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Overview of Rabbit Production as an Option for Fighting Malnutrition in Nigeria

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Abstract

Malnutrition as the biggest problem currently threatening public health and wellbeing in different countries across the world; it directly affecting one-third of people in the world and occur in many forms as inadequate intake of food, lack of the right type of food for consumption and extreme lack of foods. Malnutrition promotes the occurrence of diseases and it represents economic burden. In developing countries like Nigeria, malnutrition expresses itself through children stunting growth, children wasting and deficiency in vital nutrients for normal bodily functions. The situation (malnutrition) requires a diverse solution for the promotion of healthy living across the world. From animal production perspective, addressing poor animal protein intake by increasing the supply of meat for human consumption is highly desirable especially in developing countries such as Nigeria where inadequate intake of animal protein is a problem. Apart from increasing meat supply for human consumption, efforts towards increased animal production will also be contributing to the eradication of hunger mission of United Nations (UN) by the year 2030. This paper project rabbit production as cheap alternative because rabbit production is one of the best most suitable livestock production unit that can increase supply of meat due to its short gestation interval, high yield per production period, superior meat quality and little capital requirement to start rabbit production enterprise compare with other animal production enterprises especially by the poor rural dwellers.

Keywords: Malnutrition, rabbit production, animal production

Introduction

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of United Nations as at the year 2001 estimated that daily animal protein intake in developing countries including Nigeria was 4.5 g/head/day which was very low compared with the minimum global requirement of 35 g/head/day. Even after more than a decade into the millennium, *per capita* intake of animal protein was still 10 g/head/day in Nigeria which is less than average for middle-income developing countries (16 g/head/day) not to even mention the global recommended average. This is an indication of malnutrition especially animal protein intake in Nigeria (FAO, 2015).

World Food Programme (WFP) also reported that one third of children less than five (5) years old in Nigeria are stunted due to poor nutrition and this is twice the rate of such incidence in Thailand and three times that of Tunisia which is also developing countries like Nigeria – hence case of severe malnutrition is glaring in the country. Children in many remote communities across Nigeria are four times more likely to experience malnutrition than children in less remote communities. According to reports of IFPRI (2016), another indicator to malnutrition in Nigeria is case of women of reproductive age which are about 48.5% anaemic a situation ranking Nigeria 172nd best out of 185 countries in the world.

The situations above are problems which require solutions through production of animals that can address poor animal protein intake by increasing the supply of meat for human consumption in Nigeria. Apart from increasing meat supply for human consumption, efforts towards increase animal production will also be contributing to eradication of hunger mission of United Nations (UN) as the organization stated that to end hunger by the year 2030, there is a need for comprehensive efforts to ensure that every man, woman and child enjoy their right to adequate food; women are empowered; priority is given to family farming; and food systems everywhere are sustainable and resilient.

Rabbit Production in Nigeria: Trends and Future Projections

Rabbit production can be regarded as one of the least developed livestock production practices in Nigeria. Problems responsible for this include poor reproductive performances, climatic factors occasioned by high temperature which characterized most part of the country, diseases and poor markets. Feeds and feeding is another problem facing rabbit production development in Nigeria. Full advantages of rabbit nutrition have not been taken in Nigeria and this currently limit interest in rabbit production (Okpanachi *et al.*, 2010).

In addition to nutrition, another challenge to rabbit production is poor documentation of rabbit meat consumption records. Records of rabbit meat per capita consumption in Nigeria is very hard to come by considering the situation of the rabbit industry which is grossly unorganized and small scale in nature. However, despite all these challenges, rabbit production still remains a livestock unit in Nigeria that can contribute meaningful to Nigeria's agricultural development because of its low capital

outlay to produce which makes it highly suitable and economical for production by both poor and rich farmers. Rabbit production can contribute to quality meat supply across all social classes. Wool from rabbit production can also be processed into sewing threads for clothing and the garment industries while it can also be used as cotton for textiles.

International trade opportunities also exist for rabbits produce in Nigeria in form of export and foreign exchange earnings as well as the promotion of bilateral socio-economic relationship. This is what is in operation in China which is one of the countries where rabbit production is very popular and well organized and in addition, it has large consumers of rabbit meat while huge quantity of rabbit hides and skin also goes to its manufacturing industries. In China as of 2008, more than 660,000 metric tons of rabbit meat was produced, out of these, only very few were exported while finished products such as rugs, cotton and thread are being produced from rabbit raw materials for export into international markets for sales (Lebas, 2009; Li, 2010).

5. Conclusion

Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa currently faces challenges of food production and food supply as the country population grows; there is no commensurable supply of foods of both plant and animal origins capable of catering for the population increase and this result into malnutrition. Shortage of animal protein is one of the most serious case of malnutrition in the country. Therefore, production of animals such as rabbit capable of providing meat within short interval becomes highly important and necessary.

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