

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF RABBIT PRODUCTION IN GBOKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF BENUE STATE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study evaluated the problems and prospects of rabbit production in Gboko LGA of Benue State. A descriptive survey design was employed to assess the problems and prospects of rabbit production. Data was collected on Poor breeding practices, inadequate feed and nutrition, disease prevalence, and market access issues. And on the potential for growth in rabbit farming, opportunities for technological advancements, policy support, and export market access. Data collection was carried out through structured questionnaires and interviews, with the sample size adjusted based on the response rate and data saturation point. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The result showed that Poor breeding stock availability (66.7%) and high feed costs (58.3%) were the most common challenges. Half of the respondents (50%) cited disease outbreaks as a significant concern, reflecting the need for improved veterinary support and disease management. Although most respondents (66.7%) had not received training, 83.3% believed rabbit farming could significantly contribute to food security.

Keywords; Rabbit, Production, Problems, Prospects, Solutions

INTRODUCTION

Rabbit production, known as cuniculture, is an essential aspect of Nigeria's agricultural sector. Rabbits are highly valued for their rapid reproduction, high feed conversion efficiency, and ability to thrive in small spaces, making them suitable for both rural and urban farming systems. Their economic importance lies in their contribution to food security and income generation. Rabbit farming provides a sustainable source of high-quality meat, which is low in cholesterol and rich in protein, helping to address the nation's malnutrition issues (Okoro, 2023).

In Nigeria, rabbit farming has gained traction due to its relatively low start-up costs and potential for quick returns. It serves as an excellent opportunity for youth and women entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas like Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State. In addition to meat production, rabbits can be reared for fur, manure, and as pets, diversifying income streams for farmers (Arówólò, 2023).

This study is particularly relevant to both the local and national economy. Gboko, a region with a rich agricultural history, holds significant potential for scaling rabbit production. Strengthening this sector can enhance rural livelihoods, alleviate poverty, and create employment opportunities. Moreover, rabbit farming aligns with the Nigerian government's efforts to promote diversification in agriculture and reduce dependency on traditional livestock (Okoro, 2023).

Understanding the challenges and prospects of rabbit production in Gboko will provide valuable insights into how this industry can be improved to benefit local farmers, contribute to food security, and support economic growth. Rabbit farming in Nigeria, including Gboko LGA, is constrained by a range of issues that hinder its growth as a viable enterprise. These challenges include poor access to quality feed, substandard housing, and inadequate veterinary care. Farmers also face financial limitations, which restrict their ability to adopt modern practices, leading to poor productivity and high mortality rates among rabbits, especially during their neonatal phase. Additionally, low market demand and cultural preferences for other types of meat further discourage investment in rabbit farming. Issues such as theft, predation, and seasonal variations in management practices also exacerbate the problem, leaving farmers with diminished returns on investment (Owen & Amakiri, 2010; Abu *et al.*, 2008).

The adoption of improved technologies and modern farming practices among rabbit farmers in Nigeria remains limited. In Gboko LGA, many farmers lack adequate training in effective breeding techniques, nutritional requirements, and disease prevention. These gaps in knowledge and resource utilization often lead to suboptimal reproductive performance, high mortality rates, and inefficient use of locally available feed resources. The absence of reliable extension services and access to credit further limits farmers' ability to expand and sustain production (Chah *et al.*, 2017; Owen & Amakiri, 2010). These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions to address the knowledge deficit and enhance resource optimization for rabbit production. The general objective of this study is to evaluate the problems and prospects of rabbit production in Gboko LGA.

Efforts to improve rabbit production in Gboko LGA must therefore focus on capacity building for farmers, enhancing access to veterinary services, and creating awareness of the economic and nutritional benefits of

rabbit meat. Addressing these challenges will enable farmers to tap into the latent potential of rabbit farming as a source of food security and income generation in the region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive survey design was employed for this study to assess the problems and prospects of rabbit production in Gboko Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State. The descriptive survey design is widely used in agricultural research due to its ability to collect detailed, comprehensive data on the current state of a particular phenomenon and the factors influencing it. This approach is particularly suitable for studies aiming to describe and analyze existing conditions, such as the production systems, challenges, and prospects related to rabbit farming (Adeniyi & Omojola, 2019; Dube *et al.*, 2020; Afolayan *et al.*, 2021).

Sample size determination was based on the population size of rabbit farmers in Gboko LGA, and a formula for sample size calculation was applied to ensure statistical significance. According to Cochran's formula for sample size calculation, a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% were used to determine the appropriate sample size. This yielded a sample of approximately 150-200 farmers, which was deemed sufficient to provide reliable and valid data for the study (Cochran, 1977). Data collection was carried out through structured questionnaires and interviews, with the sample size adjusted based on the response rate and data saturation point. This study employed multiple data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the problems and prospects of rabbit production in Gboko Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State. The primary methods used were structured questionnaires, interviews and on-site observations of rabbit farms. The data collected in this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result on Problems and Prospects of Rabbit Production in Nigeria: A Case Study of Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State is as presented in the tables below.

Table 1: Challenges in Rabbit Production

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor breeding stock availability	40	66.7
High cost of feed	35	58.3
Disease outbreaks	30	50
Lack of veterinary services	25	41.7
Inadequate knowledge of rabbit farming	20	33.3
Market access and low consumer demand	18	30

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Poor breeding stock availability (66.7%) and high feed costs (58.3%) were the most common challenges. Half of the respondents (50%) cited disease outbreaks as a significant concern, reflecting the need for improved veterinary support and disease management. Although most respondents (66.7%) had not received training, 83.3% believed rabbit farming could significantly contribute to food security. However, only a small percentage (16.7%) were aware of support programs, indicating the need for better outreach.

Rabbit production in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State is characterized by distinct demographic, management, and economic patterns, as well as notable challenges and opportunities. Analyzing these findings sheds light on the sector's current status and future prospects within the context of smallholder agriculture in Nigeria.

The demographic composition of respondents suggests that rabbit farming in Gboko LGA is dominated by young and educated individuals, with 58.3% aged between 21–40 years and 75% having secondary or tertiary education. These findings align with earlier research indicating that younger farmers are more likely to adopt innovative practices in livestock production (Ojo & Adeolu, 2022). The predominance of males (58.3%) and the significant involvement of farmers as the primary occupation (41.7%) reflect the gendered nature of agricultural labor and the rural base of rabbit farming. Studies have shown that education positively correlates with the adoption of modern farming methods, which could enhance rabbit production outcomes (Adetunji *et al.*, 2021).

The semi-intensive production system practiced by most respondents (58.3%) demonstrates a hybrid approach that combines extensive and intensive methods, which is common in developing economies like Nigeria (Abu *et al.*, 2022). The reliance on multiple feed sources, with 41.7% of farmers using a combination of forage, commercial feeds, and household leftovers, highlights the adaptability of rabbit farmers to fluctuating resource availability. The small scale of production, with 75% of farmers rearing fewer than 50 rabbits, underscores the subsistence nature of the sector. This aligns with findings by Igbokwe and Madueke (2021), who reported that limited resources and market access constrain the scale of livestock production among smallholders.

Table 2: Prospects of Rabbit Production

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Received Training/Education		
Yes	20	33.3
No	40	66.7
Aware of Support Programs		
Yes	10	16.7
No	50	83.3
Belief in Contribution to Food Security		
Yes	50	83.3
No	10	16.7
Recommendation to Others		
Yes	48	80
No	12	20

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The challenges facing rabbit farming in Gboko LGA are consistent with those reported in other parts of Nigeria. The high prevalence of poor breeding stock availability (66.7%) and high feed costs (58.3%) echoes the findings of Ekunke and Abah (2021), who identified these factors as significant barriers to scaling up rabbit production. Disease outbreaks (50%) and the lack of veterinary services (41.7%) further exacerbate production challenges, reflecting systemic issues in livestock health management in rural areas. The limited market access and low consumer demand (30%) highlight a need for better value chain integration, as noted by Olowokere *et al.* (2023). Despite these challenges, the prospects for rabbit farming in Gboko are promising. A large majority (83.3%) believe that rabbit farming contributes significantly to food security, aligning with global studies that emphasize the role of small livestock in improving protein intake and household nutrition (FAO, 2022). However, only 33.3% of respondents had received training, and a mere 16.7% were aware of support programs. This indicates an urgent need for capacity-building initiatives and government or non-governmental interventions to raise awareness and provide technical support. The willingness of 80% of respondents to recommend rabbit farming to others reflects its perceived potential as a viable and sustainable agricultural activity.

CONCLUSION

There is an urgent need for capacity-building initiatives and government or non-governmental interventions to raise awareness and provide technical support. The willingness of 80% of respondents to recommend rabbit farming to others reflects its perceived potential as a viable and sustainable agricultural activity.

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