

What's the best way to get the fastest growth for my rabbits?

Why should I care?

By Carla Carter

As a commercial producer or even a backyard producer who wants to be the most efficient with their money, time and effort this is a question that we all should be asking and paying attention to the answer.

For a commercial producer time is money. The difference between 8 or 9 weeks may not seem like much, but every week you are feeding those rabbits costs you money and when you figure you are feeding 10, 20 or 30 rabbits 1, 2 or 4 weeks more it adds up. How much does it cost you extra? Well, it depends on the cost of your feed, but it can easily add up to several dollars extra PER RABBIT if you aren't watching the bottom line.

I figure on average that for me, it costs around \$5.60 per rabbit to raise them to 5 pounds. My rabbits get to that weight around 8 weeks. My feed costs is around .28 cents a pound. It costs approximately 4 pounds of feed to every pound of weight you put on your rabbit. That includes the cost of your does and buck in your herd (i.e. overhead) included to cover all. That is approximately .63 a week per rabbit. If you have 40 rabbits that you are feeding out and it takes your stock 12 weeks instead of 8 weeks that adds to the cost of your feeding expense. Yet you still get the same amount of money for those rabbits, right? Guess who pays that extra money? **YOU DO!** It comes right out of the small amount of profit that you make!

Let's say you are getting \$1.59 a pound for those 5 pound rabbits (average processor payment) or \$7.95, let's say \$8 each to make it easy.

- \$8 X 40 rabbits is \$320 total earnings
- Cost of raising them at 8 weeks $8 \times .63 \times 40 = \201.60 - Profit \$119
- Cost of raising them at 12 weeks $12 \times .63 \times 40 = \302.40 Profit \$18

Bottom line is you didn't make any money on the 12 week rabbits because they ate up all your profit! That's a lot of work for \$18, don't you think?

Do I have your attention now?

But I fed them only hay, grass or fodder. . . .But, here's the thing, your cage space is like retail space. You need to be turning cages too. You are LOSING money when you aren't turning those rabbits over. As a commercial producer, you have taken up 50% LONGER than you should have in order to turn those rabbits. Maybe it didn't cost you

in pellet cost, but your time and labor cost of feeding them, watering them, cleaning up after them . . . that all comes into play in the bottom line. You could have been feeding the next group and making more money. You should have been half way into your next group of rabbits by the time your first set got finished.

NOT to mention the fact that you will not have as healthy of rabbits and they will be more prone to infection, bacteria, virus, pasturella, etc.

PLUS, feeding hay and grass you are also exposing your rabbits to parasites and diseases as well as mold, mycotoxins, dust, mites and a variety of other issues and problems. Maybe it's time to rethink those issues especially as a commercial producer.

Ready to fix the problem?

The BEST way is to feed a pellet only diet consisting of a high protein, high fiber and low fat pellet. 18% protein and 18% fiber (higher is fine as well).

By low fat I'd like to keep it around 2% or lower. If you have to cheat anywhere I'd do it on the protein, NOT the fiber. You can go as low as 16% on the fiber IF YOU HAVE TO, but look hard to find good feed.

Don't go to ONE STORE and give up. Talk to the store managers. Go to the Purina Store Locator and find one near you and talk to that manager and ASK him about getting Country Acres in for you. Tractor Supply carries Purina but they are just a retailer not a dealer. They are NOT able to order it in.

READ the labels on all of the feeds that you are considering. Make sure that you know what ever item on that list is, even the strange things that you can't pronounce, look them up. Make sure there are NO cheese by-products or animal by-products in your feed. Rabbits don't need this. Also beware of sugar or molasses as an additive. This is also something that rabbits do NOT need in their feed.

What if I'm feeding good feed, pellets only and still not making weights?

At that point it's time to look at your stock. Industry standards for commercial rabbits is 5 pounds by 8 weeks. If you are feeding a quality feed that is 18% protein and 18% fiber and you are NOT getting that standard, it's time for you to look at your stock. You may need to make changes in your stock in order to reach those benchmarks. We have another entire section on choosing your stock, selecting a breeder and questions to ask to make sure that you are making wise choices.

The bottom line to remember is you get what you pay for. Quality stock is worth what you pay for it because it will definitely save you money in the long run. Look at the numbers we talked about in the beginning of this article. That should be enough to convince you right there that good stock can make or break a commercial operation.