

BOOK REVIEW

RABBIT PRODUCTION. 9TH EDITION. MCNITT J.I., LUKEFAHR S.D., CHEEKE P.R., PATTON. H.M. CABI WALLINGFORD AND BOSTON, (2013). 300 PP. HARDCOVER.

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The FAO estimates worldwide production of rabbit meat at around 1.7 million MT annually. Although rabbit production systems are not found worldwide, they contribute to meat supply in many parts of the world. The species has many advantages, such as good reproductive performance, rapid growth rate and minimal interspecific competition with man, while the meat is recognised as having high dietetic qualities, making rabbit production an attractive option for worldwide diversification of meat supply.

This new edition of the book may be considered an adequate source of information for people interested in starting up this animal production in areas where interest in rabbit is growing. Although interest in rabbit production for meat supply is still scarce in North-America, the authors -pioneers in this field in United States- have wide-ranging experience in different areas of this field (genetics, housing, pathology, nutrition, management...), particularly in the implantation and promotion of rabbit farming programmes in rural scopes and developing countries, ensuring the value of this book, now in its 9th edition after a career spanning over 25 years.

The book updates the knowledge available in the field and provides an impressive compilation of information structured in 26 chapters, mainly focused on meat and fur production, but also containing practical information on pet, show and lab rabbits.

The first three chapters of the book introduce the potential interest of rabbit production for different proposes, describing the weak points that may be limiting its spread (Chapter 1, "Introduction"), "Rabbit Production Worldwide" (Chapter 2) and the main "Rabbit Breeds" (Chapter 3) available for different uses, including a wonderful colour photo collection of 40 different breeds.

The following three chapters deal with rabbit management in terms of the facilities required (Chapter 4, "The Rabbitry and its Equipment") and "Rabbit Management" on the farm per se (Chapter 5, later extended in Chapter 11 "Rabbit Reproduction"), as well as "Economic and Financial Management", including an interesting cash flow example for a small commercial rabbitry (Chapter 6). Although highly technified rabbitries perhaps require more detailed and updated information on modern rabbit housing systems to maximise their profitability, these chapters constitute a valuable source of knowledge for those interested in getting to know and starting up in rabbit production.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 deal with rabbit nutrition, including a broad compendium of main nutrients to be considered in rabbit nutrition ("Principles of Rabbit Nutrition"), an updated review of the nutrient requirements of rabbits and the most common feedstuffs used in rabbit feed formulation ("Feeds and Feeding"), as well as a full description of possible negative natural and artificial compounds that might appear in the feed ("Toxins in Feeds").

"Rabbit Diseases and Health Problems" are described in Chapter 10. This hot topic, knowledge of which is a crucial factor to ensure success in this branch of animal production, is summarised in a basic and friendly way to introduce the reader to the description, detection, prevention and treatment of the main rabbit diseases.

Details of “Rabbit Behaviour” and American social opinion on “Animal Welfare” in relation to rabbit production are given in Chapters 12 and 19. This rabbit knowledge area, with growing interest and scientific contributions, is introduced to the reader by describing the behaviour of both wild and domestic rabbits, as well as some possible environmental factors which could modify it. Good Practice Manuals for Rabbit Welfare recently available would be appreciated and useful in a further edition of this book.

Rabbit genetics is carefully described in depth over three chapters. The reader uninitiated in this area is guided from the basic principles of rabbit genetics [Chapter 13 “Principle of Rabbit Genetics”] and breeding [Chapter 14 “Breeding Systems”], to the description of how the genetic selection for qualitative (fur colour, dwarfism, wool...) and quantitative (growth rate, litter size...) traits is performed in this species [Chapter 15 “Genetic selection for Herd Improvement”]. A longer chapter is then specifically dedicated to “Coat Colour Genetics of Rabbits”.

The last three chapters of the book are devoted to rabbit products. Chapter 24 deals with “Meat Production”, describing rabbit meat production systems in the United States and Europe and discussing the high standards of rabbit meat from a nutritional point of view. Chapters 25 and 26 briefly describe “Slaughtering and Preparation of Meats and Skins” and “Marketing Rabbits and Their Products”, especially in the United States, with a market in some respects quite different from that existing in traditional rabbit production areas.

One of the treasures of this book lies in the chapters on rabbit farming programmes at rural level and in developing countries. In Chapter 20 “Rabbits for Family and Small Farm Development”, the authors reveal to the reader the “added value” of this sometimes unknown animal production, and using their broad experience in this area, give recommendations on how to integrate a small-scale rabbit production unit on the family farm. “Rabbit Production in Developing Countries”, the title of Chapter 21, describes the advantages of this activity for many developing countries (no human-competitive feeding, efficient production, easy replacement, no religious bans...), the recommendations for housing, feeding and management under these conditions and the main agencies involved in international development of rabbit production.

Finally, a series of short Chapters (17, 18, 22 and 23) is dedicated to introducing the reader to the use of rabbits for other purposes of growing interest: “Rabbit Shows”, “Pet Rabbits”, “Rex Fur Production” and “Angora Wool Production”.

On the whole, this general knowledge book provides a valuable overview of the issues cited, aimed at animal science students and researchers, rabbit farmers and all those involved or interested in rabbit production.

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