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ADVICE TO BEGINNERS

IN

THE RABBIT INDUSTRY

BY

JOHN C. FEHR



GENE ANDER

(The Blue Devil)

Bred by the author and recently shipped
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THE RABBIT INDUSTRY

BY
JOHN C. FEHR

Licensed Judge and a Breeder of
Rabbits for Years

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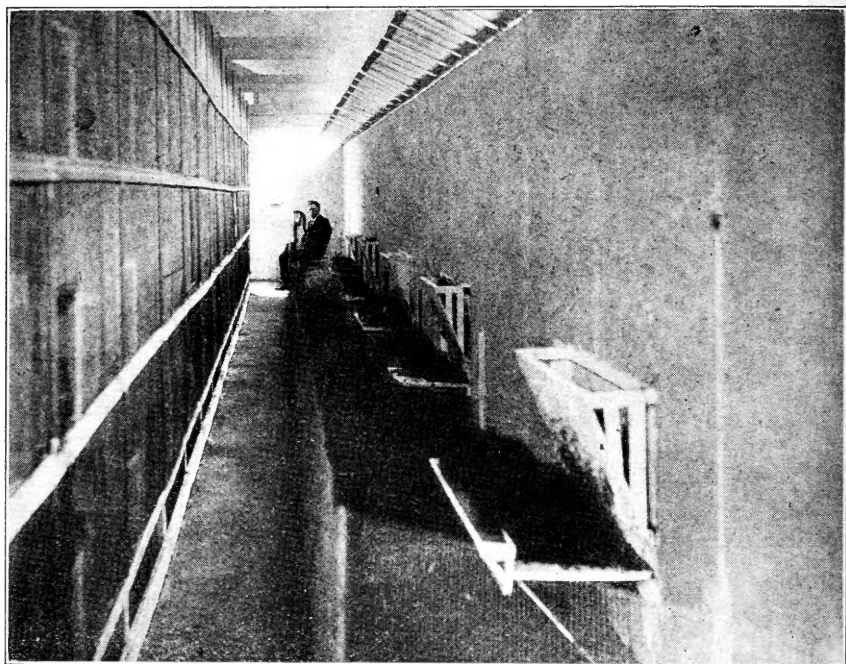
INTRODUCTION

Many have embarked in the rabbit business in the last two years. Unfortunately many, too, have made failures, inexperience being the chief cause in many cases. Others were misled by publications that were issued years ago. The rabbit business has made progress and we have developed new methods, the same as any other business. I shall try to give true facts, no exaggerations; facts and knowledge that I have gained through years of breeding. And if I shall be able to start some one out right so that they may avoid some of the bitter experiences that I and many others have had, I will feel well repaid for my efforts. To start right in the rabbit business, it is well for the beginner to decide which breed he likes or fancies best, also decide whether you intend to breed utility stock or fancy exhibition stock. In either case it is very essential that your foundation stock be strong and vigorous. We often hear this remark: "Oh, I don't want any fine stock; I am only going to breed utility stock."

To get good utility stock you must have good, healthy, vigorous breeders. The most popular utility rabbits at present are the Belgian Hare, Flemish Giant and the New Zealand. The American Blue will no doubt be right in the front ranks before long.

HOUSING

Since the housing and management of most all domestic rabbits is about the same I shall not go into detail regarding the different breeds. There are two different ways of housing, the outdoor rabbitry and the indoor rabbitry. There is no half-way. You must have them either housed in a good, ventilated



VIEW OF AN UP-TO-DATE INDOOR RABBITRY.

building without drafts, or you must have them out in the open with only a roof to protect them from the rain and the extreme heat, with an apartment entirely closed with the exception of a hole large enough for them to enter, in which they are protected

during the extreme cold weather. See cuts which show both plans.

Some of the best stock I have ever judged was raised in outdoor rabbitries, and there is no doubt that before long this plan will be adopted by most of the prominent breeders. One great advantage in the outdoor hutch is, that should one of your rabbits contract any contagious disease, it is not near as apt to transmit it to the other stock.

While on one of my trips out West, I had the pleasure of visiting Reed Storm's outdoor rabbitry at Kansas City. The thermometer stood at 12 degrees below at the time, but at that he had about twelve to fourteen litters of young in these hutches



AN IDEAL OUTDOOR RABBITRY.

ranging in age from six days to six weeks, and a happier or healthier lot of rabbits I never saw. So I claim, if you can breed rabbits in outdoor hutches successfully in Kansas you can do it in any State in the Union. The average beginner will usually start in on a very small scale, probably with one pair, which is a very good plan, as he will have more time to study the nature and wants of his stock, therefore, he will need no elaborate

hutches at the start. After he has gotten well along it is time enough to plan for his rabbitry. We show several different plans which have proved successful.

FEEDING

The feeding of rabbits no doubt has been discussed more than any one thing regarding rabbit culture. Some will say, feed all the greens they will eat; others say don't feed any. Personally, I feed very little green stuff, but I know prominent breeders who feed all the greens their rabbits will eat, and they are having splendid success.

I find that if one intends to feed much greens, you must start in gradually to increase greens and cut down on dry feeds. We also find that if the doe has been fed mostly greens while pregnant that the young will show no ill effects if given greens at a very early age. If you are having success with your present way of feeding, don't change. It is time enough when you see that your system of feeding does not agree with your stock. We find that alfalfa hay, third crop, or clover hay, the first crop, is the best; good oats and a change to barley once in a while are excellent. Carrots are very good at all times, especially for the does with young. Dried carrot tops, beet tops, or in fact, dried leaves of any kind are very much relished by both young and old. I have often noticed when feeding some lawn clippings, if there should be a dried leaf among them that the rabbits will pick it out first. In feeding always try to have regular hours, and by all means favor the mother does with the litter, for the more you do for her, the better will be her offspring. When your stock is in a moult, with rough coat, try giving a teaspoonful of whole flaxseed in their oats about two times a week; also

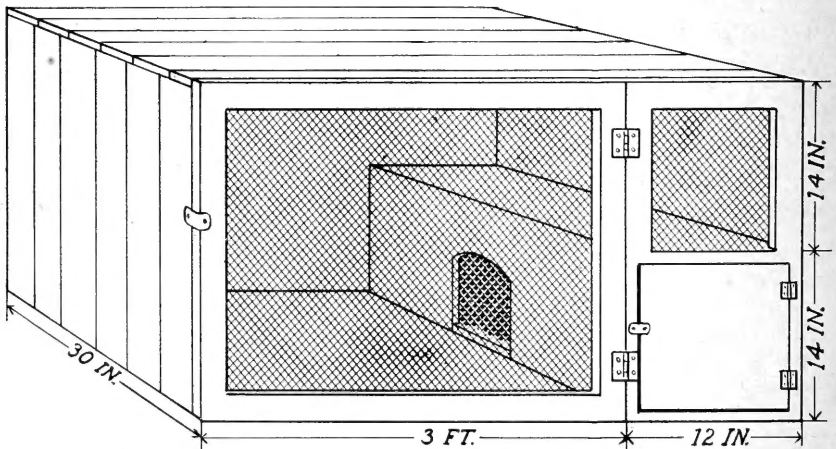
give them a good brushing down with a stiff brush. This treatment is also fine for stock you wish to show. After you have brushed all the dead hair out rub them down with your hand, then with a very soft rag. Some advocate using a drop of sweet oil, but I find that if they have been given the flaxseed it is not necessary for there will be enough oil in their coats to give a fine luster.

I believe there are more rabbits killed by overfeeding than by not being fed enough. By this I do not wish to encourage underfeeding. A small handful of oats or barley in the morning and enough good, clean hay to last them until the next feed is all that is necessary with the exception of some carrots or other roots; or, if you have some nice green stuff you may give them just enough that they will clean up in a short time. I find that the breeders who work out their own system of feeding are the most successful. A little good judgment and common sense will soon learn you just about what is agreeing with your stock. The rabbit is just like the human. In the spring of the year we need a tonic. I find that *plantain* and *dandelion* are just what your rabbits need in the spring.

MATING

We will assume that your stock is in the proper place with the sexes separated. I prefer to mate young does to old bucks, and old does to young bucks. Always put the doe in the buck's hutch for serving, for should you put the buck in the doe's hutch, she may think that he is intruding and put up a fight. If she is not in season she will let it be known by whining and running away or by laying down flat and refusing to rise up. Take her out and try again the next day and keep on until she is served.

One service is enough. Then try her again in four days. Now give the does the best of care and attention and plenty of good clean feed, such as hay, oats, carrots and a little greens. In about twenty days after service put in a nest box about 14x14x20 with a 6"x6" hole in the end. Then throw plenty of straw in the hutch, not the box, for she wishes to carry that in to suit herself. In thirty days from time of service you may look for the young. The day before she is due, have plenty of food before her, also fresh water, as they often have a fever which sometimes causes an abnormal appetite and if they do not get



A VERY CONVENIENT HUTCH FOR OUT OR INDOORS.

what they desire they often destroy or even eat their young. The day after she has had her young, take her out of the hutch, without exciting her any more than you can help, and let her run around. While she is away take out the nest box and count the young. If there are more than six, sort out the smallest ones; or, if there are any off-colored ones, and destroy them. Put the remaining ones in the hutch and then put the doe back. The more care and attention you give the mother does during

this period the more success you will have with the young. Some breeders wean the young at four to six weeks, but I claim it is absolutely wrong to do that. I never wean the young until they are at least ten weeks old and twelve weeks is better. The dangerous period of a rabbit's life is from weaning time until they are about four months old. After they are about two months old they begin to shed their baby coat, and it usually takes about a month. So if you leave them with their mother during this dangerous period you will be well repaid.

The young may not get very much nourishment from the mother during the last month, but what they do get seems to help them get their new coat, and the food that they eat builds their frame and bone. Remember, six good rabbits are worth more than twelve of medium grade. Now, after you have weaned this litter, let your doe rest about two weeks, and if she is not in the best of condition, let her rest until she is. Then you can breed her again. In this way you can get from three to four litters of good stock in a year.

DISEASES OF RABBITS

In looking over the different pet stock journals and seeing the amount of different rabbit remedies one would almost come to the conclusion that the rabbits are subject to all diseases, when in fact we have only one disease that can be considered a drawback to the industry, and that is "snuffles." Most of your trouble will come from inattention to your stock. As snuffles is one of the greatest drawbacks to the rabbit industry, I shall give some plain facts regarding this disease. The disease starts with a cold; the rabbits begins to sneeze and discharge at the nose; the discharge at first is almost transparent;

it then becomes a whitish color; in the last stage it becomes yellow and thick. This disease being very contagious, it is very important that the rabbit be taken away from the other stock as soon as you detect the slightest indication of the disease, then thoroughly disinfect the hutches with a good germ killer. Treat the rabbit affected with any of the so-called snuffle cures, which usually will cure a cold if detected in time. I have found some of these snuffle cures very good for colds, and if they were advertised as cold cures instead of snuffle cures, the public would have more confidence in the remedy and the manufacturer also.

If by treating the rabbit for ten days to two weeks you can see no improvement, I would advise killing it. This may seem hard, but it is the only way we are going to get rid of this disease, for so long as we continue to harbor, sell and breed this kind of stock, just so long are we going to have snuffles in our hutches.

SLOBBERS

Slobbers is no doubt the next most prevalent disease. This is caused by the young not getting enough for proper nourishment from the mother doe. They eat the coarse food which they cannot digest, which causes their stomachs to become out of order. This is also caused by stock that is closely inbred and very low in vitality. If caused by the latter, dispose of it, otherwise feed the mother doe good nourishing food, such as bread and milk, carrots, barley, oats, and the young will soon pick up. You may also rub a little salt on the mouths of the young so affected. Let them eat a pinch, which will do them good. It is also good to take their food and water from them for about twelve to fourteen hours. Young out of good, healthy, vigorous breeders will seldom have slobbers.

Ear canker is also very prevalent, but is very easily cured. Make a salve of sulphur and sweet oil and apply to the inside of ear, which should do the work in a very few days. The rabbit is subject to practically all diseases that the human is, so if you will watch your stock and use good judgment and give them the proper care you will have very little trouble. Remember, you can treat the rabbit exactly as you would a human for practically all ailments.

D O N T ' S

Don't see how many young you can breed; see how good you can get them.

Don't breed your does more than four times a year. To get winners, three times is still better.

Don't allow your doe to keep more than six to a litter, and if you expect to produce good, large, vigorous breeding stock, three or four is much better.

Don't keep your stud bucks where they will see the does unless it is a doe you intend to mate to the buck, as this only causes him unnecessary excitement, and is harmful.

Don't expect to get large stock out of a short coupled doe. Remember, we get size from the doe and color and type from the buck. Therefore, we find the extremely long-bodied does are usually the best producers.

Don't breed Flemish or Checkered Giants under ten months old. Belgians, New Zealands, American Blue and Lops may be bred at eight months, but, personally, even in these varieties, I

prefer to wait until ten months. Dutch, English, Tans, and all the small fancy breeds may be bred at six months.

Never breed brother and sister. If you must inbreed, do it with a system, and line-breeding is the only safe way. But if you have no intention of going all the way, don't start. There is a line-breeding chart on the market, which explains this system in full.

Don't feed green stuff to young under two months old, and very sparingly then. Some of the most successful breeders never feed green stuff, using only roots, such as beets, turnips and carrots, carrots being the best, especially for the mother and her young.

Don't breed your stock when in moult. You will be unable to produce young with a good coat.

Don't use your stud buck more than two or three times in a week.

Don't let him serve the doe more than once. After he has served her once, take him out, and in about four days try her again. If she refuses, take him out and in about four days try her again, and if she refuses you can be reasonably sure that she is bred.

Don't put stock in outdoor rabbitries in winter which have been purchased from a breeder who has indoor hutches. If you wish to accustom your stock to outdoor hutches, move them out in the spring.

Don't get the idea that when your rabbit sneezes "it has a cold," and when your neighbor's rabbit sneezes "*it has snuffles.*"

Don't sell a rabbit because it is a poor breeder or is subject to colds. The best thing to do is to put it on the meat block.

Don't envy your neighbor because he has better stock. Get busy and you will soon enjoy the friendly rivalry which makes the exhibiting of rabbits one of the greatest of all hobbies.

Don't pay any attention to such heading as this: One doe will produce 300 or 400 pounds of meat in one year. Just such a heading as this is what has put many a beginner to the bad.

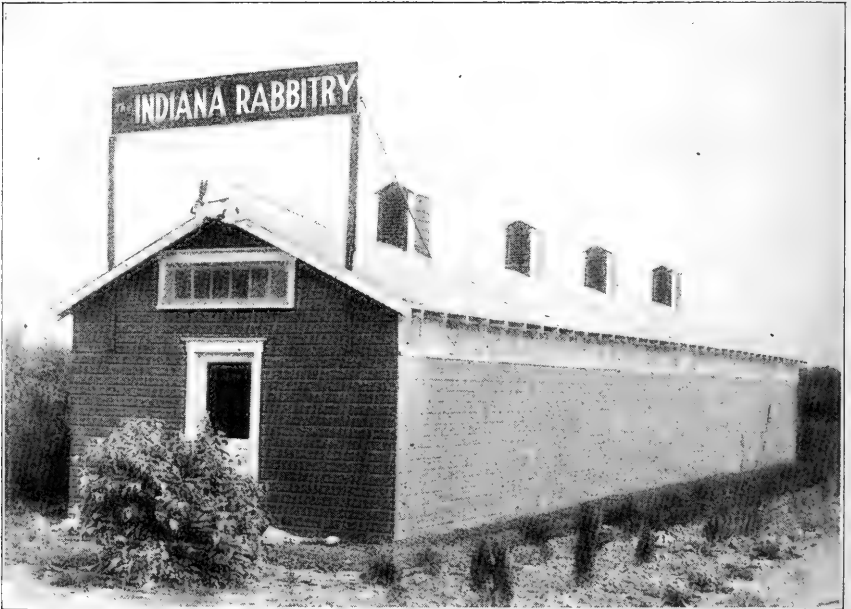
Use a little common sense, and, by all means,

Don't begin breeding rabbits with a lead pencil. Just because four and four are eight, that is no reason to believe that if one doe has four good young in one litter that two does will have eight good ones in a litter.

The Future of the Rabbit Business

Will the present prosperity in the rabbit business continue, or will the bottom drop, all at once, as it did during the Belgian Hare boom some eighteen or twenty years ago? Personally, I believe the rabbit has come to stay, for this war has taught the American people how to save and economize, and it is an undisputed fact that rabbit meat can be produced at less cost than any other meat in the country, and at that it is second to none in nutriment and taste. Another point in our favor is this: After the war the European countries will have to be supplied with breeding stock, for France, Belgium, Holland, and in fact, all the countries at war, were breeding rabbits very extensively. No doubt they are all depleted. It will be up to us to replace this stock, and I can see no reason why we should not see carloads of rabbits exported to these countries. Therefore, to supply this demand and the demand which we are sure to have from the number of new beginners, I can see no reason why the prospect

for the rabbit business in the future is not very bright. In fact, I do not believe that we will be able to supply the demand for breeding stock alone for several years to come. Then no doubt prices will settle down to a standard; but even at that, with the price of other meats, there is a good margin of profit in breeding for meat alone.



POPULAR PLAN OF AN UP-TO-DATE RABBITRY.

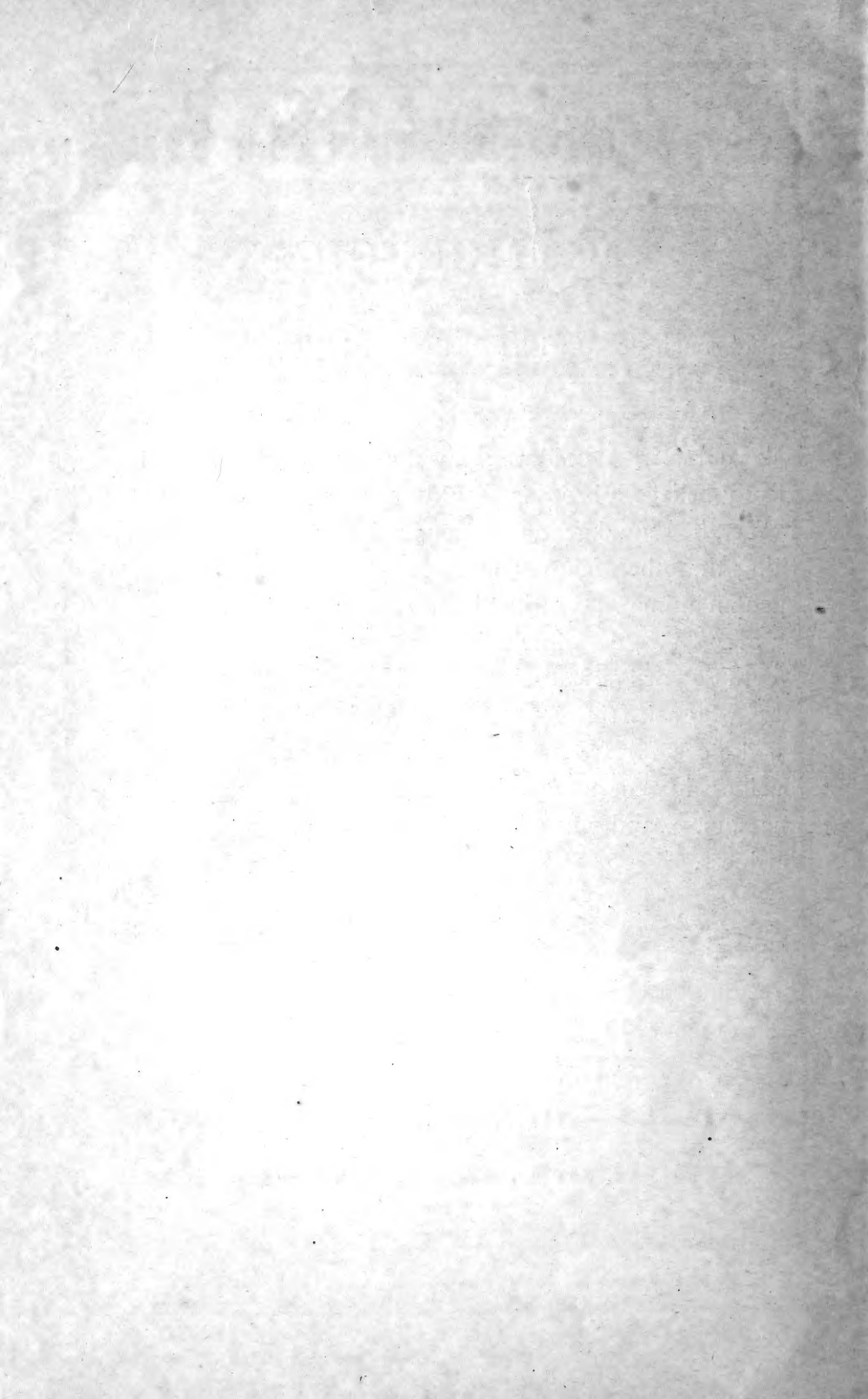
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wish to make it plain that the "Golden Rule" applies to the rabbit business probably more than any other business. Before pricing a rabbit to one of your customers, always ask yourself, "Would *you* pay that much for this rabbit?" I firmly believe a breeder should get a good price for his stock; in fact, he should get a very good price if he has produced something the other fellow could not produce, and who needs just such an animal. But, just because such an animal is worth \$50 or even \$100, do you think an animal half as good should be worth \$25 or \$50? "Absolutely, No!" I find too many beginners who ask from \$4 to \$10 for their culls and expect to buy good stock for from \$6 to \$8. So, for the good of the rabbit business in general, and for your own benefit, play the game on the square, and you will work yourself into a good profitable business.

JOHN C. FEHR.

My book, "The Flemish Giant, for Pleasure and Profit," will soon go to press, in which I will give my experience in the breeding of Flemish, which undoubtedly is the most wonderful breed today. Price per copy, 50 Cents.





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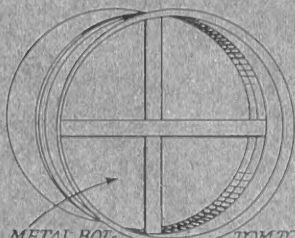
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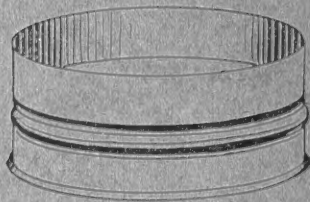
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