Round Table 2:

RABBIT HOUSING - new farming systems with the regulations and social demand?

Chair: Luc Maertens

12th World Rabbit Congress, 3-5 November 2021, Nantes, France
Organisation of the round table

- **General introduction** – objectives (Chair)
- **3 short presentations** of 10 -15’
  - Laurence Fortun-Lamothe (F - INRAE): situation in France
  - Liesbeth Van Damme (B - ILVO): focus on doe housing
  - Karel De Greef (NL- WUR): focus on social demand
- **Each presentation followed by a discussion** focussed on the topic
- **General discussion**:
  - Each country present will have the opportunity to present briefly (5’ max.) the situation in his country
  - General questions - discussions
The problem:

- In **commercial rabbit farms** cage housing is (was) the standard
- **Increasing pressure** from NGO’s and the society to ban the (small) individual cages
- Increasing demand for improved “welfare” and ... a rabbit has a high cuddly ability (pet syndrome) → **social demand of the society**
- **No EC legislation**, some countries have a legislation: B, NL, D, ...
- Recently the European citizens initiative “**End of cage**” calls the Commission to propose legislation to ban the use of cages for farmed animals (e.g. rabbits)
- Are there **alternatives** for cage housing in commercial rabbit production?
- Combining “animal welfare” and “economic feasibility”
For fatteners:

- Different non cage housing systems were developed and are increasingly applied
- E.g. in the NL, B and DE: > 50% of fatteners in park systems
- Definition ....
  - Open top and min. 1 side ≥ 1,8 m
  - Enriched: 2nd level, gnawing material
  - 800 cm²/rabbit and min. 20 rabbits in group
  - Plastic (slatted) bottom (if wire 80% has to be covered)
- Improved natural behaviour expression
- More enteric problems especially due to plastic slatted flooring
For reproducing does:

- **Continuous group housing**: both welfare and reproduction data are negatively impacted (Szendrö et al., 2011; ...).
- **Problems**: mutual aggression of females, high losses of kits, pseudo pregnancy, does not fit with AI management, ...
- **Individual recognition system** (electronic ear tag):
  - Tackles common use of nestboxes
  - Not compatible with management of large batch production
  - Pseudo pregnancy ....
  - Expensive (not economical)
- **Efforts to develop a part-time group housing** of females
  - During critical period (around parturition) individual
  - Encouraging results
  - Still aggression problems after regrouping: research to tackle necessary
Organisation of the round table

- General introduction – objectives (Chair)
- 3 short presentations of 10 -15’
  - Laurence Fortun-Lamothe (F - INRAE): situation in France and research efforts
  - Liesbeth Van Damme (B - ILVO): focus on research with does
  - Karel De Greef (NL- WUR): with focus on social demand
- Each presentation followed by a discussion focussed on the topic
- Scientific congress, less us avoid to lobby for a certain housing system but concentrate on what can we add as researchers to the society