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RAISING GUINEA PIGS

Prepared in Section of Fur Resources, Division of Wildlife Research

Guinea pigs are raised as pet and fancy stock and for scientific purposes. This limited outlet naturally restricts the possibility of large profits from quantity production. The institutions that require guinea pigs purchase animals that have never been used for experiments and are known to be suitable for the purpose. Fanciers producing guinea pigs are now organized in a national association, known as the American Rabbit and Cavy Breeders Association, with the secretary's offices located at 7408 Normal Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Persons desiring to raise purebred guinea pigs, or cavies as they are technically known, should write to that office for information regarding registration, shows, and disposal of stock.

Guinea pigs are of various solid colors and mixed broken colors. They may be long or short haired smooth or rough coated. The short-haired, smooth-coated varieties are in the greatest demand, and from a sanitary standpoint are the most satisfactory to raise. A full-grown cavy in good flesh should weigh nearly 2 pounds at 18 months of age.

Housing

To reduce the cost of equipment and the labor in feeding and care, some producers have adopted the colony system of raising guinea pigs. In this system 30 to 50 mature animals are kept in one group, and sufficient pen space is provided to give the animals ample freedom of exercise. The compound-tier hutch, however, proves more satisfactory under average conditions. The number of such hutches, or even of tiers to the hutch, depends entirely upon the number of guinea pigs to be kept. With each compartment 30 inches deep by 36 inches long and 18 inches high, there is sufficient floor space for 4 or 5 breeding females with their litters. The one large door closing all tiers should be made of 1/2 to 3/4-inch-mesh wire netting. In a dark corner a shelf about 4 inches high should be provided for the guinea pigs. The animals usually sleep on the top, while the space below is a safe retreat for the female.

Feeding

Guinea pigs should be fed twice daily on regular schedule and without waste. They require about the same kinds of feed as do rabbits. A mixture of equal parts of oats, wheat, and barley, and then soybean meal, peanut meal, or linseed meal, making 10 percent of the total, proves satisfactory. Good quality legume hay should be supplied freely. A salt spool and fresh water should always be available. Green feed such as garden vegetables or lawn clippings is an excellent conditioner.

Breeding

Well-developed females are sexually mature at one month of age, but they should not be bred until 5 or 6 months old. The gestation period is 63 to 70 days. Consequently, under the best of circumstances not more than 5 litters can be produced within a year. The average number of young per litter is about 3, and the maximum rarely exceeds 5 or 6. A female in breeding prime can be expected to produce about 12 or 15 young annually.

The young are born with eyes open and are fully furred. The mother weans them after about three weeks. When the young are taken from the mother the sexes should be kept separate until mating time. A pen holding 30 to 40 is satisfactory for this purpose. It is always best to keep animals of about the same size together as the older and stronger males are likely to injure those just weaned.

From 3 to 5 females should be mated permanently with one male. The females should be so grouped as to get along among themselves agreeably. This they usually do, and frequently they nurse young animals of about the same age as their own indiscriminately. If the animals have no hereditary weakness, inbreeding for a few generations is not harmful.

Management

The quarters should always be kept clean and sanitary. Hutches should be cleaned regularly twice a week, oftener if necessary. This may be done without removing the guinea pigs. It is a good plan to fumigate and disinfect the hutches once or twice a year.

The general healthiness of the guinea pigs will be sustained if a uniformly moderate temperature is provided and if the animals are always kept dry.