**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 (Validation = Sat., May 14th)
  + 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/)