

RABBIT PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION IN HUNGARY

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The aim of the study was to get information about the Hungarian rabbit production tendencies, and meat consumption habits of consumers. Data were collected from statistical databases, from producers' organisation and by questionnaires. Production level has a cyclic pattern, profitability of production seems to decrease. Slaughterhouses fit to European regulation. Traceability of the rabbits is more and more important. A lot of people can not make difference between rabbit and hare, so our first task was to make clear the difference between the two species. People buy living animals, whole carcasses or looking for different parts of the rabbit. The consumers from cities would like to buy semi-finished or ready-made products. The culture of rabbit meat cooking in Hungarian cuisine is very poor. The most important traits of the meat are the quality, freshness and price.

Key words: rabbit, meat production, meat consumption, marketing

Hungary is at the 10th place in the rabbit meat production (8,000 tons in 2005). Since 97% of slaughtered rabbits are exported and Hungary is at the 2nd-3rd place in the rabbit meat export, that is why the continuous estimation of available and potential markets are essential (Szendrő and Szendrő, 2008). Hungary is about at the 10th place among countries that produce rabbit meat; although the amount of the production which is only 1% of the world's production does not seem to be important, but it is determinant in the export (Kling, 2007) Hungary is one of the greatest rabbit meat exporters (Szendrő, 2004). The ratio of the export is 96-97% so the home consumption is only 3-4% (Kling, 2008).

The aim of the study was to demonstrate the tendencies in Hungarian domestic rabbit production and gathering information is about the consumers' opinion about the rabbit meat.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Changes in Hungarian rabbit production were analysed since 1990. Data were collected from statistical databases, from producers' organisation and by questionnaires. The rabbit meat consumption was calculated by the difference of the carcass weight of the slaughtered rabbits and the weight of the exported rabbit meat.

In order to obtain the information a survey of questionnaire was designed and carried out. The questionnaire with 19 questions was aimed at knowing the traits of the involved population, and the rabbit meat consumption patterns in Hungary.

The questions focused on the following areas:

- personal information about sample (sex, age, living place);
- connection with rabbit production);
- opinion about rabbit meat consumption (causes of rejection);
- opinion about rabbit meat;
- frequency of consumption;
- places of purchasing rabbit;
- form of purchasing rabbit;
- opinion about prices;
- information about cooking recipes;
- effects which can increase consumption frequency.

The survey was applied in Budapest and all over in Hungary (except Budapest) as study areas. The selection of the interviewees was random. Sample size was established in 1274 surveys (Budapest n=543, countryside n=731).

Data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistic (central tendency and dispersion measures). Results were expressed as proportions and percentages of the analyzed sample with SPSS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The structure of rabbit production units went through on an important changing. The number of small scale farms decreased drastically. The main reasons were: the variable price of rabbit, reduction of direct payments for farmers, increasing prices of concentrates, new quality, environmental and animal welfare requirements.

The evaluation of production data demonstrated the following:

- The production level of living animals shows a categorical cyclic pattern with a three years long periodicity in average, which is very similar to the pig production cycle (*figure 1*).

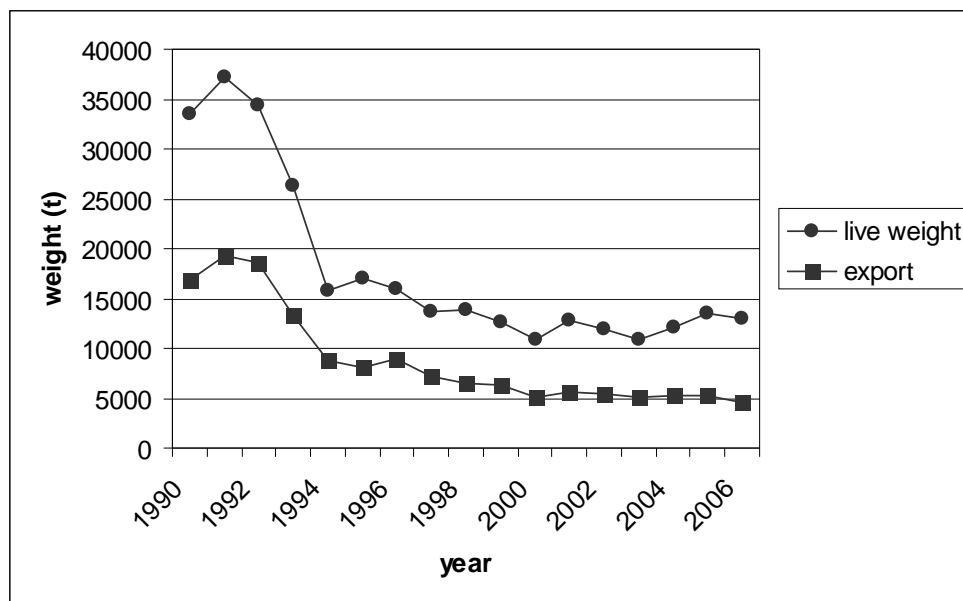


Figure 1 The quantity of living rabbit production and export in Hungary

Results of interviews and questionnaires

We noticed that the interviewees often can not make difference between rabbit and hare, so our first task was to make clear the difference, because the meat quality alter between the two species.

Those who themselves are rabbit breeders or have a direct and close connection with producers are living in the suburban areas of the capital. The rabbit breeders have a regular self-consumption, and they sell living animals and carcasses to friends, neighbours and also for local markets (3% eat rabbit meat every week). 75% of the asked population has already tasted rabbit meat, in the opinion 76% of them it is healthy and it has the same character as the poultry meat has, but 70% of them eat it only one or two times a year. One third part of the people buy living animals or the whole carcasses (8% and 26%) and 46% is looking for different parts of the rabbit. 66% of the consumers would like to buy semi-finished or ready-made products. The sample population does not trust in the supermarkets, only 7% of them buy rabbit there, less than the rate of producers' self consumption (8%). Most of the consumers buy rabbit from producers (48%).

The culture of rabbit meat cooking is very poor in Hungary, only 14% of the people could list more than 2 rabbit recipes. Discussing with the people about the causes of rejection of rabbit meat consumption, we found that from those people who have a negative attitude to rabbit meat only the vegetarians and/or who refuse consumption due to emotional reasons reject so strongly that there is no way to convince them. It seems that better distribution and more information about rabbit meat, and all this combined with introductory price reduction can be effective in the changing of people's attitude.

In most questions there is no difference in the opinion of people living in the capital or in the countryside. Outstanding the difference in the preference of buying living rabbit (Country: 42% vs. Budapest: 11%). Most of the consumers buy rabbit directly from farmer (70%), and unsatisfied with the distribution of rabbit meat in supermarkets. 46% of the interviewees found the rabbit meat too expensive in the shops, and buy it only one or two times a year. The fact that farmers self consumption is high suggests that the frequent rabbit meat consumption among them a social necessity too.

CONCLUSIONS

In the last 15 years the total rabbit production was reduced to less than half of the former production level. The sale of carcasses decreased with the parallel increasing of processed rabbit products. Data of rabbit production demonstrate cycles with 3 years periods. The weak points of the rabbit production are the following: the traceability of rabbits from stable to table, and the quality management of the small household farming plots.

The national consumption seems to be higher than it is in the statistics. More than 1/3 part of the sample population eat rabbit meat, but most of them buy it only 1-2 times a year directly from the producer (the meat is always fresh, and the price is cheaper than in the supermarkets).

People need better information about rabbit meat and about the ways of processing (recipes) and the increasing of domestic production seem to be accessible. The marketing work can be ineffective only among the vegetarians and those who reject consumption due to emotional reasons.

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