

Livestock Ledger

By

Chester D. Hughes

Extension Livestock Specialist

Since the depopulation of several chicken flocks in the county, there has been some interest in conversion of poultry buildings to swine units, veal housing and facilities for raising rabbits. There are possibilities for all of these enterprises with some conversion, reconstruction, and of course some additional expenditures.

Through exploring these different possibilities, I have become intrigued by the business of rabbit production. There seems to be increased interest in raising rabbits for fur production, and what beautiful creatures they really are.

Along with their value as fur-bearers, and their celebrated ability to multiply, rabbits have another quality going for them that may someday add to their fame: their meat is nutritious and delicious to eat. In fact, rabbit meat is higher in protein and lower in saturated fat, cholesterol and calories than either beef, pork, chicken or fish. What's more, their tender, all-white meat tastes

remarkably like chicken.

In recognition of rabbits' low cholesterol content, the American Heart Association recommends it for heart patients. Because it also goes easy on the calories, rabbit has been endorsed by Weight Watchers. And, due to rabbits' low sodium content, it's a boon to meat eaters on a low salt diet for high blood pressure.

With all these health benefits, you'd think that rabbit meat would be available on every supermarket meat counter, but it isn't. The fact that Americans ate about 25 million pounds of rabbit in 1980 only means that we consumed less than one-half ounce per person. In Italy, where rabbit has long been popular, the average person consumes over 5 pounds a year.

Another great thing about rabbits is that they produce more meat per pound of feed consumed than any other domestic animal. They produce twice as much meat from the same amount of alfalfa as sheep do, for example, and four times as much as cattle.

Elections held at Md. Simmental Assoc. sale

BY JOHN S. SCHMIDT
FREDERICK, Md. — Election of officers highlighted the Maryland Simmental Association's 10th Annual Spring Sale held at the Frederick, Md. Fairgrounds on Saturday, April 14.

The annual meeting and banquet preceded the sale, with about 85 members and friends in attendance for the meal.

Election results were as follows: president, Tom Stevenson, Langdon Farms, Sherwood, Md.; vice president, Dr. Brenda Stewart, Oak-n-Thistle Farm, Woodbine, Md.; secretary-treasurer, J. Fred Grooms, Ravenwood Farms, Boonsboro, Md.

Newly elected president Stevenson is also a member of the board of trustees of the National Simmental Association. Secretary-treasurer Grooms is one of the founding members of the Maryland Association.

After the banquet, breeders purchased semen from 15 national sires for a total of \$1600 to benefit the Maryland Junior Simmental Association.

The Association's 1984 Maryland Queen, Mindi Wrightson, assisted with the auction along with entire junior association. All behind the scene preparations were carried out by these juniors. Many of the junior association members worked sale day to clip, wash, fit and move the animals in and out of

the sale ring. The senior association was very pleased with the total performance of the juniors in what has become an annual role for them.

The sale averaged \$901 on 69 females and 10 bulls. All top selling bulls, cows and heifers were sired by the Abricot bull. The top cow and calf were consigned by the George Poole of Myersville and sold for \$2,000 to Ravenwood Farms, Boonsboro, Md.

J. Fred Grooms bought the top open heifer for \$2400. An Abricot yearling son sold for \$1200 to Hargett Farms of Boyds, MD. Volume buyers were Woodbourne Farms, William, Carson and Betty Queen of Warrenton, VA.

LIVESTOCK LATEST



Oregon study sheds light on gilt breeding

NEWARK, Del. — Every swine producer has a favorite system for moving gilts into the breeding herd. Some say it's best to breed gilts after they've cycled two or three times. Each successive heat period (supposedly) allows a gilt to shed another egg or two.

But according to University of Delaware extension livestock specialist Dr. Ken Kephart, some studies suggest this theory isn't everything it's cracked up to be. For example, an experiment in Europe about 11 years ago showed that waiting until the third estrus to breed gilts gave only one extra half-pig per litter compared to breeding at the first heat. And in Canada, researchers at the University of Guelph who conducted a similar study found virtually no difference in litter sizes between two such groups.

What about the age of the gilt at first breeding? Does this influence litter size? "If you looked at a 1951 experiment at the University of Wisconsin, the answer would be no," Kephart says. "But a 1974 study at Oregon State says that breeding gilts before they reach six months of age will reduce litter size."

Such conflicting results are confusing, admits the specialist. "You don't know whom to believe. And neither did folks at Oregon State, so they conducted another study."

For this study three scientists, R.E. Knott, D.C. England and W. H. Kennick, raised 123 gilts in confinement. Then they moved the gilts into a breeding facility at a light weight (155 to 175 pounds), medium weight (200 to 220 pounds) or a heavy weight (240 to 255 pounds). In the breeding area the researchers hand fed the gilts 6 pounds per day. To help stimulate the onset of heat, gilts were regrouped and penned next to a boar.

Those in the heavy weight group were bred at their first heat. But the light and medium weight gilts weren't bred until the third heat.

At about four weeks after breeding, the gilts were slaughtered in order to determine actual ovulation rates and number

of live embryos. Here are some of the results:

* All gilts came in heat an average of two weeks after they reached the breeding barn.

* All gilts were roughly the same age (about 228 days) and weight (about 254 pounds) at breeding.

* The number pregnant four weeks after breeding was the same for all groups (90 percent).

* Ovulation rate (about 13 eggs), number of live embryos (about 11) and embryo survival (about 86

percent) were similar for all groups.

"So here's another study which shows that age, body weight and number of previous heat cycles in prepartum gilts have little or no influence on litter size," Kephart says. Based on these results, growers might conclude that it doesn't matter how or when gilts are brought into the breeding herd.

"But stop and think about the procedure followed in this experiment," he advises. The researchers took the gilts off the

feeder when they went to the breeding area and hand fed them six pounds a day. That represented a potential saving in feed. The amount saved, of course, depended on how long the gilt was in the breeding barn before she was bred.

From the initiation of the preheat regimen in this study (when gilts weighed between 155 and 175 pounds) each group consumed the following amounts of feed per head:

Light weight group — 336 pounds.

Medium weight group — 470 pounds.

Heavy weight group — 368 pounds.

So, based on this experiment, an economical way to get gilts into the sow herd is to move them into the breeding barn at 155 to 175 pounds and breed them on the third cycle. "By using this scheme," Kephart says, "a grower can save feed — as much as 134 pounds per head — with no apparent reduction in embryo numbers."

Charolais Assoc. to hold summer conference

The 1984 American-International Junior Charolais Association Summer Conference has been scheduled for June 18 to 21 at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. The conference will feature the 9th Annual National Junior Heifer Show, 6th National Junior Public Speaking Contest, Panel Debate and Variety Show.

Events will begin Monday, June 18 at 9 a.m. at the Animal Pavilion at Texas A&M University with the National Junior Heifer Show. Juniors from all across the United States will compete for national titles. This year's show will be dedicated to Johnny Ragsdale of

Richmond, Texas.

Schedule for Tuesday, June 19, is a live animal and carcass evaluation program by Dr. Gary Smith, head of the animal science department at Texas A&M. In addition, a tour will be given of the Texas A&M agriculture department, large animal, medicine and surgery department and the meats research center. A panel debate will be held that evening at 7:30 p.m. in the Kleberg Center.

Beginning at 8:30 a.m., Wednesday, June 20, a tour of Granada Transplant Center and C-J Ranch in Leona, Texas, will take place. That evening at 8 p.m., a special

variety show will be held for participating Juniors.

The AIJCA public speaking contest will convene Thursday, June 21 at 10:30 a.m. in the Kleberg Center. Following at 2 p.m., the AIJCA will hold its annual meeting.

This year's conference is

dedicated to Mr. & Mrs. Arley Chambers of Claysville, Pa. For more information concerning the AIJCA Conference and National Junior Heifer Show, contact Terri Sparrow, director of youth activities, P.O. Box 20247, Kansas City, Mo. 64195, 816/891-6432.

Encephalitis vaccination for horses urged

NEWARK, Del. — Now's the time to vaccinate horses against both the eastern and western forms of equine encephalitis. University of Delaware extension equine specialist Dr. Mel Reitnour says horse owners should take steps to protect their animals before mosquitoes become active.

Eastern encephalomyelitis (EEE) has about a 90 percent death rate, while the western form (WEE) kills about 30 percent of its victims. In most cases, both forms of the disease are transmitted by mosquitoes.

According to Reitnour, encephalitis, or sleeping sickness, is caused by a virus which affects the nervous system. At first, an infected horse or pony will wander aimlessly around, circling mechanically. As the disease

progresses, its lips and throat become paralyzed. Dehydration sets in and the animal stands cross-legged, grinding its teeth. As the paralysis spreads, it falls down and is unable to rise. Death is usually due to cardiac or respiratory failure. Animals that survive are seriously impaired.

Highly effective vaccines are available against both EEE and WEE. A combination vaccine is available in forms suitable for intramuscular injection. Some combinations also include protection against tetanus and influenza. Reitnour urges horse owners to contact a veterinarian as soon as possible and make arrangements to have their animals vaccinated in Delaware and nearby states.

