B. Species-specific provisions for rabbits

1. Introduction

The rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculi*) is a naturally gregarious species. Rabbits should be allowed adequate space and an enriched environment, the denial of which can result in loss of normal locomotor activity and in skeletal abnormalities.

2. The environment and its control

2.1. Ventilation

(See paragraph 2.1. of the General section)

2.2. Temperature

Rabbits should be maintained in a room temperature range of 15°C to 21°C. Local temperatures among groups of rabbits in solid-floored enclosures will often be higher than room temperatures. Nesting material/nest boxes give animals the opportunity to control their own microclimate. Special attention should be paid to the temperature in containment systems.

2.3. Humidity

The relative humidity in rabbit facilities should not be less than 45%.

2.4. Lighting

(See paragraph 2.4. of the General section)

2.5. Noise

(See paragraph 2.5. of the General section)

2.6. Alarm systems

(See paragraph 2.6. of the General section)
3. Health
(See paragraphs 4.1. and 4.4. of the General section)

4. Housing, enrichment and care

4.1. Housing
Young rabbits and female rabbits should be housed in harmonious social groups. Adult entire males may perform territorial behaviour and should not be housed with other entire males. Enriched floor pens have been used with success to house young rabbits and adult female rabbits although groups may need to be carefully managed to avoid aggression. Ideally rabbits for group housing should be littermates that have been kept together since weaning. Where individuals cannot be group-housed, consideration should be given to housing them in close visual contact.

4.2. Enrichment
Suitable enrichment for rabbits includes roughage, hay blocks or chew sticks as well as an area for withdrawal. In floor pens for group housing, visual barriers and structures to offer refuges and encourage look out behaviour should be provided. For breeding does nesting material and a nest box should also be provided.

4.3. Enclosures – dimensions and flooring
It is preferable for enclosures to be rectangular. A raised area should be provided within the enclosure. This raised area should allow the animal to lie and sit and easily move underneath, but should not cover more than 40% of the floor space. While the enclosure height should be sufficient for the rabbit to sit upright without its ears touching the roof of the enclosure, this degree of clearance is not considered necessary for the raised area. If there are good scientific or veterinary reasons for not using a shelf then the enclosure should be 33% larger for a single rabbit and 60% larger for two rabbits. Wherever it is possible, rabbits should be kept in floor pens.

4.3.1. Dimensions
Table B.1. Rabbits over 10 weeks of age: Minimum enclosure dimensions and space allowances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final body weight (kg)</th>
<th>Minimum floor area for one or two socially harmonious animals (cm²)</th>
<th>Minimum height (cm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 3 to 5</td>
<td>4200</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 5</td>
<td>5400</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table is to be used for both cages and pens. In cages a raised area should be provided (see Table B.4.). Pens should contain structures that subdivide the space to allow animals to initiate or avoid social contact. The additional floor area is 3000 cm² per rabbit for the third, the fourth, the fifth and the sixth rabbit, while 2500 cm² should be added for each additional rabbit above a number of six.

Table B.2. Doe plus litter: Minimum enclosure dimensions and space allowances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doe weight (kg)</th>
<th>Minimum enclosure size (cm²)</th>
<th>Addition for nest boxes (cm²)</th>
<th>Minimum height (cm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 3 to 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At least three to four days before giving birth, does should be provided with an extra compartment or a nest box in which they can build a nest. The nest box should preferably be outside the enclosure. Straw or other nesting material should be provided. The enclosure should be designed so that the doe can move to another compartment or raised area away from her kits after they have left the nest. After weaning, the littermates should stay together in their breeding enclosure as long as possible. Up to eight littermates may be kept in the breeding enclosure from weaning until seven weeks old, and five littermates may be kept in the specified minimum enclosure area from eight to ten weeks of age.
Table B.3. Rabbits less than 10 weeks of age: Minimum enclosure dimensions and space allowances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Minimum enclosure size (cm²)</th>
<th>Minimum floor area per animal (cm²)</th>
<th>Minimum height (cm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weaning to 7 weeks</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 7 to 10 weeks</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table is to be used for both cages and pens. Pens should contain structures that subdivide the space to allow animals to initiate or avoid social contact. After weaning, the littermates should stay together in their breeding enclosure as long as possible.

Table B.4. Rabbits: Optima dimensions for raised areas for enclosures having the dimensions indicated in Table B.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in weeks</th>
<th>Final body weight (kg)</th>
<th>Optimum size (cm x cm)</th>
<th>Optimum height from the enclosure floor (cm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 10</td>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td>55 x 25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From 3 to 5</td>
<td>55 x 30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 5</td>
<td>60 x 35</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To allow proper use of the raised area and of the enclosure as a whole the dimensions given above for the raised area size and height are optima, with very close minima and maxima (within 10% of optimum size). If there are scientific or veterinary justifications for not providing a raised area then the floor area should be 33% larger for a single rabbit and 60% larger for two rabbits, to facilitate the rabbit’s locomotor activities and to enhance the opportunity to escape from a more dominant animal. Where a raised area is provided for rabbits of less than 10 weeks of age, the optimum size of the raised area should be 55x25 cm and the height above the floor should be such that the animals can make use of it.

4.3.2. Flooring

Wire floors should not be used without the provision of a resting area large enough to hold all the rabbits at any one time. Solid floors with bedding or perforated floors are preferable to grid or wire mesh floors.
4.4. Feeding
(See paragraph 4.6. of the General section)

4.5. Watering
(See paragraph 4.7. of the General section)

4.6. Substrate, litter, bedding and nesting material
(See paragraph 4.8. of the General section)

4.7. Cleaning
(See paragraph 4.9. of the General section)

4.8. Handling
(See paragraph 4.10. of the General section)

4.9. Humane killing
(See paragraph 4.11. of the General section)

4.10. Records
(See paragraph 4.12. of the General section)

4.11. Identification
(See paragraph 4.13. of the General section)