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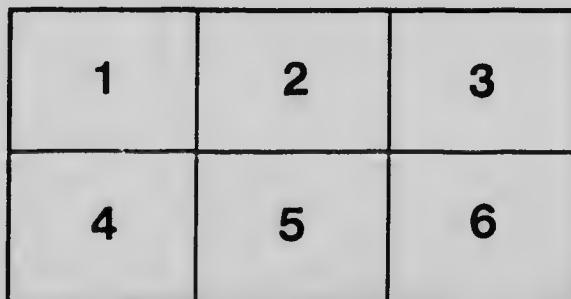
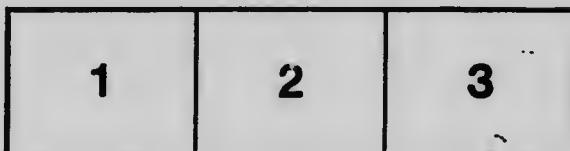
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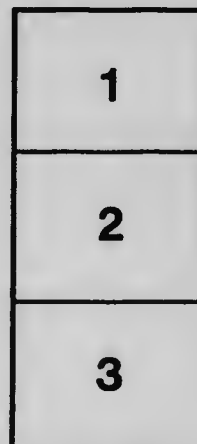
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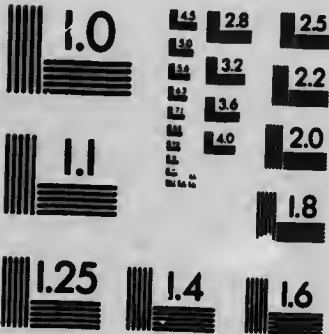
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BULLETIN No. 47

RABBIT RAISING

*Under present conditions, the rabbit is the most
paying animal for the food it consumes.*

EDOUARD du SOL



Fine pair of Canadian "Jeannots"

Published by order of the Hon. J. Ed. Caron, Minister of Agriculture

— 1918 —

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BY

J. ED. BELANGER

INTRODUCTION

When publishing the first edition of this booklet on rabbit raising we were far from foreseeing the beneficent effect it would have on our domestic economy.

The first issue of five thousand copies was soon exhausted.

We now offer a second edition, considerably enlarged to those who have grasped the opportuneness of rabbit raising.

J. Ed. Bélanger.

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THE RABBIT

ORIGIN AND OPPORTUNENESS OF ITS INTRODUCTION INTO CANADA

The rabbit, a multiparous, herbivorous and rodent mammal of the *lepus* genus, belongs to the caniculus family. A native of warm countries (Egypt, China, Greece), it was domesticated in the earliest ages. It was introduced into France in the thirteenth century and thenceforth its raising became popular throughout Europe. Before the war, Belgium and Holland used to export nearly four hundred thousand rabbits a week to the markets of London, England.

In Canada, it is only within late years that certain breeders have made a success of rabbit raising from imported stock. However, the difficulties of our present circumstances threatening us with great scarcity of animals for slaughter, have given such an impetus to the spread of rabbit raising in this country that it seems destined to play an important part in the serious problem of food production.

True, the farmer absorbed with his extensive cultivation, will hardly be interested in this second-rate industry. Critics will even go the length of blaming us for giving such prominence to a common rodent like the rabbit.

Still, in view of the astonishing increase in the number of persons interested in rabbit raising;

In view of the evidence of breeders who all consider the rabbit as the animal who best assimilates food,

In view of the large export of breeding animals which will be required to replace thousands of live stock destroyed by the war ;

In view of the ease with which all people of leisure, both ladies and gentlemen, can contribute to increase the production of one of the most wholesome animal foods, while amusing themselves ;

In view also of the scarcity in farm labour, we do not hesitate to urge all people who can do so to undertake rabbit raising.

Gentle, prolific, developing quickly, furnishing excellent meat, and catering to a variety of industries, the rabbit is moreover the flesh producer that can be most economically fed in cities and especially in country places. Then again, the initial outlay of rabbit raising is a mere trifle. A pair of breeders costs from \$3.00 to \$4.00 and their installation is not expensive.

We refer our readers to the chapters headed "Food" and "Housing."

DOMESTIC AND INDUSTRIAL RAISING

Rabbit raising procures a threefold source of income :

A) Its flesh, which is much appreciated in large centres, is the industrious breeder's best investment. Canadians seem to take to it and several butchers find that it sells well.

B). Its skin is especially used in making fur garments, such as ladies mantles and muffs, automobile robes, glove lining, etc. It produces very fine boot and glove leather, and also a good imitation of seal skins and other furs which have become too rare.

C). Its hair enters into the manufacture of light felt hats, also of cloth goods, hosiery and other articles of a delicate, soft and warm texture.

CHOICE OF BREEDS

This is a stumbling-block for most beginners. To begin without a definite object in view, purchasing rabbits for flesh, fur or hair production indiscriminately in order to start breeding, is to lose both time and money. Hence, we shall set down the principal breeds according to the nature of their produce.

For the market.—The Flanders Giant. Average weight, 10 to 15 lbs; colour, hare colour or grey; flesh, middling; fur, lacking in density.

The French Norman. Average weight, 6 to 7 lbs; colour, grey; flesh, delicate; hair, close and silky.

The Belgian Hare and the Ram are better suited for amateurs.

For the fur.—The Canadian: Average weight, 5 to 6 lbs; colour, white, black or silvery; flesh, of good quality fur, very close, much appreciated by

furriers. This is the name of our common rabbit, better acclimatized than imported breeds.

The Siberian.—Middling size; white colour, tips of feet and nose black. Eyes pink or almost red. Its fur is a fair imitation of the ermine when prepared by specialists.

The Russian, the Angora, the Blue or the Silvery also offer a large choice of varieties.

For the hair.— Foremost is the Angora. Colour, generally white; flesh, rather tough; eyes almost red. The hair is plucked every two or three months.

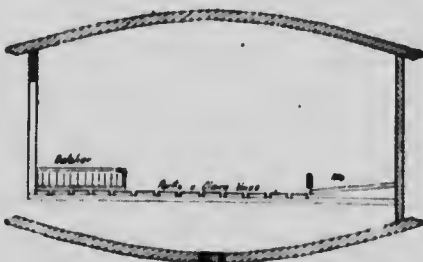
We would have wished to illustrate this rather short description of the principal rabbit breeds known here under their most popular European names. But variations in shade and shape are so easily obtained through cross-breeding that the breeder could hardly rely on photographs, however typical they might be.

HOUSING

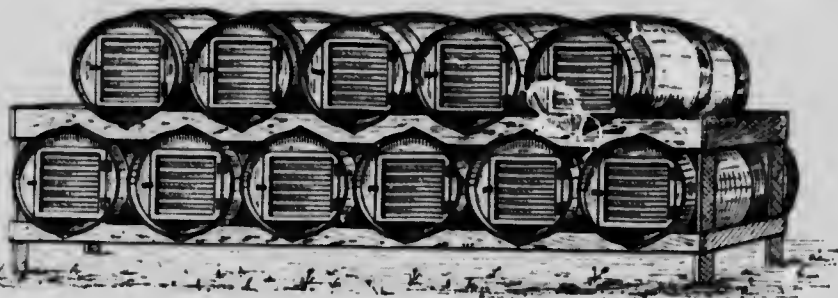
The rabbit is housed cheaply, in a yard, a garret, a box, a cask or a hutch.



Front view



Sectional view



Casks arranged in tiers in such a way as to drain urine through the bung-holes. The doors are in hard wood or wire netting.

It is essential that it be kept dry, for dampness is always fatal. An open-work flooring with the underpart gently sloping down best answers the purpose. This arrangement allows of cleaning with a hook or some other implement without disturbing the occupants. The casks are arranged in two tiers in such a way as to drain the urine through the bung-holes. It is best to face the casks towards the rising sun. The warren requires a heavier outlay. The fences in close wire netting must be four feet high and sunk two feet into the ground. Without this precaution the rabbits would soon cause mischief in orchards and other places where it would be difficult to get at them alive.

During hot summer days, they should be kept in the shade, especially when with young. Female rabbit hutches should be four (4) feet deep by three (3) feet wide and two (2) feet high. They should always be disposed so that the inmates may see their keeper coming.

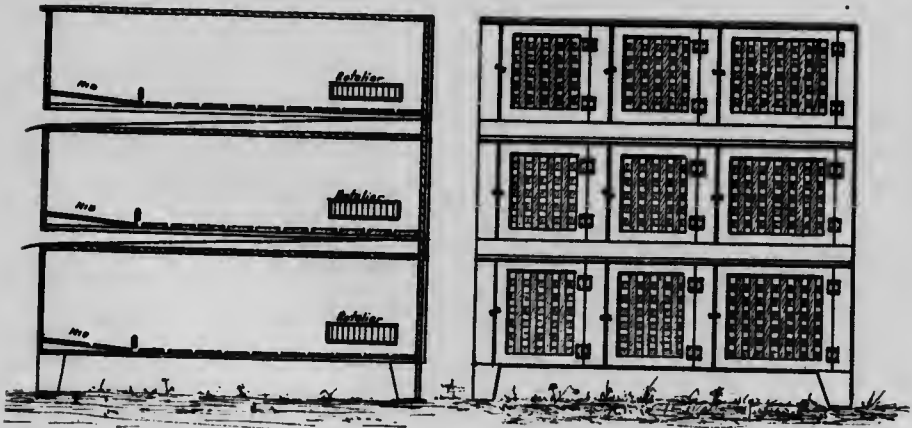
Hutches for market rabbits should be two feet and a half ($2\frac{1}{2}$) high.



Floor of the hutch
A—Close boarded section with a gentle slope.
B—Open-work section.



NEST



MODERN HUTCH

Front and sectional views of hutches showing the open-work floor, the racks and the gently sloping nest.

Some breeders prefer to place fattening rabbits on shelves or boards fastened at a height of 5 or 6 feet, against a wall. This method is advisable only towards the end of the fattening process.

Hutches for breeding males should be four (4) feet deep by two feet and a half (2½) in height and width. They should as much as possible be kept at a distance from the hutches for females. An exception may be made for Angora males who can be left with the females.

In the case of young rabbits, larger-sized hutches may be used, but we do not advise putting more than 20 or 25 together, when they are more than 8 to 10 weeks old. Eight to ten young rabbits may live in the same cask.

No hutch or cask should be too near the ground; an elevation of a foot and a half is not too much.

At the approach of winter the breeding hutches or casks are transferred to a well aired spot, not too cold, dry and thoroughly lighted; a modern hen-house, a barn loft or a shed.

Breeders who keep their rabbits in warrens or in fixed enclosures prefer to move them into lofts or other buildings where they are properly fenced off with close wire netting. Needless to say that no less cleanliness and care are required in the latter instance than when the rabbits are kept in boxes or casks.

FOOD

Nothing is simpler than rabbit feeding. Besides field, lawn and park grass, they should be given various vegetables, kernel fruit, grain, twigs, weeds and other more or less valuable debris. They even eat some kinds of animal food.

Hence it is easy to vary their meals by treating them alternately to meadow grass (never wet), timothy, clover, alfalfa, etc., and to vegetables and grain. Variety in food is an important factor.

Rations must be calculated according to the age, size and number of rabbits. They should be fed morning and evening, but a light midday meal of choice food (aromatic plants) may be given to them with advantage. The most abundant meal should always be in the evening.

Freshly cut grass should never be exposed to the heat of the sun and still less piled up in heaps. This causes fermentation, which deteriorates the fodder and is injurious to the health of the rabbits.

Watery food, such as salads, cabbage leaves and potato peels are equally dangerous if too often and too liberally given.

Certain plants, like aniseed savory, parsley, turkey-weed stimulate the rabbit's appetite, improve the taste of its flesh and at the same time act as invigorating tonics. They should be given preferably at the midday meal.

Now and then, it would be well to throw a few pinches of fine salt or a few drops of weak brine on their dry fodder, or to mix a little wheat bran with their rations of green or cooked vegetables.

The rabbit seems to delight in soiling and trampling down the remains of its meals. It is important therefore not to give too much at a time and always to place fodder in a rack and grain in a trough.

A middle-sized rabbits consumes about one third of its weight in green fodder a day.

If the rations are properly balanced and varied, a breeder who is at all skilful can easily make a profit averaging from one third to one half the price of sale.

When rabbits get nothing but dry fodder, dry twigs or leaves for a long time, it is advisable to put a little water in their way. Water is also required for females about to bring forth and the latter should also be more abundantly fed.

BREEDING

The female rabbit's gestation lasts from 29 to 31 days. The best mothers bring forth 6 to 7 young five or six times a year. Others bring forth from two to ten irregularly. At the time of littering, there must be the most absolute quiet around the hutch. To avoid accidents, it is wise also to put some tempting vegetables and water mixed with a little milk in the rabbit's hutch.

Young rabbits are born with closed eyes and almost hairless. At the end of 10 days, their eyes open and another week must go by before they leave their nest to disport themselves.

If their eyes happen not to be open on the fifteenth day, it will be well to open them by bathing them in warm water.

Sun baths are as wholesome for them as exercise.

To make a big litter and a small one equal, advantage should be taken of the mother's absence to quietly slip under her own young those it is desired to make her adopt.

The female generally makes her nest at the back of the hutch. Hence we suggest placing there an overturned box with an opening in the centre, about two inches from the floor. The opening thus situated will prevent the mother from dragging her young out of the nest, should she be frightened by some noise around the hutch; for she never carries her young about like the cat. She would let them die of cold or hunger. Some breeders think it enough to throw a cloth over two thirds of the hutch opening towards the twenty seventh day of gestation. In any case, it is necessary to clean the hutch thoroughly before the rabbits bring forth and to cover the floor with a good litter of chopped straw.

Rabbits should be weaned when from 4 to 5 weeks old. In certain cases, it is good to wean the more vigorous ones first, leaving the weaker ones with their mothers 6 to 8 days more. It is also generally found to be an advantage to accustom the young to eat with their mothers before taking them away. They cut their first teeth about the seventh day.

During the first few days after being separated from their mothers, the young rabbits should receive a mixture of milk and water and begin at once to eat varied food.

The young ones of the same age and sex should be placed in a warm hut abundantly provided with dry litter. They are considered adults when about 6 to 8 months old. This is the age to choose good breeders which are put aside for breeding purposes. In the case of large breeds, it is often preferable to wait till they are 7 to 8 months old before using them for breeding.

Sexes must be separated as soon as the rabbits reach the age of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 months, the right time also for castrating males unfit for breeding.

A vigorous buck rabbit or breeding male is sufficient for from 10 to 12 females. Never put bucks together in the same hutch.

The castrated rabbit fattens more rapidly and its flesh is more savoury. Needless to enter into the details of castration. The operation is very simple and the breeder merely has to follow the chief points to be observed in the case of other small farm animals.

As soon as the female upsets her litter, loses her appetite, etc., she must be carried without delay into the buck's hutch, but not the buck into the female's, for the latter is always more timid.

Never more than two females should be put to the same buck in one week, and it is wise not to let them cohabit uselessly. Immediately after coupling, which may be ascertained by a little scream from the buck or by his collapsing, the mother must be returned to her little ones, so that she may not cease recognizing them.

It is always better to await the end of the suck'ing period before once more putting the female with the buck.

Large does or female rabbits may be carried in a deep basket without the slightest drawback. To take them by the ears is to risk killing them.

The rabbit is lifted like the cat, by grasping the lower part of the neck near the top of the shoulders. The rabbit is thus carried without injury, without danger of getting scratched and without risk of dislocating its spine or swelling its ears and the nape of its neck.

Breeders have often noticed that rabbits are less disposed to breed during

summer heat; hence it is important to keep them preferably in a cool or sufficiently shady place during this season.

Good breeders (male and female) should be kept till the age of 4 or 5 years. The others may be killed from the ages of 7 to 8 months.

The practice of selecting animals most closely resembling the ideal type, especially for males, cleanliness of hutches and keeping litters always dry, are fundamental conditions for success in rabbit raising.

When a doe litters for the first time her nest must not be visited till the third or fourth day after littering, for the slightest disturbance or handling of the little ones might irritate the young mother.

To ascertain a rabbit's age requires a certain amount of practice or at least great attention. The inspection of the eyes, especially the eyelids more or less folded, quick movements, the length of the more or less curved claws, the development of the growth, are all useful points to go by.

KILLING

The rabbit is hung up by the hind legs. While with the left hand the ears are moved aside, with a mallet in the right it is struck on the nape of the neck between the ears. There is another much more simple way. The animal is grasped in one hand by the hind legs and with the other it is struck a moderate blow downward on the nape of the neck. In both cases death is almost instantaneous. Some people bleed the rabbit by driving a knife into its throat, in the direction of the heart, others pluck out an eye.

In order to clear the bladder of stale urine, which would give a bad smell to the flesh of rabbits destined to be sent whole to the market, rather strong pressure is exerted on the lower part of the belly.

SKINNING

After being killed and before cooling, the rabbit is tied by the hind legs, if this has not already been done, and hung to a nail. A side cut is made from the inside of the right to the inside of the left leg passing by the anus, then the skin of the thighs is drawn down as far as the head. In the toughest places, it may be loosened with a few light cuts.

The rabbit is dipped into cold water for about ten minutes to clean its flesh, while the skin is rolled on a board so that the back will be slightly stretched.

DRESSING AND PRESERVATION OF SKINS

Alum process (sulfate of aluminum)

The skins (3 or 4) are allowed to soak in fresh water for 24 hours, then stretched over a convex surface and bits of flesh removed by scraping with a large blunt knife. They are then soaked for 48 hours and occasionally stirred in a lukewarm bath composed of a gallon of water, 1 pound of alum and 8 ounces of coarse salt. They are spread out in the shade on frames or boards, then stretched in every direction as soon as they are half dry. For greater security the latter part of the operation is repeated by soaking them again in a bath for another day before letting them dry.

When the hair is still somewhat oily, the skin is spread out with the hair underneath, sprinkled with bran, sifted wood ashes or plaster, covered with a sheet of thick paper and rolled up. It is then pressed down and lightly beaten. The skins are then ready for use.

Another alum process consists in using a mixture of half a pound of powdered alum per pound of barley flour.

The skins are cleaned, scraped and gently wiped on the tanning side. The mixture is spread on the fleshy side about half an inch thick and the skins are thus rolled up to remain in a dry and cool place for eight to ten days. Fermentation tans the skin.

On the tenth day the preparation is removed and the skins are spread out in the shade, so that they may dry, neither too quickly nor too slowly. As they dry they are stretched out by being pulled in every direction and rubbed between the hands.

The hair drying process is always the same. The hair is given its natural direction by combing and shaking the skins, which are then piled up with hairy sides facing each other.

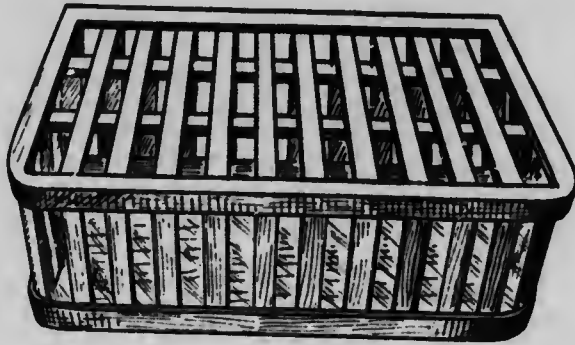
Sumac Process

"The skins should be carefully cleansed of the remains of blood and flesh with soap, water and scraper; then stretched on a board with the hair underneath; pricked with a needle in many places to insure the soaking in of a strong decoction of dried and ground curriers' sumac leaves, which is vigorously rubbed over the skin by means of a linen pad. It is then washed in water and dried in the shade. This operation is repeated three or four times. The dry skin is unfastened and rubbed between the hands to restore its pliancy." *Le Cosmos*.

MARKETS

In visiting our principal city markets it is observed that the meat consumer is always ready for the producer.

The rabbit already holds a more considerable place than would be thought in our commerce and diet. Hence the breeder generally secures good prices from butchers, cooperative societies and other meat dealers, especially in the sale of live rabbits. It is not unusual to realize a profit equal to half the price of sale.



Basket for carrying breeding or market rabbits.

The principal fur merchants and manufacturers are more and more on the lookout for well dressed rabbit skins. With the exception of the skins of rabbits killed in moulting time, late autumn or winter skins take the highest prices. At present they are worth 30 to 75 cents.

As for Angora rabbit skins, we hardly know of any purchasers, since their breeding is very little spread in this country. However hat and wool manufacturers would willingly buy this product which is already utilized in the manufacture of gloves, scarfs and fancy shawls.

There never has been a more favourable time for the sale of pure-bred rabbits for breeding purposes. Many are the beginners who are imposed upon and pay exorbitant prices for animals of little value. As far as meat production is concerned, there is scarcely more profit to be derived from over expensive breeding rabbits.

Leaving aside connoisseurs whose ambition is rewarded by certain specialists in the raising of exhibition animals, sold at from \$10.00 to \$25.00 a pair, we would not advise a beginner to start raising rabbits for the market with such heavy disbursements. A good pair of rabbits should be purchased for three or four dollars.

DISEASES OF RABBITS

Rabbits like to be kept dry. Better not keep any than to expose them to dampness.

Rabbits, like most farm yard animals, are always more easily preserved from disease than cared for once they are stricken.

Dampness in hutches and litters, lack of fresh air, dirtiness, consanguinity in breeding, failure to vary diet are practically the only causes of disease among rabbits.

Dropsy

SYMPTOMS.—A soft tumor appears on the neck, then diminishes to reappear again. The belly grows more voluminous and the hair stands on end.

TREATMENT.—Give a few meals of wheat or a mixture of wheat bran, buckwheat flour and powdered resin, 1 in 10. The seeds and twigs of the juniper-tree or of the dried willow also have their place in the troughs of rabbits suffering from dropsy or "big belly."

Scabby ears

SYMPTOMS.—A kind of scab develops in the inside of the ears or rather a white liquid hardens in foul-smelling crusts. The ears are drooping.

TREATMENT.—Apply in the ears as deeply as possible an ointment prepared as follows: Mix together one (1) spoonful of castor oil, two (2) spoonfuls of sublimated sulphur and four (4) spoonfuls of lard. This mixture should be lukewarm and held in the ear by means of a wadding pad. The ears should be washed with boracic water every second day and applications of the mixture repeated till complete cure. The hutches should be scoured with boiling water.

Sore eyes

SYMPTOMS.—The eyes are almost completely closed. The lids are covered with little reddish pimples.

TREATMENT.—Wash the affected parts with very weak brine containing about 15 grammes of acetate of lead per quart of liquid.

Constipation

SYMPTOMS.—The dejections become hard, dry, shiny and are expelled with more and more difficulty. There is usually irritation of the urinary ducts and loss of appetite.

TREATMENT.—Give green food, cabbage leaves, etc. Throw a little salt and sulphate of soda (baking soda) in their water, or make them swallow one two teaspoonfuls of castor oil.

Diarrhoea

SYMPTOMS.—The stools are soft and dirty the hair which becomes bristling. The urine is darker.

TREATMENT.—Diminish the rations. Give only dry and heating food. Oats and wheat bran are very effectual. Administer a castor oil purgative, if necessary.

Eczema, scurf and sores

SYMPTOMS.—The hair falls off certain parts of the body or there appear floury matter and little scales at the roots of the hair.

TREATMENT.—Scrape these spots and smear them with a mixture of iodine and glycerine, in equal parts.

Bloat

SYMPTOMS.—Rapid swelling of the belly and prostration.

TREATMENT.—Administer a castor oil purgative, one to two spoonfuls. Do not give badly dried or wet grass and diminish the rations during a few days.

Convulsions and paralysis

SYMPTOMS.—These diseases are more prevalent among young rabbits, during or after the moulting crisis, that is, between the age of 30 and 45 days. Stricken animals grow thin rapidly, are depressed and without appetite.

TREATMENT.—Give a better diet comprising wheat bran, boiled oats, carrots. Mix a little salt and ground camphor, a pinch at each meal.

Lice and fleas

Their presence in hutches is generally caused by uncleanness. Prevention is therefore within every body's reach. Certain little acarids find their way into rabbit hutches with the leaves of beans or other plants. It is sufficient to inspect them, especially during the months of August and September.

TREATMENT.—Blow pyrethrin powder (phenolated if possible) into the hair of the infested animals. The same effect is obtained with a naphthaline powder. The inside of hutches must always be lime-washed or scalded, the litters changed, etc.

It is always advantageous to segregate animals affected by any disease from those that are not. Contagion is thus avoided and it is always less expensive to sacrifice one or two rabbits than to risk losing the whole.

SOME COOKING RECIPES

As for the rabbit appreciated in France, so delicious, so economical, there never has been any question of it here. We are perhaps the civilized nation which eats least white meat.

Dr AURELE NADRAU

Since rabbit meat seems likely to enter more and more into our diet, it may interest our housekeepers to have a few appropriate recipes.

Fried rabbit

Melt some butter in a frying-pan and drop in slices of rabbit, which are turned over in adding a little flour. It is seasoned with chopped parsley, sliced onion, pepper and salt to suit the taste.

Rabbit stewed in daube

Cut the rabbit in pieces which are mixed with small bits of salt pork or slices of ham. Season with a little pepper, salt and cloves and stew slowly in a closed stew-pan.

Jugged rabbit (civet)

After skinning, sprinkle the rabbit with vinegar and let it cool for a few hours. Cut it up after washing it, then add some pieces of salt pork and vegetables and stew, keeping covered with water. Season to taste. Serve with brown sauce.

Rabbit pie

Chop or merely cut the meat in pieces. Season to taste with pepper, salt, cloves, then cook well. The meat is then put between two thin layers of paste and baked again for a few minutes in an oven or ordinary stove.

Rabbit pie is very nourishing, very economical and excellent to eat.

A just appreciation

Taken from Miss Amélie DesRoches' famous book on Hygiene in Diet.

"The poor domestic rabbit has been much slandered and is still belittled in some places. But the day of doing justice is come for this innocent creature outra-

geously called " cabbage rabbit " and, as in the case of all things long ignored, truth shines forth at last.

The disagreeable taste, peculiar to certain rabbits, is due to the dirtiness of the place they are kept in and to the bad food given to them.

Dirt is to a rabbit what a badly kept coop is to a chicken. Give each one its due. If justice is slow, at least let it be complete.

A well fattened and well dressed rabbit is an excellent dish, and furnishes the greatest cooking resources: it advantageously replaces veal in several preparations, especially when the latter is scarce.

The rabbit is better in winter than in summer, and to be relished in all its delicacy, it must be taken young and fat. It is most savoury between seven and eight months. It is either bled or stunned. When it is to be cooked *au blanc*, it must be bled. A knife is stuck into its throat, reaching the heart, and death is immediate.

When it is to be jugged, stewed with cabbage or otherwise it is better to kill it with a blow. For this purpose it is hung up by the hind legs; with the left hand, the ears are moved aside while with a wooden mallet in the right hand it is struck a sharp blow between the ears on the nape of the neck. It is skinned and soaked for ten to twelve hours in cold water.

The rabbit requires to be well cooked: an hour and a half to two hours, whatever be the way it is to be cooked."

"Rabbits are being raised this year on a large scale on the Pacific coast. About 4,000 people are now engaged in that line of breeding. There is no reason why this example should not be followed in Canada, since rabbit raising is easy, cheap and profitable."

Canadian Food Bulletin, July 1918.

"The domestic rabbit is raised both for its white and savoury meat and for its fur. Its raising should be more popular in our Canadian farms."

"Nothing thrives more easily than these gentle and prolific animals. Their light, wholesome and nutritious flesh is admirably suited to all and might become one of the staples in the ordinary family diet."

VICTOR FORTIER,

Poultry Department

Experimental Farm, Ottawa.



Model arrangement for raising rabbits in a state of partial freedom. The hutch is placed in the shade, under thick foliage.

