



Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development
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Emergency Locust Response Program
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Sustainable Agricultural Livelihood Restoration, Rehabilitation and Resilience in Kenya Training Manual

3.4 MODULE 4

RABBIT PRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT

Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) farming is one of the fastest growing micro-livestock enterprises in Kenya. They vary very much in colour and weight (1.4-7.3 kg). Some have small, erect ears while others have long hanging ears. The male is called a buck and the female is a doe and the young are referred to as kids.

The rabbit enterprise has the potential to be a cheap and sustainable means of producing high quality animal protein for the expanding human population in Kenya. Rabbits can be reared on cheap diets of forages and kitchen leftovers. They also utilise forages more efficiently than cattle, shoats and the rabbits pose minimal competition with humans for similar food. With good care a doe can produce up to 40 young ones per year compared with 0.8 for cows and 1.4 for ewes per year.

Housing for rabbits

The housing of Rabbits is called rabbitry. Rabbits are sensitive to space and when not granted enough to freely move about, often exhibit abnormal behavior. This includes repetitive chewing of cage bars or over-grooming. The rabbitry should be an enclosed construction with proper ventilation, lighting, heating, and cooling systems. The construction can be cages, hutches or a house with enough room to accommodate their feeders, drinkers, kits and expansion of their population. Regardless, rabbits are good at taking care of themselves once you create a nice habitat for them. Better still, they permit you to keep your day job while you rear them if you so choose. The rabbitry with proper ventilation and lighting systems



The rabbitry with proper ventilation and lighting systems

Rabbit breeding

The common rabbit breeds in Kenya are California White, Flemish Giant, New Zealand White and some other local cross breeds. Rabbits multiply rapidly and they start breeding at 4 to 5 months of age. The gestation period for the doe (female rabbit) is 31 days and she could give birth to between 6 and 10 kits (baby rabbits) in one go. Rabbits are also able to reproduce seven times a year. The doe being capable of producing up to 50 baby rabbits in a year translates into good income with successful breeding. For reproduction to take place, the buck and doe must be kept together to induce mating, after which they should be kept in separate cages. Bucks should be used for reproduction at least once in four days. The mating

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process could be scheduled for every three weeks or every six weeks depending on your level of patience. You should maintain the herd on a year-round schedule of 12 hours each of light and darkness to keep them breeding throughout the year.

Feeding rabbits

Rabbits should be fed at least twice a day and provided with plenty of water. The best food for them is grass, they can also be fed cabbage and lettuce. Rabbits are naturally nocturnal creatures, preferring to eat at night. Rabbits should have a daily diet of mostly hay, a smaller amount of fresh vegetables, and a limited number of pellets. Hay is the most important part of a rabbit's daily intake. Unlimited, high-quality grass hay, such as Timothy, orchard or brome, should make up the bulk of a rabbit's diet. Thus rabbits feed on a variety of feeds such as: green feeds that include growing plants such as grasses and leafy vegetables; root crops such as sweet potatoes, turnips and beets; cereals grains namely oats, wheat, barley, grain sorghums, corn and rye and milled feeds such as bran, middlings and shorts. Rabbits feeding on vegetables.



Rabbits feeding on vegetables

Disease control in rabbit

The most important factors for maintaining a healthy rabbit herd are cleanliness, good ventilation, close observation, and protection from sun and rain. Rabbits are susceptible to several diseases that can reduce production to unprofitable levels. The respiratory disease caused by *Pasturella multocida* is responsible for decreased productivity and a high mortality rate in does.

To help prevent diseases, do not permit casual visitors entry into the rabbitry. They may introduce a disease or cause additional stress to the animals. Also, isolate any sick or injured rabbit immediately. Disinfect both the isolation cage and the rabbit's regular cage to avoid further spread of the disease.

For a good health program, you should keep accurate records of each animal. Provide each rabbit with a tattoo identification number or ear tag and attach an identification card with health and breeding information to its hutch.



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Marketing and sales of rabbit

Not many people are involved in commercial rabbit production in Kenya. Because of this, it has been almost impossible for the few existing rabbit farmers to satisfy market demand. Therefore, once you set up your own rabbit farming business in Kenya, you are already on your way to becoming a silent millionaire.

You can make your sales in the local market. If you prefer not to stay all day long selling rabbits, consider getting somebody to sell them for you. Social Media is also a reliable platform for attracting patronage. Unfortunately, poor marketing is the main drawback for rabbit farming in the country.

Benefits of rabbit farming

There are several benefits of commercial rabbit farming in Kenya. The main benefits of rabbit farming business in Kenya are listed below.

- Source of cheap proteins (meat)
- Source of manure
- Income generation
- Source of employment
- Raw material for the leather industry (skin)
- Rabbits are very fast-growing animals like broiler chicken. They gain maturity fast and become suitable for slaughtering purpose within 4-5 months. 274
- Rabbit gestation period is less (generally between 28-31 days) and a doe give birth of kids after every 2 months. Each time one doe can give birth of 2-8 kids
- Starting rabbit farming in Kenya requires very little capital or investment

Further reading

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