**Meat Pen Rabbits**

**4H and FFA Projects**

**Developed by Eric Walker, Past Superintendent**

* **General info about Rabbits**
	+ Meat quality
		- High quality protein
		- Can be used in most ways chicken meat is used, because both are blank palettes upon which any desired flavors can be layered.
		- Rabbit meat is leaner than beef, pork, and chicken meat.
	+ Breeds
		- Californian
		- New Zealand
		- Fancy Breeds
	+ Market Rabbits vs Breeding
		- Market - pens of 3 “triplets” vs single rabbits
		- Breeding – Buck or Doe
* **Finding, selecting, & choosing market rabbits**
	+ Finding rabbits – Breeders
		- Internet / Ag Extension Agents
			* Call breeders BEFORE breeding date(March)
		- Breeder can help you pick
		- Preferably from **same** litter
		- 4-5 weeks old
	+ Gender doesn’t matter for young meat pens
	+ How many do I need?
		- Minimum of 4
		- 7-8 preferred (more options for culling)
	+ Rabbit carriers are preferred for transport
* **Housing and raising market pens**
	+ Temperature is critical!
		- Fans, AC, shade, ice, etc.
		- Good ventilation
	+ Pens
		- Size
			* Minimum 24x24x18 / Best 36x24x24
			* 1x2 sides & top / ½ x 1 bottom
		- Location
			* Suspended, NOT supported underneath
			* Protected from predators
		- 2 pens if possible for sorting
* **Feeding and Nutrition**
	+ Feeding
		- Free choice vs measured
		- 16-18% protein
		- Check feed labels - 3month old feed is old for rabbit food
		- Conditioning “show” feeds vs regular
		- Poor out and replace swollen or old feed
		- Be careful with their digestive tract
		- Sticking with breeder’s feed is best
		- Transitioning feeds
			* Timothy or Coastal hay
			* Slowly mix to transition feeds
	+ Supplements
		- Don’t over-supplement
		- Black oil sunflower seeds (Not too much!)
		- Molasses
	+ Avoid bread and grocery vegetables
	+ Show Blooms for “pushing” rabbits
	+ Water, water, water!
	+ Bins, crocks, and water bottles
	+ Target Weights
		- 5 weeks = 2 ¼ -2 ½
		- 6 weeks = 2 ½ - 3
		- 7 weeks = 3 - 3 ½
		- 8 weeks = 3 ½ - 3 ¾
		- 9 weeks = 3 ¾ - 4 ¼
		- 10 weeks = 4 ¼ - 5
	+ Every ounce matters for rabbits!
* **Care and handling**
	+ Carrying and handling
		- Support weight
	+ “Set em up” every chance you get
	+ Working fur
		- Hands and water
		- Never use a comb
		- Keep them clean!
	+ Nails
	+ Teeth
	+ Rabbit carrying cage preferred
* **Trouble shooting**
	+ Rabbits have very few diseases or issues
	+ Diarrhea
	+ Sore hocks
		- Preparation H
	+ Conjunctivitis
	+ Snuffles
	+ Ear mites
		- Campho-phenique
	+ Missing fur
		- Fur mites
		- Fighting
		- Separate immediately!
* **Sorting and Selecting for Show**
	+ Keep good records on weights!
	+ 2 times/week early – every day at the end
	+ Weigh them at the same time as weigh-in (8am)
	+ Scales
		- Digital
		- Basket & fish scale
	+ Pushing and Holding weight
	+ **Final Pen Selection**
		- Early, late, or cool day
		- Within 2 ounces preferably
		- Mirror, ruler, & scale
		- Characteristics
			* Weight
			* Depth
			* Loin
			* Rump
			* Lower hindquarter
			* Shoulders
			* Fur
			* Appearance
		- Tips
			* Wear long sleeves
			* Use a mirror
			* Make a chart
			* Judge each rabbit individually before grouping
			* Select within 24hrs of show
* **Judging and Scoring**
	+ Meat Type – 40 points
		- Most important factor
		- Compact / well filled body
		- Firm flesh
	+ Condition – 30 points
		- Pelt should be tight over entire body
	+ Uniformity – 20 points
		- “Three peas in a pod”
		- Size, weight, meat type, color, & fur
	+ Fur – 10 points
		- Fly back
		- Tight with no loose fur
		- Clean / natural shine
		- Often separates the top few pens
* **Showmanship**
	+ Read, Read, Read!!!
	+ Commons Showmanship Judging categories
		- Carrying rabbit
		- Posing rabbit
		- Turning over rabbit
		- Returning to Posed position
		- Examining Rabbits:
			* Ears
			* Teeth
			* Eyes
			* Nose
			* Toenails
			* Hocks and front feet
			* Legs
			* Body
			* Gender
			* Tail
			* Coloring, smut, & foreign spots
			* Quality and Cleanliness
		- Pose for Evaluation of overall balance
		- **YOUR Appearance**
		- **YOUR Actions**
		- **YOUR Knowledge**

**RESOURCES**

* [www.arba.net](http://www.arba.net/)
* [www.texasrba.net](http://www.texasrba.net/)
* [www.bassequipment.com](http://www.bassequipment.com/)
* [www.bunnyrabbit.com](http://www.bunnyrabbit.com/)
* [www.klubertanz.com](http://www.klubertanz.com/)
* [www.kwcages.com](http://www.kwcages.com/)