

## RABBIT SYMPOSIUM

### Research and Extension Strategies for Small-Scale Rabbit Production

**25 Evaluation of lablab (*Dolichos lablab*) and cactus (*Opuntia stricta*) as forage resources, and the effect of fur clipping on rabbit growth under subtropical conditions.** C. A. Ruiz-Feria\* and S. D. Lukefahr, *Texas A&M University, Kingsville.*

Altex and New Zealand White (NZW) rabbits (n=152) were involved to evaluate lablab and cactus forages and the effect of fur clipping on growth performance. Rabbits were fed 100, 75 or 50% commercial pellets with 0, 25 or 50% fresh lablab substitution, respectively, with or without cactus fed ad libitum. Individual rabbit weights and pellet and forage consumption by pen were measured daily during the 42 d experiment, as well as ambient temperature (T) and relative humidity (RH) at 1400 h. Altex had heavier final weight (FW) by 146 g (P< .01), better average daily gain (ADG) by 3.5 g/d (P<.01), and reached market weight (1,800 g; AGE) earlier by 2.6 d (P<.05) than NZW rabbits. Overall, restriction of pellets reduced FW by 159 g, ADG by 3.8 g/d, and increased AGE by 4.6 d, compared to rabbits fed pellets ad libitum (P<.01). Pellet restriction (0 vs the average of 25 and 50%) reduced (P<.01) pen weight gain by 498 g, pellet intake by 6,600 g and gross feed intake by 1,600 g, but improved (P<.01) pellet conversion by 1 unit. Rabbits fed 75% pellets were not different from rabbits fed 100% pellets for pen gain weight (P>.1) but the former had better (P<.01) pellet conversion (3.3 vs 2.5). Fur clipping improved (P<.05) FW and ADG by 72 g and 1.7 g/d, respectively, and tended (P=.10) to improve pen gain weight by 188 g and increase (P<.05) pellet plus forage consumption by 800 g, suggesting a reduction in caloric stress effects (average T and RH were 32.34°C and 49.4%). The feeding of lablab and clipping of fur could reduce rabbit production costs and improve growth-related performance.

**Key Words:** Rabbits, Forages, Growth

**26 Evaluation of leucaena (*Leucaena leucocephala*) and cactus (*Opuntia stricta*) as forage resources for growing rabbits under subtropical conditions.** C. A. Ruiz-Feria\* and S. D. Lukefahr, *Texas A&M University, Kingsville.*

Leucaena and cactus forages were evaluated for growth, feed utilization and carcass trait performances. Altex and New Zealand White weanling rabbits (n=64) were randomly assigned to pens and fed for 42 d. Experimental diets were 100% commercial pellets (C) or 90, 80 or 70% pellets plus 10, 20 or 30% leucaena leaves (L10, L20 and L30) fed ad libitum without or with cactus pads (Cc, L10c, L20c, L30c). Individual growth and carcass, and pen feeding traits were analyzed using mixed-model procedures. The C and Cc rabbits had a 371 g heavier (P<.05) 42-d final weight (FW), had 8.9 g/d improved ADG (P<.01), and reached 1,800 g market weight (AGE) earlier (P<.05) by 6.5 d than rabbits fed leucaena with or without cactus. Breeds were not different (P>.05) for growth traits. Rabbits fed leucaena without cactus had lower (P<.05) pellet and gross (pellet plus forage) feed intake than rabbits fed leucaena with cactus. Overall, pellet feed conversion tended to improve (P<.10) by .17 units in cactus fed rabbits. Within-pen body weight uniformity was not affected by diet or breed. Rabbits fed 30% leucaena with or without cactus had 1.9% lower (P<.01) carcass yield, and .85, .25, .23, and .11 larger (P<.10) emptied gastrointestinal tract, stomach, cecum, and large intestine percentages of pre-slaughter weight, respectively, than rabbits fed C and Cc. However, when carcass traits were adjusted for pre-slaughter weight, these differences became less important. In general, leucaena fed rabbits had the poorest performance, but when fed at the 10% level with cactus, growth and carcass traits were improved.

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