

RABBIT PRODUCTION IN GREECE: THE MOST COMMON DISEASES

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Introduction

The continuous consumers' demand for rabbit meat made the need for further investigation of this sector of greek livestock production crucial regarding its size, and mainly concerning the pathological situations that it deals with. Thus, it becomes possible to achieve the first steps for the assurance of the production of enhanced hygienic quality rabbit meat which will fulfill the consumers' demands, while it will also contribute to the improvement of the greek rabbit production (3).

During the last 6 years, there has been an attempt from the Clinic of Productive Animal Medicine to specify the major diseases, which occur in the intensive greek rabbit production.

The most common diseases in Greek rabbitries

From this study it was found that most common are the diseases of the digestive system, especially enteritis and coccidiosis, followed by respiratory system diseases such as pasterellosis. The occurrence of parasitic dermatoses, in most of the cases due to mites, is also high, while neurological and neuromuscular disorders are quite common. Other diseases, due to various causative agents were observed, but in a very low incidence (Figure 1).

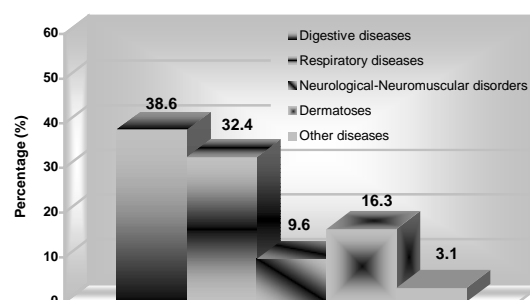
The majority of the greek rabbitries suffer from the chronic form of pasterellosis which results in large economic losses. Various clinical signs observed such as anorexia and therefore in weight loss, cases of pneumonia and pleuritis, as well as reproductive disorders led to negative effect in the productive parameters. The lack of application of on farm biosecurity measures such as improper quarantine procedures for the incoming new animals in the farm leads to the introduction of pasterellosis in naïve farms or to the entry of new strains of *Pasteurella multocida* in already infected farms.

The different types of parasitic dermatoses caused by various parasites consist a widespread pathological finding in almost all greek rabbitries. Especially ear mites (*Psoroptes cuniculi*) seem to have the largest occurrence, followed by sarcoptic mites (*Sarcoptes scabiei var. cuniculi*) infection. Nevertheless low incidence of Demodex mites (*Demodex cuniculi*) and fur mites (*Cheyletiella parasitovorax*) can be observed. The above-mentioned dermatoses were usually observed in overpopulated rabbitries with lack of appropriate disinfection and parasite control programmes.

The most common digestive disorders referred to coccidiosis, «enteritis complex» and particularly the mucoid enteropathy, as well as in a lower incidence the Tyzzer's disease. The digestive diseases had a negative impact on farm productivity, especially when inappropriate housing conditions and dietary programme coexisted.

The main incidence of neurological and neuromuscular disorders referred to torticollis and paresis/paralysis. The most frequent cause of torticollis was otitis media/interna caused by *Pasteurella multocida* and *Staphylococcus* spp. Mainly, the cases of paresis/paralysis occurred due to spinal trauma and "splay leg" (especially in young rabbits up to few months of age).

Figure 1: Most common diseases of rabbits in Greek rabbitries for the period 1998 - June 2004



Furthermore, since there is no real implementation of a proper on farm veterinary management programme in greek rabbitries (under full supervision and responsibility of the farm veterinarian), this resulted in the appearance of several health disorders due to unsuitable housing conditions (e.g. temperature, humidity, inappropriate ventilation systems, pen density), nutritional deficiencies and injudicious use of veterinary pharmaceutical preparations (1, 2). Moreover, the improper attempts in the reproduction and genetics section led to the decline of the productivity rates and the health status of the animals.

References

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