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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Demand for food brought about by the war, and shortages of beef, pork, mutton, and poultry for civilian consumption has resulted in an increase in the production of domestic rabbits of from 200 to 300 percent, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior reported today.

The tender, white-meated flesh of the domestic rabbit has grown so in popularity, according to the Service, that in southern California 13 million pounds were produced in 1944. The production in this section of California was greater than the entire pre-war United States production of domestic rabbit meat. In another important rabbit producing area, the vicinity of Denver, Colorado, one and one-half million pounds were produced last year.

Because the present demand for domestic rabbit meat in certain areas cannot be supplied, the Service is urging the increasing production of rabbit meat, both by backyard and commercial breeders, as a successful solution of the existing meat shortage.

Rabbit meat is quickly produced--only 90 days are required from the time the doe is mated until the young rabbits are ready for the table. Since the civilian shortage of red meat will be noticed mostly between the present time and late summer, rabbits now ready for breeding will produce summer meat.

The householder with a small backyard can keep 3 or 4 does and a buck of the medium-weight or heavier breeds and have all the rabbit meat that an average family will use. Any surplus can be sold to neighbors. Rabbit hutches can be constructed of scrap lumber, used poultry wire, crates, and similar inexpensive material. Clean table scraps, garden waste, lawn clippings, and palatable weeds can supplement their regular rations.

Commercial rabbitries can be made to pay double dividends in meat and fur because rabbit skin prices continue to hold up exceptionally well. Butcher-run white fryer skins are selling on the Pacific coast for about $1.90 to $1.95 a pound. The money thus obtained goes a long way towards paying the feed cost of production.

Most of the rabbit meat and wool now produced in the United States comes from the part-time operations of persons with small herds. Larger units run from 25 to 75, and in a few cases to 100 does. The rabbitry of 250 to 300

breeding does or 600 woolers, requiring the full time of the owner, is the exception. The white New Zealand rabbit appears to be the most popular breed in Southern California for commercial purposes.

Although southern California has long been known as the heart of the domestic rabbit industry because of equable climatic conditions, the large increase in the number of rabbit clubs all over the United States indicates a healthy growth of the industry in the 48 states. Post-war possibilities are excellent with hotels, hospitals, chain stores, and railway dining cars constituting a potential market.

The U. S. Rabbit Experiment Station at Fontana, Calif., maintained and operated by the Service, was established in 1927 to aid beginners and oldtimers alike. Upwards of 4,000 rabbits are utilized annually at the station in the conduct of carefully planned experiments in the feeding and breeding of rabbits which have a wide application to the entire country.

Current experiments are being carried on to determine the feasibility of using whole grains in rabbit feeding; the relative value of various protein supplements; the adaptability of selective self-feeders; the possible nutritional causes of so-called "bloat" which is responsible for losses to rabbit producers; the development of a superior strain of breeding rabbits; and various factors conducive to production of better skins adaptable to use by furriers. The experiments are progressive and so outlined as to render the most service in solving current problems of rabbit producers.

Some of the purposes for which research on rabbit is conducted are: to develop improved methods of breeding, feeding, housing, and management, and judging rabbits to aid those engaged in the business to produce meat and fur of fine quality at a profit; to produce rabbit meat so economically that it can be sold at a price that will be well within the means of the consumer; to improve the quality of fur so that it will be in demand by the fur trade. Several leaflets have been published giving the results to date of a number of experiments.

Pamphlets on rabbit raising, either backyard or commercial, are available without charge upon request to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Information Office, Chicago 54, Ill.

11127