



Production and world market: the rabbit in the European Union

The world production of rabbit meat is valued to be about 1 million tons, of this the 54% is produced in the EU. The four biggest world's producers – China, Italy, Spain, France – contribute to almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world production.

In the last twenty years the world production has increased of the 1,7% each year, passing from a bit more than 720 to almost 1 million tons. The greatest increases have taken place in the last 5 years, at the same time of the market's problems of bovine meat caused by the BSE.

The international trade of rabbit meat involves almost 50 thousands tons, equal to almost the 5% of the world production, to confirm that the principal part of the world's production is destined to the domestic use. The major commercialized volume is exchanged between a small number of countries. In particular, the 74% of the imports come from 5 countries: France (9600 tons), Holland (9240 tons), Germany (8000 tons), Italy (5000 tons) and Switzerland (3500 tons).

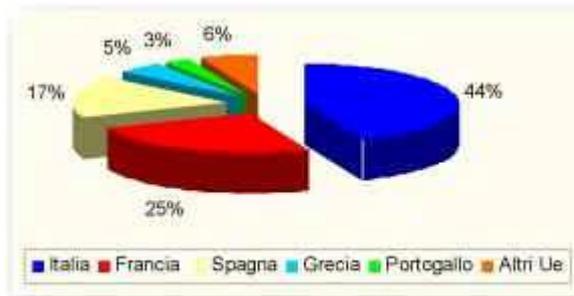
Likewise, the exports are represented for the 44% by the Chinese production, for the 11% from Hungary (7300 tons), while Holland, France and Argentina contribute with almost 4500 tons each (that is to say the 7%) and Spain with 3700 tons (that is to say the 6%).

An important role in the import-export is played from Belgium that is at the same time one of the principle countries that exports and imports rabbit meat, importing from China and East Europe and exporting part of its production in France and Germany.

At last the Italian exports are 2000 tons.

The rabbit's livestock of the EU is valued to be of almost 17-18 millions stud-rabbits with an average yield of 36 kg each, corresponding to almost 460 thousands tons, that is to say the 46% of the world's production.

The biggest producers in the EU are Italy, France, and Spain.



The area of the EU is determinant for the international trade, because the countries of the EU hold almost the 90% of the imports and the 30% of the exports in the world.

It is so possible to say that the production of rabbit meat is, first of all, an European activity.

Europe is used as a laboratory for the world's rabbit-rearing and found a model to follow for the developing rabbit-rearing like the African, the Asiatic and the American ones.

The production of rabbit meat has not any homogenous type and it is possible to find 4 fundamental categories:

1. Area with a high level of productivity, where the production is insured by specialized breedings tending to a constant increase and where are bred from 500 to 1000 stud-rabbits. Italy, the south of Spain and Galicia, the west of France. Portugal and Holland are in this category.
2. Area in which the rabbit-rearing is an important activity but it does not reach dominant levels. The production comes from breedings of middle dimension in a farm. The south of France, the north of Spain and the south of Portugal are in this category.
3. Area in which is present only a rabbit-rearing of secondary importance. The characteristic of this model is the presence at the same time of big specialized breedings that trade directly their production and an important number of small rural breedings. Germany, the centre and the east of France, the south of Spain are in this category.
4. Area that could be said "rabbit-rearing desert" where actually the production does not exist, these areas are represented by England and the North European Countries.

The European unification and the abolition of the borders in the EU have speeded up the process of globalization of the international markets and in comparison with them the rabbit-rearing one is in a backward position. As a matter of fact the rabbit-rearing has still to be considered in the regulations of the EU while all the other fields of the agriculture have been regulated since a long time regarding the laws that discipline the exchanges between the countries in the EU.

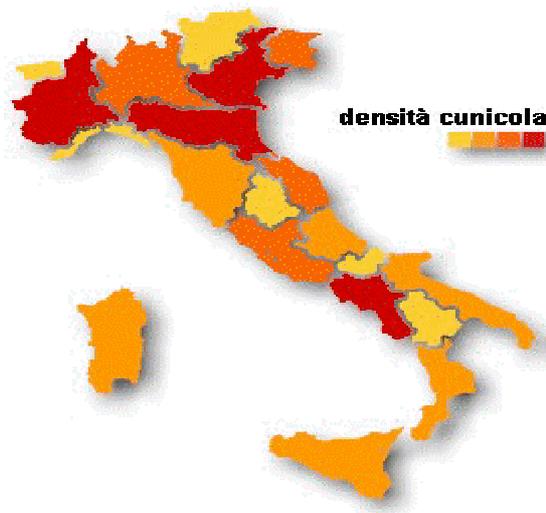
This delay is due to the scarce interest that the field of rabbit-rearing has in Europe because this breeding is limited to only 3 countries: Italy, France and Spain. In all the other countries of the EU

the rabbit-rearing is not actually an activity of particular economic stress and also the consumption of rabbit meat (that is usually considered a pet like cats and dogs, in England, Holland and anyway in the North European Countries), is extremely limited.

In the year 2000, after the problems of the diossine meat and the unforgettable fear for the crazy cow, the EU has passed an important regulation about the biological production. The rabbit, unfortunately, is not mentioned and this represents a confirmation of the scarce interest of the European legislation for this zootechnic field.

If at the moment there are no regulations of the EU for the management of the market, it is important to say that anyway exist a set of sanitary measures which have a considerable importance in the exchanges between the countries in the EU and also between the extra European countries concerning both the living animals, the meat and the products of rabbit meat.

Analysing the situation of rabbit's livestock in the EU, particular attention has to be focus on Italy. The Italian rabbit –breeding represents the biggest reality about this field both in an European level and in a world one.



Productive rabbit breeding subdivision in the Italian regions

At the beginning of the 70's the Italian rabbit-rearing was characterized by a big number of small and middle dimension farms, only a few of them with a professional character, that produced every year about 940 thousands quintals of rabbit meat. The consumption of this meat was derisory: a little bit more than 2kg/person/year.

The increasing consumption drove this field that has fast developed to satisfy the increasing demand of rabbit meat that in the 1990 arrived to be of 4 kg/person/year. At the moment the consumption per person is around 4.5 kg/year.

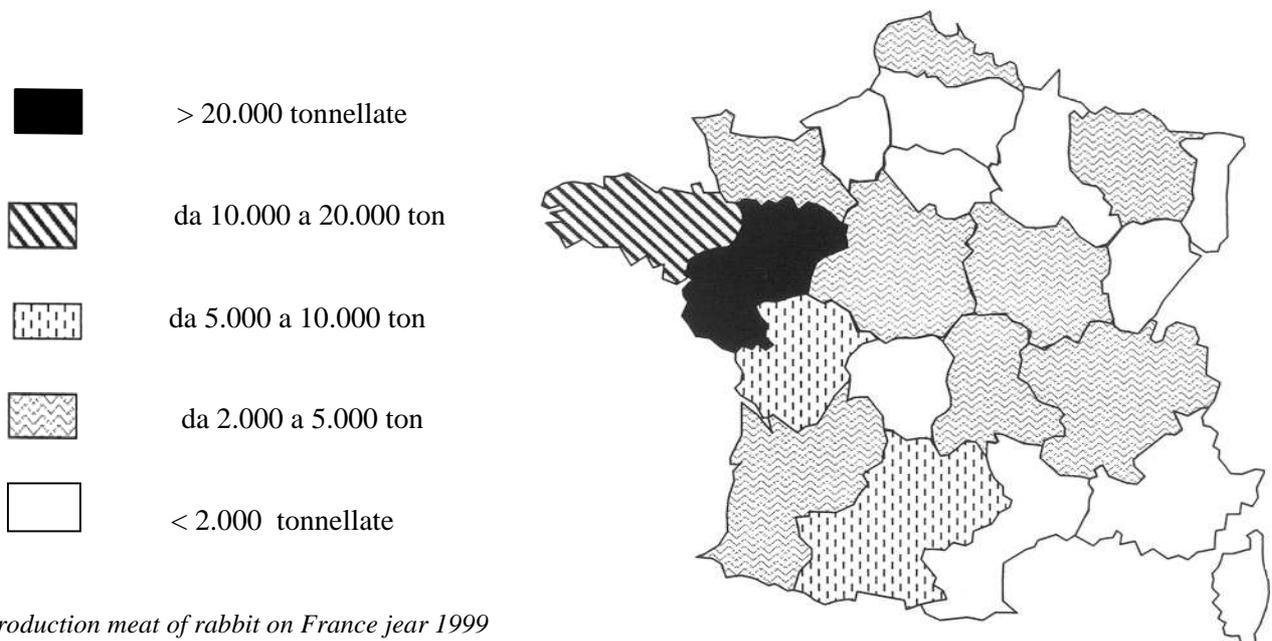
The number of breedings is valued by Ismea to be more than 200.000units. but this number includes also the “micro” breedings whose production is addressed to the domestic consumption. The number of professional breedings is extremely inferior and it is valued to be 2.000 units. The rabbit-breeding with 230.000tons of products in the 2000 that is to say 100.000.000 head/year, represents the fourth zootechnic national field, after the bovines, the swines and the bird-rearing, with the 9% of the P.L.V.(saleable gross production) that is to say 760 millions euros,.

In comparison to the entire zootechnic field of the national meat, the share of the agricultural field is almost the 6.3% according to the quantity and almost the 9% according to the value.

The production of rabbit used for meat is characterized by significative differences between North, Centre and South of the peninsula. This is due partly to a climatic factor; while in the North the rabbit produced has a weight at the slaughter of 2.6-2.8 kg with peaks of 3 kg in Piemomnte, in the Centre of Italy the weight decrease to 2.4-2.5 kg while in the South rabbits are slaughtered at around 2 kg of weight. But the most significative element that distinguishes the South from the North consists on the lack of integration of the rabbit-rearing chain with the feed-factories that are absent, the few slaughter-houses (the most of them with a farm character) and the almost absence of big breedings with an industrial feature, typical of the North of Italy, in which is possible to solve every kind of climatic problem due to the advanced technology and so to obtain heavier animals.

Italy represents the 44% of the production in Europe, followed By France with the 25%, Spain with the 17%; the productions of other countries then, Greece, Portugal and Hungary included, contribute all together to the 14%.

After Italy is clear the strong position of France. Where the production has started again, after knowing a decline in the past years.

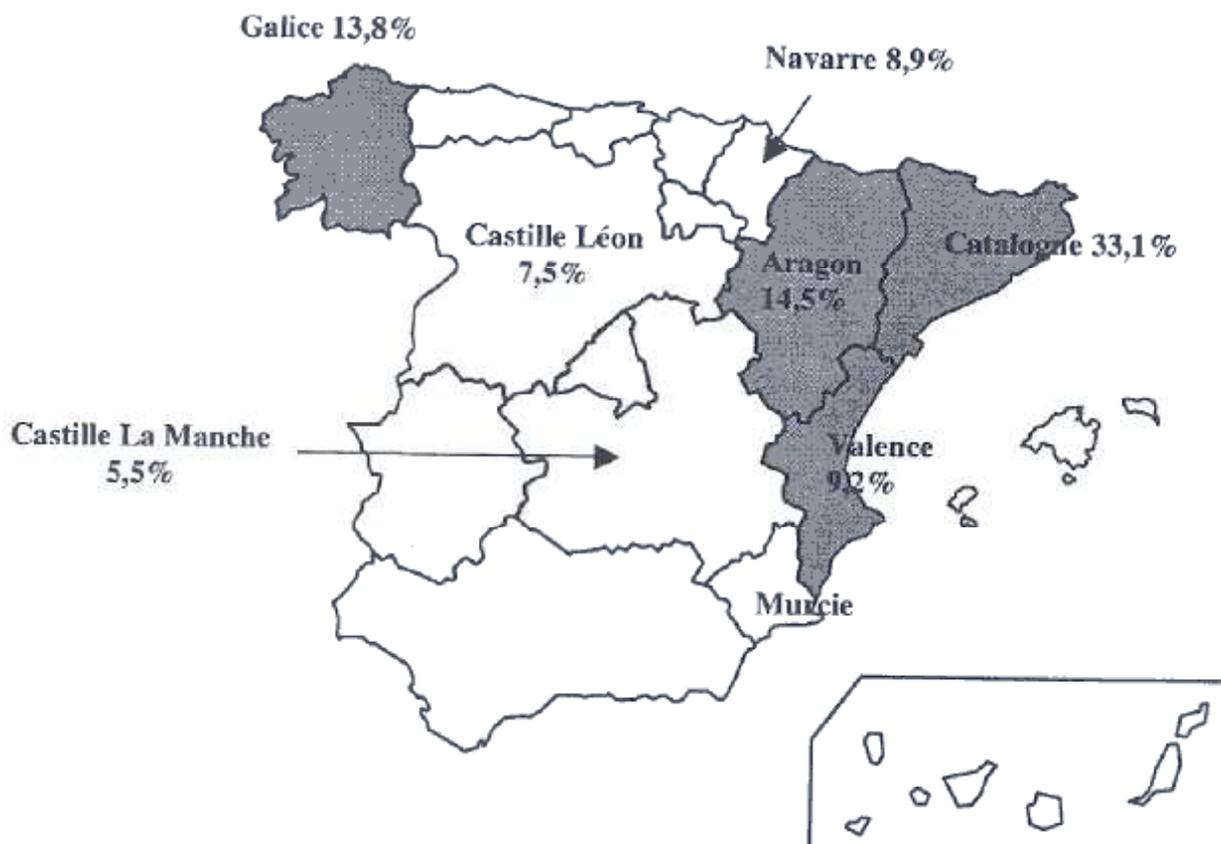


Production meat of rabbit on France year 1999

In spite of the important internal production of rabbit meat, France import a big quantity of them in order to have enough meat for the consumption. In fact in this country the internal consumption is nearly 3kg/person. The internal production is able to satisfy the demand only for the 85%. A very important phenomenon is the decreasing number of the stud-rabbits, this is due to the closing of a lot of rural activity. So France has passed from more than 7 millions stud-rabbits in the 1970 to less than 3 today. During this period the productivity per nest has stongly increased. But it is still insufficient to compensate the low number of stud-rabbits present today. In spite of the importance of the big breedings that has increased more and more, the small breedings represent still a fundamental reality of the rabbit-rearing French production that should not be neglected.

Spain is the only country in the EU that has been able to achieve the sufficient quantity of rabbit meat to satisfy its internal demand.

Principal



Principal lands productory of rabbit in Spain

In Spain as well the consumption is particularly important, more than 2Kg/person. Since some years in this country it has been recorded a little surplus in the production of rabbit meat, this excess is prevalently addressed to the export to Portugal, France and Italy. The distribution of the breedings according to their dimension and structure, vary from region to region. Some years ago the rabbit-

rearing in Spain was essentially rural above all in Galicia and Andalusia and except for Valencia and Catalogne.

The present situation has completely changed and since some years big productive units have developed due to the strong development that the country had had. The traditional rabbit-rearing, even if it still has the majority of the stud –rabbits , produce only the half of the Spanish rabbit-rearing production, and this is one of the outstanding characteristic of the Spanish rabbit-rearing field. In the other countries of the EU,(except Italy of course), the interest for the rabbit-rearing is rather limited and the consumption per person does not exceed 1 kg.

Synthetically the situation of the rabbit-rearing in the other countries in the EU is as follow.

The internal production in Holland is developing and it is essentially addressed to the foreign markets (and so the French and Italian ones in particular). Holland is characterized by a high level in the import and the production, that in the past was attested to around 20 thousands tons/year, has now exceeded more than 30 thousands tons. This is an evolution to consider because Holland boast of a big capacity concerning the zootechnic field in general and the rabbit- rearing could be the new outlet to the potential of this country that in the past were expressed essentially in the swine-rearing field. But the ecological problems prevent Holland to have a bigger growth in this field. And so the rabbit-rearing, that for sure presents less problems from this point of view, could represents the new formula to achieve a further developing of the zootechnic activity. Being unlikely having an increase of the internal consumption of rabbit meat, it is clear that every hypothesis of developing of the rabbit-rearing in these countries is based on the contemporary increase of the exports.

In Ireland and Great Britain there are no significative production and the consumption as well is very modest.

In Greece the consumption of rabbit meat are in progressive decline (from 14 thousands tons of the 1997 to the 6 thousands of today). Consequently also the numbers of breedings has reduced.

In Portugal, until the 1986, the production and consumption of rabbit meat was stabilized around a bit less than 1 kg per person, satisfied in part by the internal production of 8 thousands tons per year. In the last years the potuguese rabbit-rearing has made sensible progress, having a production of 20 thousands tons, value that put Portugal at the eighth position in the world's production. An interesting aspect that has to be mentioned: in the majority of the breeding's system the sheds are used only for the breeding of the stud-rabbits, while the cages for the fattening are placed in the semi –plain air part of the breeding place.

The production of rabbit meat in Germany and in the North European Countries is extremly low and it is essentially represented by a hobbistic type of rabbit-rearing.

National Unions of Rabbit-rearing

AVITALIA- Unione Nazionale Avicunicola

Avitalia is the union of the associations of the bird- and rabbit-rearing producers, recognized from the CEE Regulement 1360/78. The union has been recognized with ministerial decree and now it associates : ASPROAVIC (Piemonte), A.E.R.A.C. (Emilia Romagna), AVI-MARCHE (Marche), A.P.A.A.C. (Abruzzo), AVI-MOLISE (Molise) e Coniglio Veneto (Veneto) for a total amount of 496.000 stud_rabbits.

Fe.Na.Lap. – Fédération Nationale des Groupements de Producteurs de Lapins

CONACUN – Confederaciòn Nacional de Cunicultores

Founded in the 1988 as an answer to the fears of the rabbit’s breeders.It associates Federations and Associations in all Spain for a total of 383.677 parents.

The Interprofessions of Rabbit-Rearing

This is the instrument for the management of this field in every single country. Nowadays Interprofessional Organizations are present only in France and Spain. In Italy the course of legal costitution is still in itinere having prepared in the Ministry for the Agricultural Policy the Interprofessional Rabbir-rearing Table.

FRANCE	CLIPP Comité Lapin Interprofessionnel Pour la Promotion del Produits
PRODUCERS	CFA (Confédération Française de l’ Aviculture) CP (Confédération Paysanne) FENALAP (Fédération Nationale des Groupements de Producteurs de Lapin)
PRODUCERS OF RABBIT – FEED	SNIA (Syndicat National des Industriels de la Nutrition Animale) SYNCOPAC (Syndicat National des Coopératives de Production et d’ Alimentation Animales)
SELECTORS OF GENETIC AND CONSTRUCTORS OF EQUIPMENTS	SYSELAF (Syndicat des Sélectionneurs de Lapin Français) ANFEC (Association Nationale des Fournisseurs d’ Equipements Cunicoles)

SCAUGHTERERS AND MANUFACTURERS	FIA (Fédération des Industries Avicoles)
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SPAIN	INTERCUN Organizaciòn Interprofessional Cunicola					
CONACUN National Union of Rabbit's Breeders	ASAJA Agricultural Association of Young Farmers	COAG Coordination of the Organization of Farmers and Breeders	UPA Union of Small Farmers and Breeders	CCAE Spanisch Confederation of the Agricultural Co-operative Society	MADECUN Association of the Rabbit Scaughterers	EL GREMI Association of the scaughterers of Aves and Catalogne

The European Rabbit Association

This is the European Federation of the rabbit's breeders founded in the 1999 to work of Coniglio Veneto. Nowdays it associates the 3 National Unions (AVITALIA, Fe.Na.Lap. and CONACUN) in the addition to the rabbit-rearing Associations working in Portugal, Belgium, Holland. The Hungarian Association of Rabbit-rearing adhere as well but as an observer. It has been recognized with decree of the President of the French Republic at the end of the 1999 and has its seat in Paris.

A project for the European rabbit-rearing

In an European rabbit-rearing scenary, so different between the producers countries, and with outstanding differences also in the single countries, a project for the rabbit-rearing should tend to:

Market

- Conform the productive realites with the aim of standardize as much as it is possible the final product characterizing in this way the "European rabbit" that must be distinguished from the rabbit imported from the extra CEE countries.
- Find a logo to identify the European rabbit
- Keep the rabbit meat not conforming to the sanitary law of the EU from coming into Europe
- Support the farm in the definition of the productive process in order to guarantee, before the 2005, the complete tracing of the rabbit meat.

- Plan a food project to spread the consumption of rabbit meat, famous for its dietetic qualities, in all the countries in the EU involving the school institutions and the refectory financed by the public institutions
- Promote the rabbit meat towards the participation in the most important agricultural and food manifestations in Europe
- Support economically the Rabbit-rearing National Unions and the Associations adhering to the fulfilment of projects for the direct trade of rabbits from the breeders

Scientific Research

- Increase the studies about the rearing to define the regulations about the animal's welfare of rabbits that must be based on particular scientific knowledges and not on prejudicial bases
- It is pressing for the rabbit-rearing to define a number of veterinary products able to intervene on the most spreaded sanitary problems of the rabbit. This problem is concerning the politics about the antibiotic resistance and about the division between the human antibiotics and the ones with zootechnic use.
- Research new kind of rabbit's breeding to satisfy the regulations about the animals' welfare and that at the same time should also reduce the costs of production.

Politics of the rabbit-rearing's field

- Define, in the matter of the WTO towards a transnational agreement between the most important countries producing rabbit, the vertical regulation about rabbit in order to give it the same importance of the other zootechnic fields.
- It is necessary to define a strategy to defend the European production or at least a strategy able to create some economic "shock-absorber" in order to protect a productive field that is already weak especially if it is compared with the strong bird and rabbit producers of the PECO countries that should enter in the EU.
- It is necessary for the rabbit-rearing's field to proceed to a bigger education of the breeders in the ambit of the applications of the regulations found in the White Book about the food health and about the responsibility towards the consumers acting in collaboration with the Organs of Repression to stop the illegal importation of veterinary raw material, especially from the Asiatic countries.
- Establish a Rabbit-rearing European Observatory able to control constantly this field in every single country concerning the extra CEE importations, the production, the market, the prices, all important elements for a right politic of the rabbit-rearing and to prevent situations of commercial crisis.

Needed amount

According to the importance of the projects necessary for the European rabbit-rearing, and also to the number of Organizations that this project wants to involve in the single countries it is considered indispensable a financial amount that must be not inferior to 10.000 euro.