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RABBIT NUTRITION IN TROPICS

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ABSTRACT

Rabbit nutrition basis were mainly developed since the 70's, for indoor professional systems, where the feed is produced by specialized companies, and in western Europe, thus in temperate climates. However, since the 90's several research groups developed programs to improve the feeding in hot environments (Egypt, Spain) and also in tropics (Indonesia, Africa, etc.). The nutrition is first dependent of the level of production aimed: either intensive indoor farming to very extensive outdoor or semi-indoor systems. In tropical climates one of the main constraints is the high temperature ($>30^{\circ}\text{C}$) combined with high humidity that leads to a decrease in the voluntary feed intake of the rabbit, and thus of performances. One of the challenge, particularly for a semi-intensive system is to maintain a sufficiently high level of nutrient intake (energy, proteins) in the breeding doe, to allow a good milk production and thus to improve the litter survival. In less extensive systems, one of the main challenge is to use tropical forages having a good nutritional value for the rabbit. Further research are still needed in this topic, to set up feeding programs, having a low-cost but a good nutritional supply to the animals. When rabbit are extensively farmed a zero cost feeding may be reached, without competition with human food, by giving various types of plants, cuts, household vegetable wastes, etc. Thus, rabbit farming is already developed in many tropical countries, either at a medium scale level (20 to 100 breeding does) or a large scale level (>100 does).

Key words: Rabbit nutrition, tropics, feeding programs