

1 **B. Species-specific provisions for rabbits**

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3 **1. Introduction**

4

5 The rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculi*) is a naturally gregarious species. Rabbits
6 should be allowed adequate space and an enriched environment, the denial
7 of which can result in loss of normal locomotor activity and in skeletal
8 abnormalities.

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10 **2. The environment and its control**

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12 2.1. Ventilation

13 (See paragraph 2.1. of the General section)

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15 2.2. Temperature

16 Rabbits should be maintained in a room temperature range of 15°C to 21°C.
17 Local temperatures among groups of rabbits in solid-floored enclosures will
18 often be higher than room temperatures. Nesting material/nest boxes give
19 animals the opportunity to control their own microclimate. Special attention
20 should be paid to the temperature in containment systems.

21

22 2.3. Humidity

23 The relative humidity in rabbit facilities should not be less than 45%.

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25 2.4. Lighting

26 (See paragraph 2.4. of the General section)

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28 2.5. Noise

29 (See paragraph 2.5. of the General section)

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31 2.6. Alarm systems

32 (See paragraph 2.6. of the General section)

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35 **3. Health**

36 (See paragraphs 4.1. and 4.4. of the General section)

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38 **4. Housing, enrichment and care**

39

40 4.1. Housing

41 Young rabbits and female rabbits should be housed in harmonious social
42 groups. Adult entire males may perform territorial behaviour and should not be
43 housed with other entire males. Enriched floor pens have been used with
44 success to house young rabbits and adult female rabbits although groups may
45 need to be carefully managed to avoid aggression. Ideally rabbits for group
46 housing should be littermates that have been kept together since weaning.
47 Where individuals cannot be group-housed, consideration should be given to
48 housing them in close visual contact.

49

50 4.2. Enrichment

51 Suitable enrichment for rabbits includes roughage, hay blocks or chew sticks
52 as well as an area for withdrawal. In floor pens for group housing, visual
53 barriers and structures to offer refuges and encourage look out behaviour
54 should be provided. For breeding does nesting material and a nest box should
55 also be provided.

56

57 4.3. Enclosures – dimensions and flooring

58 It is preferable for enclosures to be rectangular. A raised area should be
59 provided within the enclosure. This raised area should allow the animal to lie
60 and sit and easily move underneath, but should not cover more than 40% of
61 the floor space. While the enclosure height should be sufficient for the rabbit
62 to sit upright without its ears touching the roof of the enclosure, this degree of
63 clearance is not considered necessary for the raised area. If there are good
64 scientific or veterinary reasons for not using a shelf then the enclosure should
65 be 33% larger for a single rabbit and 60% larger for two rabbits. Wherever it is
66 possible, rabbits should be kept in floor pens.

67

68 4.3.1. Dimensions

69 **Table B.1. Rabbits over 10 weeks of age: Minimum enclosure**
 70 **dimensions and space allowances**

Final body weight (kg)	Minimum floor area for one or two socially harmonious animals (cm ²)	Minimum height (cm)
Less than 3	3500	45
From 3 to 5	4200	45
Over 5	5400	60

71

72 The table is to be used for both cages and pens. In cages a raised area
 73 should be provided (see Table B.4.). Pens should contain structures that
 74 subdivide the space to allow animals to initiate or avoid social contact. The
 75 additional floor area is 3000 cm² per rabbit for the third, the fourth, the fifth
 76 and the sixth rabbit, while 2500 cm² should be added for each additional
 77 rabbit above a number of six.

78

79 **Table B.2. Doe plus litter: Minimum enclosure dimensions and space**
 80 **allowances**

Doe weight (kg)	Minimum enclosure size (cm ²)	Addition for nest boxes (cm ²)	Minimum height (cm)
Less than 3			
From 3 to 5			
Over 5			

81

82 At least three to four days before giving birth, does should be provided with an
 83 extra compartment or a nest box in which they can build a nest. The nest box
 84 should preferably be outside the enclosure. Straw or other nesting material
 85 should be provided. The enclosure should be designed so that the doe can
 86 move to another compartment or raised area away from her kits after they
 87 have left the nest. After weaning, the littermates should stay together in their
 88 breeding enclosure as long as possible. Up to eight littermates may be kept in
 89 the breeding enclosure from weaning until seven weeks old, and five
 90 littermates may be kept in the specified minimum enclosure area from eight to
 91 ten weeks of age.

92

93 **Table B.3. Rabbits less than 10 weeks of age: Minimum enclosure**
 94 **dimensions and space allowances**

Age	Minimum enclosure size (cm ²)	Minimum floor area per animal (cm ²)	Minimum height (cm)
Weaning to 7 weeks	4000	800	40
From 7 to 10 weeks	4000	1200	40

95

96 The table is to be used for both cages and pens. Pens should contain
 97 structures that subdivide the space to allow animals to initiate or avoid social
 98 contact. After weaning, the littermates should stay together in their breeding
 99 enclosure as long as possible.

100

101 **Table B.4. Rabbits: Optima dimensions for raised areas for enclosures**
 102 **having the dimensions indicated in Table B.1.**

Age in weeks	Final body weight (kg)	Optimum size (cm x cm)	Optimum height from the enclosure floor (cm)
Over 10	Less than 3	55 x 25	25
	From 3 to 5	55 x 30	25
	Over 5	60 x 35	30

103

104 To allow proper use of the raised area and of the enclosure as a whole the
 105 dimensions given above for the raised area size and height are optima, with
 106 very close minima and maxima (within 10% of optimum size). If there are
 107 scientific or veterinary justifications for not providing a raised area then the
 108 floor area should be 33% larger for a single rabbit and 60% larger for two
 109 rabbits, to facilitate the rabbit's locomotor activities and to enhance the
 110 opportunity to escape from a more dominant animal. Where a raised area is
 111 provided for rabbits of less than 10 weeks of age, the optimum size of the
 112 raised area should be 55x25 cm and the height above the floor should be
 113 such that the animals can make use of it.

114

115 **4.3.2. Flooring**

116 Wire floors should not be used without the provision of a resting area large
 117 enough to hold all the rabbits at any one time. Solid floors with bedding or
 118 perforated floors are preferable to grid or wire mesh floors.

119

120 4.4. Feeding

121 (See paragraph 4.6. of the General section)

122

123 4.5. Watering

124 (See paragraph 4.7. of the General section)

125

126 4.6. Substrate, litter, bedding and nesting material

127 (See paragraph 4.8. of the General section)

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129 4.7. Cleaning

130 (See paragraph 4.9. of the General section)

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132 4.8. Handling

133 (See paragraph 4.10. of the General section)

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135 4.9. Humane killing

136 (See paragraph 4.11. of the General section)

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138 4.10. Records

139 (See paragraph 4.12. of the General section)

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141 4.11. Identification

142 (See paragraph 4.13. of the General section)