SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF RABBIT FARMERS IN THRISSUR DISTRICT OF KERALA*

Rabbit is an important livestock species that has immense potential to improve the socio-economic status of the rural poor and to contribute substantially to the country's Gross Domestic Product as well. Broiler rabbits are reared for meat and fur and Angora rabbits for wool production. There are 3,00,000 breedable female rabbits in India (Gulyani *et al.*,2000). Eventhough Kerala has the highest number (148233) of rabbits (Risam *et al.*, 2005), the details of the socio-economic status of rabbit farmers have not been documented in the recent past. Since information in this regard is scarce and scanty, this survey was conducted to assess the socio-economic status of rabbit farmers in Thrissur district of Kerala.

Thirty rabbit farmers were identified from different parts of Thrissur district by employing purposive sampling method and utilized for documentation. The information regarding socio-economic status like family status and employment, rationale for rabbit farming, details of breed, source, herd strength and litter traits were collected from the owners by personal interview and by using a well-designed questionnaire.

The socio economic status of rabbit farmers of Thrissur district (Table 1) revealed that people living in a nuclear family system readily adopted rabbit farming as compared to those living in a joint family system. This could be attributed to the availability of more leisure time and the willingness and financial capability to spend on pets, which is an increasing trend in nuclear families. Persons employed in public sector and those involved in business, practiced rabbit rearing at 26.67 per cent each. Agriculturists closely followed this at 20 per cent. This trend could be due to higher income received in public sector and business activities and rabbit rearing might provide additional income to agriculturists. These results are in close agreement with the findings of Prathap and Ponnusamy (2006). They reported that people belonging to middle and high income groups possessed favourable attitude towards rabbit rearing.

Rationale for rearing of rabbits (Table 2) revealed that 53.33 per cent of the respondents kept rabbits for additional income and as pets but none were rearing for meat purpose alone. This finding is in contrast with Lopez *et al.* (1999) who stated that rabbits were reared mostly for household consumption in Mexico. The high price of rabbit meat

Table I. Socio economic status of rabbit farmers

Family status	Nuclear family	86.67
	Joint family	13.33
Employment status	Public sector	26.67
	Private sector	16.67
	Business	26.67
	Agriculture	20.00
	Others	10.00

Values in percentage

could be a hindrance to raising rabbits for meat purpose alone, which is supported by Hoffmann *et al.* (1992). About 50 per cent of the farmers are new to this field with an experience of one to six months and only 23.33 per cent of the farmers have been involved in rabbit farming activities for over three years. The primary responsibility of rabbit rearing in 43.33 per cent of the households falls on wife and children indicating the keeping of rabbits as pets and also the easiness of rabbit rearing. This is in close agreement with Lopez *et al.* (1999). Involvement of children alone in rearing rabbits accounts for 30 per cent of the households.

New Zealand White (NZW) was the most popular breed (50%) followed by a combination of Grey Giant (GG) and Soviet Chinchilla (23.33%), NZW and GG (16.67%) and the least was NZW and Soviet Chinchilla (3.33%). Crossbred rabbits also existed in the field (6.67%), This was similar to the findings of Lopez *et al.* (1999). Rabbits were obtained mainly from local farmers (63.33%). Herd size of 1 to 10 (43.33%) and 11 to 20 (40%) were comparable and was found to be the preferred strength for small-scale rabbit farming. This is in accordance with the reports of Gulyani *et al.* (2000). They suggested that small-scale backyard rabbit rearing could be a useful enterprise to improve the health and socio economic conditions of the tribals and the rural and urban poor. Only 16.67% of farmers maintained a herd size of more than 20 animals (Table 3).

Table 2. Rationale for rabbit farming

Reasons for rabbit rearing	Additional income alone	13.33
	Meat purpose alone	0.00
	As pet animal	10.00
	For self employment	6.67
	Additional income + meat	13.33
	Additional income + pet	53.33
	Additional income + employment	3.33
Experience in rabbit rearing	1 - 6 months	50.00
	7- 12 months	3.33
	1-3 years	23.33
	Above 3 years	23.33
Responsibility of rearing	Husband	3.33
	Wife	23.33
	Children	30.00
	Wife and Children	43.33

Values in percentage

Among the rabbit farming systems documented, the litter size at birth and at weaning ranged from six to ten (65.38 and 61.54% respectively) which showed that the litter trait performance are optimum (Table 4). This could be due to availability of better breeding stock and efficient management practices. This is in tune with the findings of Kumar *et al.* (2001).They reported that better performance could be achieved by avoiding unnecessary stress to the rabbits.

Summary

From the survey it was revealed that majority of the people who took up rabbit farming lived in a nuclear family system and were employed either in public sector or were involved in business activities. The reason for engaging in rabbit rearing was for additional income generated and the pleasure of keeping rabbits as pets. Most of the farmers are relatively new to this field with only one to

Table 3. Details of breed, source and strength of herd

Rabbit breed	New Zealand White (NZW)	50.00
	NZW + Grey giant (GG)	16.67
	NZW + Soviet Chinchilla (SC)	3.33
	GG + SC	23.33
	Cross bred rabbits	6.67
Source	KAU rabbit farm	13.33
	Distribution by Panchayat	23.33
	Local rabbit farmers	63.33
Herdstrength	1-10	43.33
	11-20	40.00
	Above 20	16.67

Values in percentage

six months experience and the responsibility of rearing rested with both wife and children. New Zealand White was the preferred breed and the rabbits were mostly obtained from local rabbit farmers. Most farmers maintained herd strength of less than 20. The litter size before and after weaning ranged from six to ten.

Table 4. Litter traits

Litter size at birth (no.)	1-5	19.23
	6-10	65.38
	Above 10	15.38
Litter size at weaning (no.)	1-5	38.46
	6-10	61.54

Values in percentage

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