

3 Summary of meeting findings

Park rabbits and retail

- A number of supermarkets in Belgium have publicly committed to selling meat derived exclusively from park rabbits. However, some of these supermarkets do sell non-park rabbits in promotional campaigns in order to be able to offer them at a lower price. These caged rabbits are imported.
A survey amongst retailers reveals that there is no shortage of park rabbits that could justify the import of caged rabbits.
- Supermarkets that stated they sell meat exclusively from park rabbits were encouraged to enforce their purchasing policy. Retailers that stated they still sell rabbits from traditional cages were encouraged to sell meat from rabbits exclusively derived from enriched parks in the future.

Does in group housing

- To date, no suitable system exists for the continuous housing of does in groups. It poses a high risk of aggression between does, as well as a high incidence of phantom pregnancy and disruption to litters. Thus, it does not appear feasible, either from an economic or an animal welfare perspective.
- However, several studies indicate that semi-group housing is feasible. In semi-group housing does are housed individually during the birth, as well as the first days and weeks following the birth of their litter. Once their young are old enough they can be kept in groups with other does and their young. It was found that the older the young, the less protective the does are of their litter and the less aggression they display towards one another.
- When determining the most opportune moment for returning the rabbits to group housing, a balance must be made between the disadvantages for the does (e.g. fighting, phantom pregnancy) and the benefits in terms of social behaviour. Scientific research into the optimisation of group housing for does is recommended.

Situation in Switzerland

- Switzerland has accrued considerable experience of does in group housing, particularly in spacious housing on straw. The country was consequently surveyed by mail for the purpose of the meetings. Switzerland is a small rabbit meat producer with a high consumption. It therefore imports considerable quantities of rabbit meat.
- Whilst group housing is not mandated by law, it is required for certain labels.
- Here too, the experience is that continuous group housing for does has several disadvantages, primarily the aggression between breeding females.

4 Presentations

- Luc Maertens, 2017. Options for Park Housing for Rabbits Demonstration Project by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Presentation.
- Animal Welfare Service, 2017. Results of the retail sector survey on the supply of park rabbits and non-park rabbits. Presentation.
- Animal Welfare Service, 2017. Results of the survey on rabbit farming in Switzerland. Presentation.

5 Opinion approval by the Animal Welfare Council

Approved on 25/04/2018.