Rabbits are mild weather animal, their natural habitation is hilly slopes, high altitudes, cool and bushy forest. They also thrive well in the plains, if proper care and housing is available. Rabbits are fast in producing the young ones, and are ready for table purpose in about 3-4 months of age. Rabbit has been identified as an important micro livestock that can meet the increasing demand of meat in the NE region.

Important features of rabbit:

- Possible to rear in the backyard
- Requires less space and feed
- Low initial investment to start rabbitry
- Highly prolific, producing 25-30 young ones in a year
- Do not compete with man for food grains
- Pregnancy period is 30-32 days
- Becomes ready for production by 6-7 months of age
- Attains body weight of 1.5 to 1.8kg within 10-12 weeks depending on the breed and type of feed given
- Rabbit meat contains more protein, less fat and cholesterol
- Provide fur skin which is a valuable by product

Breeds and Varieties:

There are about 38 breeds and 89 varieties of rabbits which are internationally recognized. New Zealand White and Soviet chinchilla are found to be the most suitable meat varieties for NEH region.

Management techniques:

Housing: Rabbits can be maintained in three housing systems viz. a) Cage system b) Hutch system and c) Floor system.

a) Cage system: Rabbits are raised in wooden or galvanized wire mesh cages under a shed. The general size of the cage is 2 ½' x2 ½ 'x2 ½ '.

b) Hutch system: It is a self contained cage with a roof on top which can be moved from one place to another as and when required. The dimension of hutch may be 3 ½ ' x 3 'x 3 ½ '.

c) Floor system: Rabbits are raised on floor covered with litter material.

Handling rabbits: Lifting the rabbit by the ears is wrong. Correct way to handle the rabbit is to grasp the skin fold of the shoulder region with one hand and support the rump region with the other hand.

Feeding and watering: Rabbits eat almost any type of forages, crop residues, vegetable wastes and garden flowers that grows in and around us. Beside grass and leaves, small quantity of concentrate feeds of about 120 gm for adult and 60 - 80 gm per day for young growing rabbit is essential. The feed can be reduced by providing good quality leguminous and non leguminous fodders. Feed the rabbits twice daily early in the morning and late in the evening. The quantity of feed in the evening should be more than in the morning. Avoid sudden change in diet. Introduce greens in limited amount. The young kits start nibbling the grasses and leaves by the time they reach three weeks of age or even earlier. Providing clean drinking water daily is essential for rabbits of all ages.

Breeding: Rabbits attain maturity at 6-7 months of age or when they weigh about 2 kg body weight. Male matures a little later than the female rabbit. Keep the male and female in separate cages. Mating is done in the morning or evening.

The female is introduced into the male cage. If the doe (female) is ready for breeding, she will allow the buck to mount and mating will take place within minutes. After successful mating, male will fall down on one side making a characteristic sound and thereafter the female should be put back in her own cage.

The average pregnancy period is 30 days. Through proper planning 4-5 cropping can be obtained from each female per year. Around 20-25 days after mating, provide nest box with nesting materials such as chopped paddy straw or clean jute bags to help the doe in preparing nest for the new born babies.

When the doe is with the newborn kits, dogs and children should not be allowed to go near the rabbit house and cause disturbance. When the doe gets disturb, she gets frightened and injure the babies, and sometime the doe eats her babies due to noisy environment or due to poor feeding.

Care of the new born: New born kits are helpless as they are born blind and devoid of hair. The hair starts to grow on the 4th day and open their eyes after 10th day. It is advised not to disturb the young ones except to replace wet bedding or remove the dead kits, if there is any.

Kits begin to come out of their nest around 21-23 days and starts nibbling. At around 1 month they start to take feed properly.

Weaning: The young rabbits are separated from their mother at 42-45 days depending on the growth and ability to feed themselves. Sudden change of feed should be avoided. Sexing and numbering of the young ones is done before weaning. Immediately after weaning, they are kept in groups preferably with their litter mates for few days after which they may be gradually shifted to individual cages.

Male Rabbit   *Female Rabbit*

Sanitation: Regular cleaning of surroundings, floor, cages, feeding and watering trough is essential to keep the farm and animals free from diseases, odour and pollutants. Animals should not be handled by persons other than the attendants to prevent incidence of diseases.

Diseases of rabbits: Diseases of rabbit is less, if we maintain proper feeding and hygienic condition of the cages and house of rabbit. Rabbits usually suffer from diseases such as coccidiosis, hock sore, ear canker, mucoid enteritis and aflatoxicosis.

Ear Canker   *Hock Sore*

Marketing:

Rabbits can be marketed at 90-120 days during which they will weigh around 1.9kg. However, a mature rabbit will weigh between 2.5 to 4.0 kg. The dressing percentage of rabbit is around 65%.

Rabbit Care and Management
Tips to the farmers

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