

Rabbits bring quick money

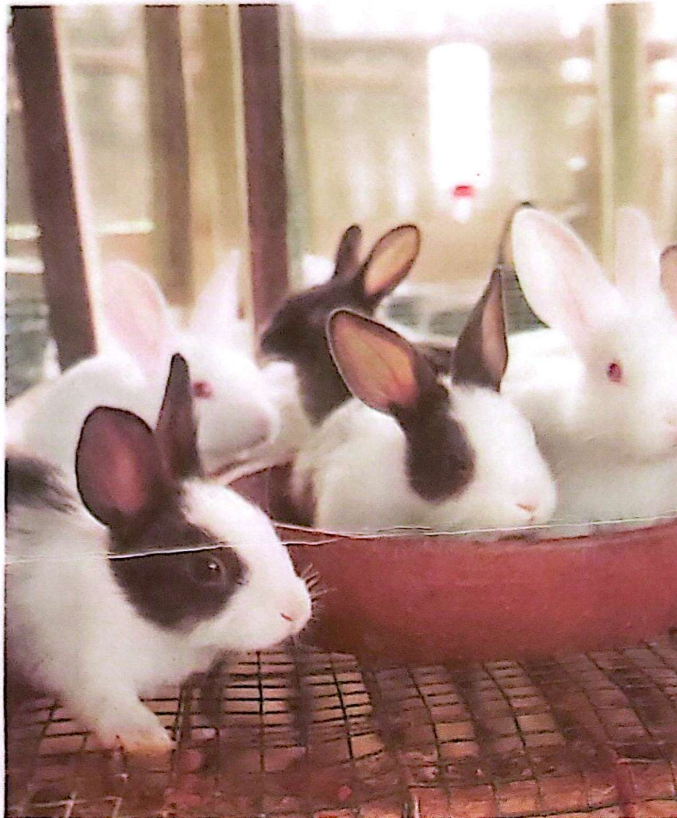
Many times doctors have said red meat from most livestock animals is not healthy. Rabbit meat, a white meat is a healthier option. The rabbit rearing business may not be a big investment but may help you earn some good money. **Beatrice Nakibuuka** helps you explore how best you can benefit from this.

The profits from rearing rabbits can come in many ways: You can sell the urine because many farmers use it as an insecticide, the manure for fertiliser and the meat whose demand is growing worldwide and is served in several hotels and restaurants.

According to Julius Ayebale, a farmer in Rubanda District, it takes rabbits 70 days from birth to reach market weight.

Benefits

Young rabbits are weaned in a month, and the doe takes only a week to conceive again after weaning. This gives you a quick turn around and within a few months you will have as many rabbits as possible. He says that rabbits can be a valuable addition to the family income and although rabbit meat is not common in the supermarket in his area, he has found market among the local people because the meat is healthy, all white and tasty. "I started rearing rabbits about a year ago with only two rabbits; a doe and a buck and in a month, I had six young ones. Now I have 200 rabbits but keep on selling them at Shs20,000 each," says Ayebale. Contrary to popular way people hold rabbits, grasping a rabbit by the scruff of its neck (the loose skin just on top of the shoulders) so that its head is facing away from you is the best way to pick a rabbit rather than holding its ears. In fact, picking it by the ears can cause injury and permanent damage.



Rabbits in a cage at Joana Mugisha's farm in Gayaza. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA.

THE GOLD IN WASTES

Ayebale also grows passion fruits, Irish potatoes and beans so he uses the rabbit urine as a pesticide. He is able to collect five 20-litre jerry cans of urine and since he cannot use all of it at once, he sells some. "I use urine to fertilise my crops. I use the dung as a fertiliser and also spray the urine on the beans and Irish potatoes whenever I sense any pests attacking them. I am also making good money from selling the urine because other people need it as a pesticide," he says.

Little capital

Rearing rabbits does not require a lot of space because they can live in cages. You need less capital unlike livestock and poultry farming according to Dr Moses Dralega who has reared rabbits for the last 10 years.

"I bought the first rabbits when they were about a month old at Shs7,000. I only needed Shs50,000 to start the business and now it yields for me about Shs300,000 every month," says Dr Dralega.

The shelter

Rabbits need a clean, well-ventilated cage protected from heat (rabbits love colder weather) and ready clean water and food are the criteria for raising healthy rabbits.

Once you have decided to start

the rabbit rearing business, it is important that you build a relatively good shelter in order to protect them from thieves and predators such as dogs and wild cats which often kill them.

You may need furnishing for the hutch in a nesting box at kindling time.

It may be about 12 x 16 inches square and 16 inches high, with an opening at one end large enough for the doe to enter.

Put a removable lid to allow you examine the litter or change bedding when necessary. Line the nesting box with soft grass in the doe's hutch twenty-five days after mating.

A doe will nurse her litter for six to eight weeks. As her milk supply decreases, the growing bunnies will teach themselves to eat the feed in the trough and manger.

As soon as they are eating completely on their own, they can be moved to individual hutches and every group the in a separate cage according to their age.

Care

Daily food and clean drinking water are a basic need for rabbits and according to Ayebale, the rabbits can eat mash, banana, Irish and sweet potato peels as well as grass. This is one of the basic challenges he faces because he has to move around town to collect the peels which he gets from restaurants. He says, "Sometimes I feed the rabbits on grass and weeds from the garden. In the dry spell, I go to different places around Rubanda town where they peel a lot of food and I book the peels. I buy a sack of peels at Shs30,000 and a kilogramme of mash at Shs1,500." He also makes sure that the cages are cleaned every day to protect the rabbits from developing hygiene related diseases. He also collects the dung and urin separately in containers to avoid the bad smell. He employs someone to help him with the routine cleaning and feeding whom he pays a pocket change Shs50,000 a month. He however warns that, "You should never keep rabbits and chicken together because there are diseases that cat the rabbits from chickens. Also make sure you keep one male in each cage. More than one male will cause fighting for females and territory."