low fat content and others (i.e. no special reasons were 4.0% each).

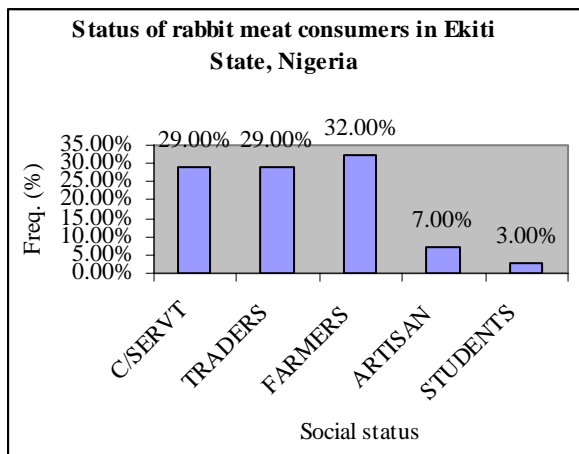


Figure 5: Status of rabbit meat consumers

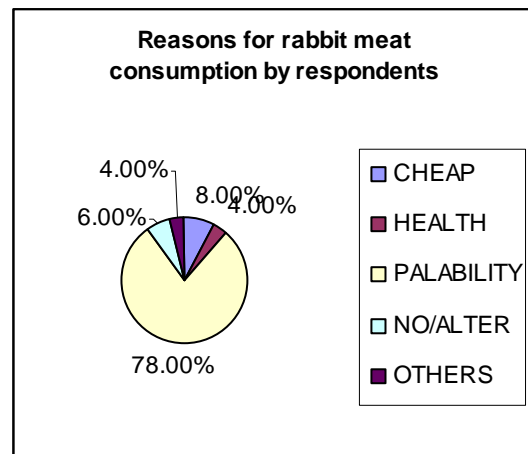


Figure 6: Reasons for consuming rabbit meat

All the respondents gave no special reasons (either traditional or cultural) against the consumption of rabbit meat. This agrees with the report of Abu *et. al.*, (2008) that there is no known taboo against the consumption of rabbit meat in Nigeria. The large percentage of consumption of meat due to palatability (78.0%) could be a good means of popularizing rabbit meat in Ekiti State and subsequently contribute to the economy of the state. Many of the respondents (72.0 %) preferred smoked rabbit meat, while 18.0 % and 10.0 % preferred frozen and roasted, respectively (Figure 7). They all expressed high expectations for processed rabbit meat in the stores/supermarkets in the town.

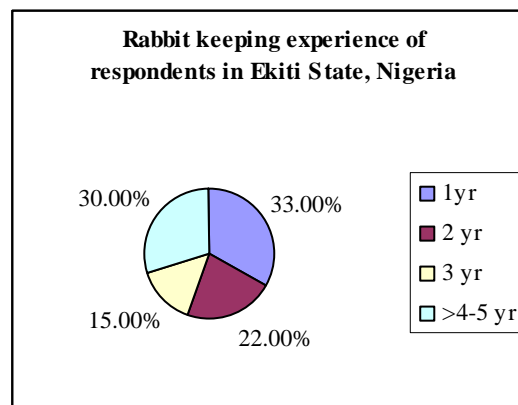
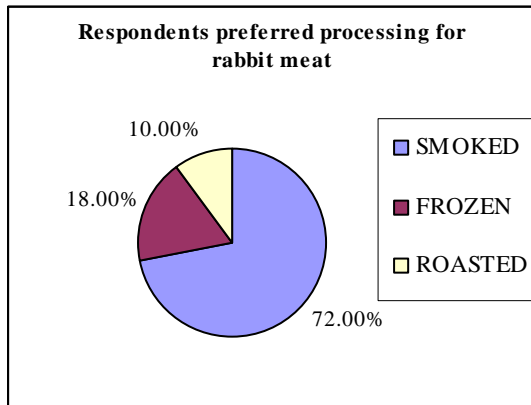


Figure 7: Preferred processing for rabbit meat **Figure 8:** Years of rabbit keeping by respondents

Figure 8 shows the years of experience of the respondents in rabbit farming with 33.0% that started rabbit rearing within one year, while 22.0 % had two years, 15.0 % 3 years and 30.0 % had been keeping rabbits over 4 – 5 years, but not more than 10 years. This trend implies that though rabbit keeping might be at its infancy in the state, it has a growth rate of about 9.72% for the 10 year period, which is an indication of its socio-acceptance among the people in the state. Bamboo/wood planks were used by 66.0% of the respondents, 33.0 % used one-tier wooden cages reinforced with wire mesh (wood/mesh) and 1.0% improvised welded iron cages as backyard housing for the rabbits (Figure 9). Figure 10 shows that harvested forage was used by 37.0 % of the respondents for feeding, 22.0% used kitchen wastes, 33.0% combined kitchen wastes and forages, while 8.0% combined forages and pellet feed.

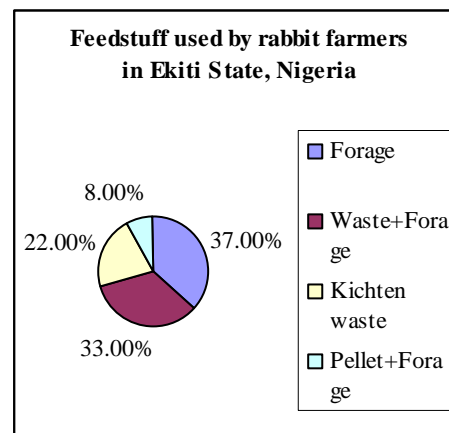
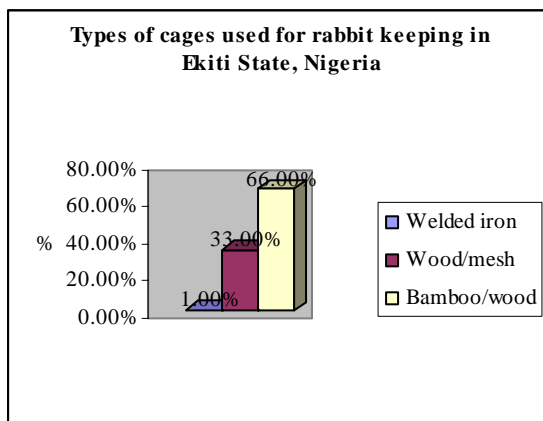


Figure 9: Cages used for rabbit housing **Figure 10:** Feedstuffs used by rabbit farmers

Housing and feed were therefore identified as part of the challenges of increased rabbit production in Ekiti State that could work against its acceptability. Hence, there is need for procurement of cage units and availability of pelleted feed for increased production. In addition, reports from interviews indicated that about 74.0% of the respondents obtained their foundation stock as gift from friends, while 26.0 % made outright purchases from open market (Table 1) Foundation stocks were difficult to import into the country as there are no credit facilities. Even though family labour (96.0%) was predominant, 4.0 % of the respondents used hired prorated labour with population under 40 rabbits. Producers often faced disease problems, notably mange and pneumonia because of inadequate housing (Table 1). It is in this respect that government agricultural agencies, policy formulators, National Directorate for Employment and non governmental organizations in the state should come together and harness the potentials available in raising rabbit by providing the missing gaps in production. Formation of rabbit producers associations and a road show campaign for the promotion of meat to enhance the growing acceptability should be encouraged.

CONCLUSIONS

Rabbit meat acceptance in Ekiti State is low even though it is growing at an impressive rate. The constraints could be addressed by quick intervention of stake holders, formation of rabbit producers associations, and a road show campaign to popularize meat consumption.

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