ABSTRACT: Double lactation in rabbits: effect on milk production, feed intake and performance of litters.

Does double lactation influence growth performance of litters? To answer this question, 42 multiparous rabbit does and their offspring were allocated to 3 groups, characterized by different frequency of lactation: free (group L), once a day (group S), double lactation (group D). The total milk production of group L (similar to that of group D) was higher (P<0.05) than that of group S (5.71 vs. 5.33 kg). The solid feed intake, from day 28 day onward, was higher (P<0.01) for D than L litters (41.2 vs. 33.6 g/d). At weaning, the weight of litters D and S was lower than that of group L (5150, 5042 and 5559 g, for D, S and L, respectively). Mortality rate did not differ between groups throughout the experimental period. These data, together with the scarce willingness of does to get into the nest box for the second lactation, suggest that the double lactation method could be useful only using hybrid characterized by high milk production. The better performance obtained with the free lactation confirm that the duration of controlled nursing could be carry out for a restricted period to prevent decrease of litter growth.

Key words: Nursing frequency, Milk yield, Litter performance, Rabbit.