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RABBITS GROW FASTER WHEN FED WHOLE GRAIN AND PROTEIN PELLETS

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Domestic rabbits being raised for meat make excellent gains on whole grains fed in self-feeders, says the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The self-feeders should have separate compartments for different grains as rabbits scratch and waste feed when the grains are mixed.

Several hundred rabbits averaging 4.02 pounds at 56 days of age, weaning time, were raised on whole grain and protein supplements in self-feeders and on alfalfa hay by the Biological Survey at the U. S. Rabbit Experiment Station, Fontana, Calif. Most rabbit growers feed more alfalfa hay than grain, but at the station where the rabbits had a choice of feeds they ate more than twice as much concentrates as alfalfa hay. To produce a gain of 1 pound live weight, 2½ pounds of concentrates, a large part of which was protein supplements, and 1.04 pounds of alfalfa hay were required.

"This heavier consumption of concentrates," says the Biological Survey, "not only results in more rapid gain but also in a better quality of meat. The dressing percentage of the self-fed rabbits averaged 50 to 57 percent of the live weight as compared with the average of 50 percent for rabbits raised today in commercial rabbitries."

Before the self-feeding experiments were undertaken tests were made with different grains and with several protein supplements in meal form to learn which

rabbits prefer. They ate more oats than any other grain. Wheat and milo were eaten in about equal quantities. Barley was less acceptable. Cracked corn was practically ignored. Peanut and soybean meals were the most palatable protein supplements, but because rabbits dislike finely ground feed they did not eat enough meal for maximum early development. But they did eat these protein supplements as pellets in large quantities and produced satisfactory gains. As the rabbits developed they ate less of the protein and more grain.

A self-feeder with compartments for grains and protein supplements developed at the Fontana station prevents waste and contamination of feed, saves labor, and when filled twice a week furnished a doe and her litter with the concentrates they need.

Instructions for building this feeder are explained in Leaflet BS-85, "Self-Feeding System for Market Rabbits." This leaflet was prepared by George S. Templeton, director of the rabbit experiment station, and copies may be obtained by writing to the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., or to the station at Fontana, Calif.

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