Effect of housing conditions on production and behaviour of growing meat rabbits: A review

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Abstract

Farmed rabbit welfare mainly depends on the housing conditions created by people. When group size is above a maximum of four to five rabbits per cage, the disadvantages (higher risk of contamination and related disease andmortality, higher rates of aggressiveness and injured rabbits) outnumber the advantages (greater locomotion possibility and more social contact). According to several studies, the optimal stocking density is 16-18 rabbits/m2 (final animal load 40-45 kg m?2), depending on final weight. Deep litter is unfavourable due to the higher risk of contamination with coccidiae (higher mortality) and lower productivity and carcass quality traits.Wire net floors are less preferable below 15 C. Although there are no differences in productive performance, carcass traits or frequency of behavioural patterns between rabbits housed on wire net or plastic net floors, at a younger age growing rabbits prefer plastic net floors. Gnawing sticksmade of softwood fixed on the cage wall at rabbit head height are a very effective means to reduce aggressiveness (body lesions).

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