

## Constraints Against Widespread of Rabbit Keeping among Households in Osun and Oyo States: Implication for Family Economic Empowerment

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**Abstract:** The study identified sources of rabbits as well as sources of credits available to the respondents, examined the tastes and preferences for rabbit meat and investigated why rabbit keeping had not been common among households in the study area. The study was carried out in randomly selected twenty one communities in Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria. Interview schedule was used to interview purposely selected one hundred and two rabbit keepers in the states using Snowball approach. Data collected were described using mean and percentages. Rabbit stocks were available to the households through different agricultural stations across the states. Majority (68%) used personal savings as source of finance. Among others, farmers' ignorance about rabbit keeping (75.5%) and inability of the Ministry of Agriculture to pay particular attention to rabbit keeping (69.6%) were major impediments against rabbit keeping in the study area. The extension department of the Ministry of Agriculture should embark on mass campaign on the importance of rabbit keeping to households so as to encourage more people to keep rabbits.

**Key words:** Rabbit keeping, constraints, households, economic empowerment

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### INTRODUCTION

Resources of the family are many and varied. Of the family's material resources food is about the most important. Food resources can either be obtained from plant or animal sources. Like chicken, rabbits are raised world-wide for a variety of reasons. Across the globe, rabbits are an important source of food. Rabbits produce white meat that is fine-grained, high in protein, low in fat, highly palatable, low in cholesterol, and can be substituted for poultry in most recipes<sup>[8]</sup>. Rabbits are also raised for non-food purposes. High quality rabbit skins are used in fur garments and trimmings. Medical and cosmetic research also requires a large number of rabbits each year. Rabbit farming is intended to be a supplemental income source, not a primary income source. Rabbit keeping helps farmers make use of some underutilized resources like labour or buildings. Sell<sup>[8]</sup> opined that a well managed and marketed rabbitry can generate positive returns to the owner's equity and labour. Martin and Fremont<sup>[6]</sup> submitted that to be economically feasible a rabbit project cannot depend on expensive purchased rations. They were of the opinion that rabbits must be raised by village farmers in areas where climate and other conditions permit the farmer to cut free or nearly free, green roughage in large quantities. The beauty

in this situation is that it converts cheap roughage unfit for human consumption into meat of very high quality. Agricultural Alternatives<sup>[1]</sup> stressed that rabbit farming has grown from raising a few rabbits for family consumption to large commercial operations with hundreds of rabbits. It further stated that approximately 200,000 producers market 6 to 8 million rabbits annually in United States, where 8 to 10 million pounds of rabbit meat are consumed each year. In recent years there has been increased awareness of the advantages of rabbit meat production in developing countries as a means to alleviate world food shortages. This is largely attributable to the rabbit's high rate of reproduction; early maturity; rapid growth rate; high genetic selection potential; efficient feed and land space utilization; limited competition with humans for similar foods; and high-quality nutritious meat<sup>[2]</sup>. According to FAO<sup>[3]</sup>, by the year 2000 the meat requirements of one-third of the human population will be satisfied by the supply of pork, poultry and rabbit meat. The world's domestic rabbit population, estimated to be 709 million<sup>[5]</sup>, is comparable to 764 million swine<sup>[3]</sup>. Some 82 percent of the world's production of rabbit meat takes place in the developed nations<sup>[4]</sup>, meaning that approximately only 18 percent of total rabbit meat production occurs in developing countries. Owen<sup>[7]</sup> emphasized that, in developing countries where critical

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national meat shortages exist, the potential for rabbit production is greatest. A discrepancy is therefore apparent between world distribution of rabbits and those countries needing inexpensively produced rabbit meat. This study therefore, was designed to investigate why rabbit keeping has not been common in Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria.

**Objective of the study:** The main objective was to identify constraints militating against widespread of rabbit keeping among farmers in Oyo and Osun States.

The specific objectives were to identify sources of rabbits and finance available to households in the study area; examine tastes and preferences for rabbit meat among rabbit keepers; and investigate why rabbit keeping has not been common among households in the study area.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria. Twenty one communities were randomly selected in the States. Snowball approach was used to identify and elicit information from one hundred and two purposely selected rabbit keepers using interview schedule. Data collected were described using mean and percentages.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Demographic Characteristics:** Data in Table 1 indicated that most (94.1%) rabbit keepers were male with a mean age of 36 years. Majority (55%) were Christians and 19.6 percent each attained secondary and tertiary level of education. Majority (69.6%) earned less than N5000 monthly through rabbit keeping. Majority (67.7%) participated in less than 2 organizations. The monthly average income of rabbit keepers is an indication that with large scale production of rabbits more income would be accrued to farmers' households and thus improved standard of living

**Sources of Rabbits:** Data in Table 2 show the distribution of rabbit keepers by sources of rabbits. It is evident from Table 2 that Ibiade farm settlement, School of Agriculture and Animal Health, Ibadan, and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile -Ife were indicated as sources of rabbit by 7.8%, 48.0% and 42.1% of rabbit keepers, respectively. About 38.0% and 5.0% of rabbit keepers indicated Ilesa farm institute and Odeda farm institute respectively, as sources of rabbit, 16.7% and 17.6% of rabbit keepers stated that rabbits were bought from Ikorodu farm institute and Fashola stock farm, respectively. Also, 34.3% of the rabbit keepers indicated friends and neighbours, as source of rabbits. It is obvious from the findings that rabbits were available to rabbit keepers through various agricultural stations within their reach.

**Table 1:** Distribution of rabbit keepers according to their age, sex and level of education.

Characteristics	N	%	Mean
<b>Age (yrs.)</b>			
Up to 25	14	13.7	
26-50	58	56.9	36
51-75	30	29.4	
	102	100	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	99	97.1	
Female	3	2.9	
	102	100	
<b>Level of education</b>			
No Formal Education	56	54.9	
Primary School	6	5.9	
Secondary School	20	19.6	
Tertiary Institution	20	19.6	
	102	100	
<b>Level of income (₦)</b>			
Up to 5000	71	69.6	
5001-10000	5	4.9	16442.6
10001 and above	26	25.5	
	102	100	
<b>Participation in organization</b>			
Less than 2	69	67.7	
2-4	31	30.4	2.66
5-7	2	1.9	
	102	100	

**Table 2:** Distribution of rabbit keepers by source of rabbits.

Agricultural Stations	N	%
1. Ibiade farm settlement	8	7.8
2. School of Agriculture and Animal Health, Moor Plantation, Ibadan	49	48
3. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife.	44	43.1
4. Ilesa farm institute	39	38.2
5. Odeda farm institute	5	4.9
6. Ikorodu farm institute	17	16.7
7. Fashola stock farm	18	17.6
8. Friends and neighbours	35	34.3

**Table 3:** Distribution of rabbit keepers by size of rabbitry.

Size of rabbitry	N	%
1-20	50	49
21-40	36	35.3
41-60	6	5.9
61-80	6	5.9
81 and above	4	3.9

**Size of Rabbitry:** Data in Table3 show that most of the rabbit keepers (94%) had small rabbit holdings. Almost four percent of the rabbit keepers had above 80 rabbits, 5.9% had between 41-60 rabbits and 35.3% rabbit keepers had between 21-40 rabbits. Also, about six percent of the rabbit keepers had between 61-80 rabbits while 49% of them had between 1-20 rabbits. The small holdings of rabbits might be due to lack of fund and lack of access to credit. However, this finding is in line with the recommendation of Agricultural Alternatives<sup>[1]</sup> that rabbit production can be started with a herd of around 20 does serviced by two bucks.

**Sources of Finance:** Data in Table 4 show that majority (66.7%) of the rabbit keepers relied on their personal

**Table 4:** Distribution of rabbit keepers by sources of finance.

*Sources of finance	N	%
Personal savings	68	66.7
Agricultural Credit Corporation	5	4.9
Farmers' Cooperative societies	47	46.1
Money lender	6	5.9
Mutual aid contribution	32	31.4
Friends	18	17.6
Family	13	12.7
Farm produce buyers	44	36.6
Commercial banks	-	-

\* Multiple responses were given by respondents.

**Table 5:** Distribution of rabbit keepers by subsidized agricultural services enjoyed.

*Agricultural Services	N	%
Subsidized fertilizer	56	54.9
Improved breeds of rabbit	6	5.9
Tractor hiring services	18	17.6
Subsidized drugs	2	1.9
Subsidized seeds	61	59.8
Subsidized feeds	1	0.9
Subsidized land clearing	6	5.9
Improved livestock	17	16.7
Point of lay poultry	6	5.9

\*Multiple responses were given by rabbit keepers.

**Table 6:** Distribution of rabbit keepers according to why rabbit keeping has not been common.

*Reasons	N	%
The Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources has not paid Particular attention to rabbit keeping	71	69.6
Rabbit keeping is an expensive business	13	12.8
Rabbits are small stocks	30	29.4
Farmers are generally ignorant of how to keep rabbits	77	75.5
Rabbit meat is not popular food item in the area	37	36.3
There is no ready market for rabbits	12	11.8
Rabbits are difficult to rear	6	5.9
Rabbits rearing is time consuming	4	3.9
Rabbit keeping is labour intensive	4	3.9

\*Multiple responses

savings as a source of financing their enterprises, 46.1 percent got loan from farmers' cooperative societies, and some (36.6%) obtained loan from farm produce buyers. While 17.6% used friends as source of their credit, only 31.4 and 12.7 percents of rabbit keepers took credit from mutual aid contribution and family sources respectively, and 4.9% rabbit keepers made use of Agricultural Credit Corporation as their source of credit. These findings indicate that majority of the rabbit keepers still depend much on their personal savings and borrowing from informal lending institutions. This might be due to the formalities involved in getting loans from formal lending institutions.

**Subsidized Agricultural Services Enjoyed:** Majority of (54.9%) and 59.8% of the rabbit keepers benefited from subsidized fertilizer and subsidized seeds respectively. About 18% rabbit keepers enjoyed tractor hiring services, subsidized drugs was enjoyed by 1.9% rabbit keepers, and 5.9% rabbit keepers enjoyed improved breeds of rabbit. Only 0.9% rabbit keepers benefited from subsidized

**Table 7:** Distribution of rabbit keepers by tastes and preferences for rabbit meat to other types of meat.

Characteristics	N	%
<b>Ever eaten rabbit</b>		
Yes	98	96.1
No	4	3.9
	102	100
<b>Tastes of rabbit meat</b>		
Very delicious	67	68.4
Delicious	35	31.6
Not delicious	-	-
	102	100
<b>*Preference for rabbit meat to</b>		
Beef	28	27.5
Chicken	9	8.8
Goat meat	19	18.6
Mutton (sheep meat)	38	37.3
Fish	39	38.2
Pork	40	39.2

\* Multiple responses were given by rabbit keepers.

feeds, 16.7% benefited improved livestock while 5.9% and 5.9% rabbit keepers benefited from subsidized land clearing and point of lay poultry respectively (Table 5). The findings showed that varieties of subsidized agricultural services were enjoyed by the respondents.

**Religions:** It could be observed that religion of all rabbit keepers interviewed (100%) did not forbid rabbit keeping. Also, the Table shows that the religion of all rabbit keepers (100%) in the study are did not forbid rabbit meat consumption. The findings imply that people of different religious denominations in the study area, engaged in rabbit production as well as consumption of its meat.

**Why Rabbit Keeping Had Not Been Common:**

Majority of the rabbit keepers (69.6%) gave the reason to be that Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources had not paid particular attention to rabbit keeping. Also, 36.3 percent were of the opinion that rabbit meat was not a popular food item in their area; while 75.5% and 29.4% argued that the reasons were that farmers were generally ignorant of how to keep rabbits and that rabbits are small stocks, respectively. But 12.8% of rabbit keepers indicated the reason that rabbit keeping was an expensive business. Other reasons such as rabbits are difficult to rear; there were no ready markets for rabbits, and that rabbit rearing was time consuming were given by 5.9%, 11.8% and 3.9% of rabbit keepers, respectively. Also 3.9% of rabbit keepers believed that rabbit keeping was not common because rabbit keeping was labour intensive (Table 6). The findings imply that extension agents have not been emphasizing importance of rabbits keeping among farmers in the study area.

**Tastes and Preferences for Rabbit Meat:** Data in Table 7 show the distribution of rabbit keepers by tastes and preferences for rabbit meat to other types of meat. Most (96.1%) of the rabbit keepers had ever eaten rabbit meat

but 3.9% of them had never eaten rabbit meat. Almost sixty eight and thirty two percents of rabbit keepers described the tastes of rabbit meat as very delicious and delicious, respectively. It could be inferred that majority of rabbit keepers who had eaten rabbit meat described the taste as very delicious. Further, few (27.5%) of rabbit keepers preferred rabbit meat to beef; 8.8% preferred it to chicken, and 18.6% of rabbit keepers preferred rabbit meat to goat meat. Also, about thirty seven percent preferred it to mutton, 38.2% preferred it to fish and 39.2% of them preferred it to pork. This finding is not surprising, because, rabbit meat has been found nutritious, low in fat and fine grained, and it provides a suitable alternative to poultry meat. This implies that with increase in rabbit production, its meat can be substituted for other sources of animal protein hence improved food security for farmers households.

**Conclusion and Recommendation:** Rabbit stocks were available to the households through different agricultural stations across the states. Among others, farmers' ignorance about rabbit keeping and inability of the Ministry of Agriculture to pay particular attention to rabbit keeping were major impediments against rabbit keeping in the study area. Trainings should be organized by the extension agents to teach farmers and members of households generally about rabbit keeping practices. The extension department of the Ministry of Agriculture should embark on mass campaign on the importance of rabbit keeping to households so as to encourage more

people to keep rabbits. As incentive for the farmers, parent stocks should be made available free of cost. With this effort, steady income and animal protein will be available to households.

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