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Drivers of Commercial Rabbit Production for Nutritional Diversity in Kenya

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Abstract

Rapid population growth and declining land sizes in developing countries have necessitated innovative shifts in enterprise mix towards more intensive farming systems that can adequately support agrarian livelihoods. Emerging small livestock such as rabbit that require less land are considered more viable enterprises in land constrained systems. The ability of rabbits to be produced in small land parcels ensures production even in declining land sizes. Rabbit meat has diverse nutritional benefits. However, rabbit production in Kenya is largely on small informal scale and mostly done as a hobby by youth in rural remote areas; where food and nutritional insecurity are surprisingly critical challenges. Further, commercial rabbit production has lowly been adopted in few urban and peri-urban areas. Thus, there is need to focus on factors that support and or inhibit smallholder farmers to commercially produce rabbits so as to be able to make comprehensive policy decisions.

This study assessed the determinants of smallholder farmers' decisions to rear rabbit for commercial purposes, as a pathway for nutritional diversity and food security through improved access to other dietary components in Kiambu County, Kenya. Primary survey data from a random sample of 70 rabbit farmers was analysed using the probit regression model. Results showed that possession of formal education, access to credit and specialised farming experience were the key motivating factors on farmers' decisions to engage in commercial rabbit production. Interventions that support up scaling of commercialisation of this relatively new and emerging meat value chain are recommended. Such initiatives include provision of value chain-specific training and affordable capital for business start-up; including low interest credit.

Keywords: Commercialisation, Kenya, nutritional diversity, probit, rabbit