

## Profitability in Commercial Rabbit Production

by Carla Carter, Owner of [Rabbits4U](#)

In commercial rabbit production, the difference between profitable and unprofitable is the ability of your fryer rabbits to reach 5 pounds in weight within 8 weeks from birth.

This is because every day past 8 weeks costs more money out of your pocket in the form of **additional expensive rabbit feed and cage space that is not available for youngsters or for a newly bred doe.**

**Here are 5 factors** that when managed correctly, will result in 5 pound fryers in 8 weeks, enhancing commercial rabbit production profitability.

### 1) Feed:

**I feed an 18% protein, 18% fiber (minimum) and a low fat feed, actually 1.5 – 2% fat.**

On 18% protein your doe will have the nutrients to conceive and kindle several more kits per litter and raise them to weaning age. 18% fiber is an essential minimum for keeping the rabbit's digestive tract and its intestinal flora balanced and healthy.

The 1.5 – 2% fat level assists in preventing excessive build-up of fats in the rabbit's body, while providing enough of the essential fats for body functions and for lactation.

### 2) Stock:

**Excellent stock will raise excellent, quick-growing offspring**, while garbage stock will result in undersized or spotty results. Therefore obtain your foundation stock from a rabbitry with a **proven commercial** track record. No sense in having to reinvent the wheel. Verify – ask to see records.

To evaluate your present stock, weigh your does and bucks. If your adult animals weigh only 8 pounds, you are probably wasting your time with these animals. They are small stock and will have small offspring. You need a **minimum** of a 10-pound doe and a 9-10-pound buck.

Weight alone is not the only criteria, as in many instances, larger is not always better. Giant breeds require heavy bones to support their giant frames. Heavy bones mean less meat and a reduced meat-to-bone ratio, meaning, more waste.

Stick with the tried and trusty meat breeds, the Californians and/or New Zealands, especially as you get started, and you'll optimize your chances for good profitability. For Cals and New

Zealands, your stock should weigh between 10 pounds for Cals, to 10-12 pounds for New Zealand.

### 3) Rabbit Husbandry:

**Provide pellets and water accessible to the kits just as soon as they leave the nest box.** I put feed and water down in feeders low on the cage in small low bowls as soon as the kits leave the nest box. I don't wait until they are big enough to get to the j-feeders even if the feeders are low. The sooner you have them on pellets, the faster they will grow.

As the young kits grow, they like to all eat at the same time. You will see them all rally around the feed bowls when given the opportunity. It is basically the herd mentally. Providing long feeders with enough room for "everybody at the trough" ensures that all will eat and grow at the same pace.

I like to use the 11 inch feeders in my 30X36 inch cages for this reason. In addition I often have a bowl or crock in the cage separate as well. As they grow they need more room and access to more space for feeding. So, provide ample feed and eating space all the time. Yes, they will eat a lot of feed, but it turns into faster weight gain and faster money turn around, very important in commercial rabbit production.

**The same is true for the watering systems.** One water bottle on a cage for 4 or 5 young fryers simply isn't enough to provide "full watering." I like to have multiple nipples available or open water bowls in the cage for them. Clean fresh water every day makes a world of difference. They won't eat if there isn't any water.

### 4) Weaning:

**Wean the kits at 28 days.** The faster they are weaned, the faster they will grow. Breeding the doe back at two weeks helps this process. By the 4 week time slot typically she has them weaned herself because her milk is drying up preparing her for her next litter. I find it easiest to remove the doe and leave the kits in the original cage. Another reason I would prefer that ALL my cages be 30X36 so I don't have to worry about moving animals around to make sure they are in the size of cage they need to be.

### 5) Cage Space:

Keep the fryers in cages that offer plenty of moving room. For example, 4-6 weanlings to a 30x36 cage gives ample room. Ensure FULL ACCESS to water 24/7 and feeders ALWAYS full. Full means all the way to the top with the feed pushed down through and filling the inside of the feeder all the way up as well. Don't always count on the feeders to self-fill as they should. Sometimes they get blocked up or even wet for some reason.

## **Don't forget that in commercial rabbit production, cage space is like retail space**

Wal-Mart makes no money if products don't fly off their shelves. And you will LOSE money if you aren't moving rabbits out and moving more rabbits into your cages. You need to be marketing your rabbits at 8 weeks and refilling those nice big cages.

If your stock is commercial grade, your feed is good and your husbandry practices are on the mark as per these basics, you should have no problems producing 5-pound rabbits in 8 weeks.

*(The article titled "Feeding Commercial Rabbits for Fast Growth" contains factors you can brainstorm if your rabbits are not gaining weight as expected.)*