

# Welfare Issues in Growing Rabbits

## Physical wellbeing

Welfare Issue	Problem	Solution
Physical confinement in cages	Lack of space for exercise and natural behaviour Lack of height to rear on hind legs	Use indoor pen or outdoor free range systems with no height restriction. Provide sufficient horizontal space (800-1500cm <sup>2</sup> per rabbit) and vertical space (no height restriction)
Insufficient fibre in diet	Poor dental health and gut function	Provide permanent access to hay, grass or leguminous plants (such as alfalfa)– loose, or in a rack or compressed tube
Poor physical comfort	Wire flooring	House rabbits on non-wire flooring. Alternatives include comfortable plastic, rubber, or bamboo slats or straw bedding on solid floor (requires frequent replenishment to prevent disease)
Poor thermal comfort	Heat stress	Ensure ventilation systems maintain the temperature in a rabbits thermal comfort zone (<25°) and that they have sufficient space to cool down (e.g lying stretched out) in warm climates
High mortality rates – up to 30%, disease	Poor hygiene, diseases including enteric diseases (Coccidiosis, Pasturellosis) and respiratory diseases	Provide a hygienic, well-ventilated environment which is cleaned thoroughly between batches. Coccidiostats can be used to prevent Coccidiosis. Routine antibiotic use should not replace the identification of management or housing related problems.
Injury Ear/ other lesions	Wire flooring Aggression between rabbits	House rabbits on non-wire flooring  Provide sufficient space and opportunities for rabbits to escape aggressors (e.g. platforms, tubes), particularly around puberty

## Mental wellbeing

Welfare Issue	Problem	Solution
Boredom	Barren environments	Provide stimulating housing conditions with enrichment including platforms, tubes and gnawing and chewing items
Fear	Unfamiliarity with humans, noise and disturbance, open spaces	Handle rabbits regularly and gently from a young age to reduce their fear of humans. A varied enrichment should be provided, including platforms which offer different levels to sit on or underneath, and tubes for hiding. Noise levels should be minimised
Lack of positive experiences	Barren environments, lack of space, negative welfare experiences	Provide higher welfare housing, with sufficient space, an enriched environment and reduced fear of humans, will enable young growing rabbits to have positive experiences, such as play and social interaction

## Natural behaviour

Welfare Issue	Problem	Solution
Abnormal behaviours	Apathy, bar biting	Providing stimulating housing conditions with enrichment that is meaningful to the rabbit
Aggression	Fighting between rabbits, particularly after puberty	House rabbits in same-age groups, provide platforms and hiding spaces so rabbits can escape aggressive individuals
Restriction of species-specific behavioural expression	Social isolation, lack of stimulation	Keep rabbits in groups and provide stimulating housing conditions with a range of enrichment