Basic Rabbit Management & Nutrition



Mike Avesing ARBA Judge

Mike's Background

- Started raising rabbits in 1966 (4H)
- Started showing rabbits in 1969
- ARBA Board of Directors 2003-2007
- Chairperson ARBA Standards Committee 2007 2010
- ARBA President 2010 2014

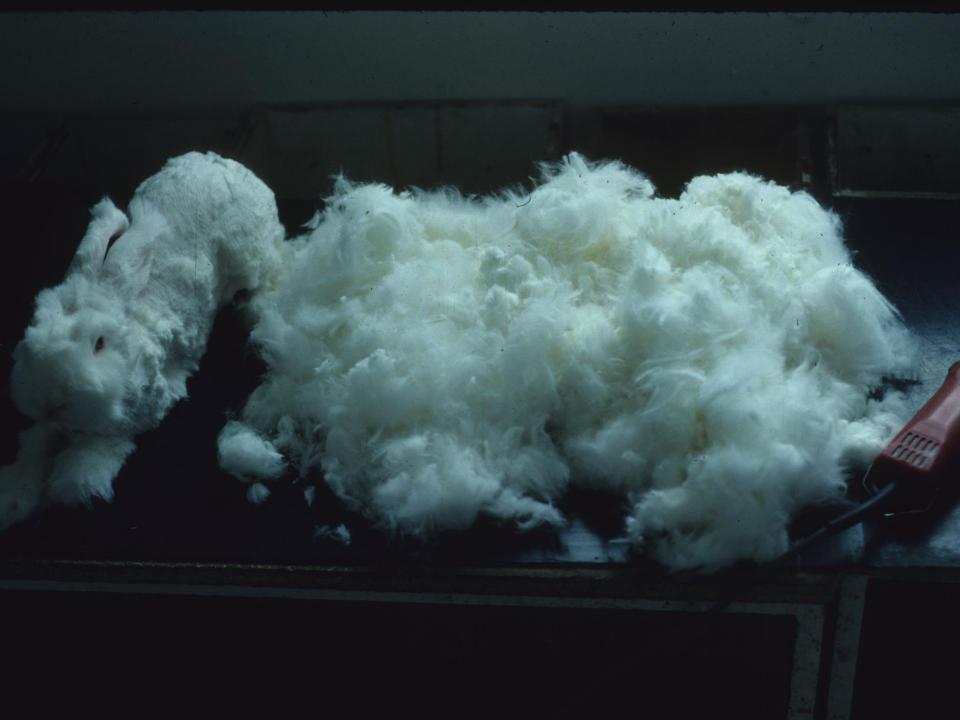
Rabbit Production

- meat
- fur
- wool
- pets
- exhibition and showing
- laboratory animals

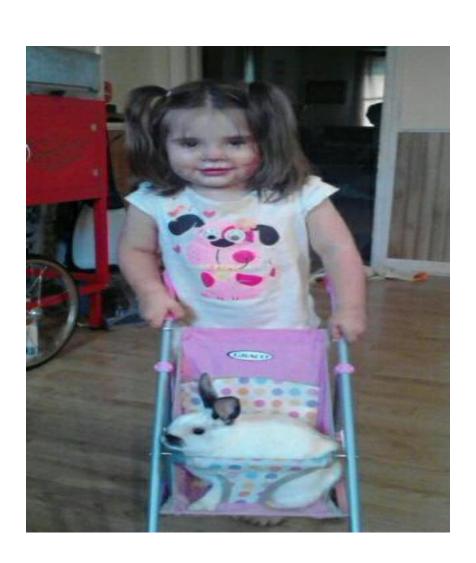
Economics of Raising Rabbits

- There are commercial rabbit operations
- They tend to be confined to southern Missouri and Arkansas
- Being able to raise a consistent supply of rabbits year round is always a challenge for the commercial producer





Pets





Breeds of Rabbits

Range from 2 lbs to 20+ lbs





- Lifespan
 - Generally dependant on size (smaller breeds live longer)
 - In production (2-3 years)
 - Pets (5-7+ years)

Housing/Environmental Requirements





Rabbit Facilities

- Proper ventilation
- Sprinkler or fogger for hot weather
- Adequate cage size
- Doe 30x36x18
- Buck 30x30x18
- Wood vs. Wire cages





Feeding and Nutrition

- Rabbit will eat 3-4% of its body weight
- Feed is the single biggest expense to a rabbit owner
- Best time to feed is in the evenings, however will adjust to a schedule.
 - More importantly: Feed at the same time every day

Basic Feeding Issues

- 15% 18% protein % fiber generally a couple of percentage points higher
- Feed must be fresh
- Amount to feed limit feeding vs. full feeding
- Commercial supplements, sunflower seeds, oats, barley, corn
- Benefits of grass hay



Natural Diet and Feeding Strategy of the Rabbit

- succulent, low fiber forage
- a low starch diet; not a seed eater
- nibbler vs. meal-eater

Roles of Fiber in Rabbit Nutrition

- growth
- Helps prevent fur chewing
- enteritis
- cecal impaction



Fur Chewing

- nutritional causes
 - low indigestible fiber
 - low protein

How much should you feed?

- Basic rule of thumb one cup (6 oz.) of feed per day for a commercial rabbit
 - Commercial rabbit is a 9-12 lb. rabbit
- Dwarf breeds ¼ cup per day
- Giant breeds 2 cups per day
- Varies with individual animals

Feeding amounts

- Kindling doe 2-3 oz first day, increase by 1 oz/day to free choice feeding at 4-5 day.
- Lactating doe with kits free choice
- Weaned Doe 4-6 oz to condition
- Gestating Doe 4-6 oz to condition
- Breeding Buck 4-6 oz to condition
- Dry Doe 4-6 oz to condition
- Grower Fryer Rabbits free choice
- Show 3-6 oz to condition

Feed intake

- Decreases in hot weather
- Reasons rabbits go off feed
 - Palatability feed is old, contaminated by rodents or insects, dehy differences
 - Wool/fur block
 - Changes in bacterial population bacterial toxins by abrupt feed changes, infections, internal parasites, and stress

Salt - Water

- Modern feeds contain an adequate amount of salt no salt spools are needed
- A constant supply of water is critical rabbits won't eat if they can't drink
 - Very critical if you live in an area where the water freezes in the winter

Conclusions

Rabbits have numerous unique nutritional characteristics

- high urinary Ca
- low vitamin D requirements
- low fiber digestibility
- Cecotrophy
- very susceptible to digestive disturbance
- their basic feeding strategy is nibbling on low-fiber forage
- they are not seed eaters
- digestive disturbances (enteritis) are the inevitable result of seed (grain)-containing diets

Cecotrophy

- Cecotrophy is defined as the normal behavior of rabbits to eat their own feces.
- This behavior is a source of nutrition, primarily vitamins and minerals from partially digested plant material[[]
- Cecotropes, also called 'night feces' or 'soft feces,' are the material resulting from the fermentation of food in a part of the digestive system. This material is rich in protein, usually softer than normal feces and also contains high levels of vitamins K and B. Cecotropes are formed by reverse peristalsis within the cecum and are passed during resting periods.

Questions???

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