

PREVALENCE OF ENTERITIS IN GREEK RABBITRIES

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Introduction

The importance of rabbit meat as source of food for human consumption is well established long time ago. However, over the last years its nutritious value is well understood by consumers, especially after the last food “scandals” that affected other sectors of animal origin food production. Rabbit meat belongs to white ones, thus it is a particularly healthy animal origin protein source that makes it the consumers’ first option. In Greece, the development of rabbit production began during the last decades and just recently started to be intensive.

The incidence of digestive system’s problems is high in rabbits. Among them, enteritis comes first, as they constitute almost the 80% of the digestive system diseases. This is a very important inhibiting factor to the growth of enterprises that deal with the intensive production of rabbit meat (3).

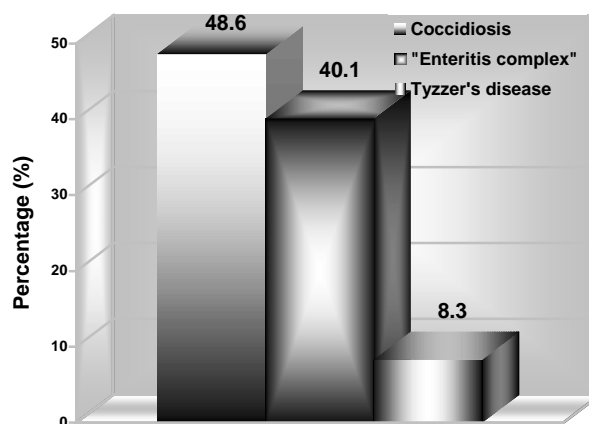
Over the last years there has been noticeable progress in the clarification of the aetiology of pathological findings of the digestive system of rabbits, which were characterized as “non-specific” enteritis. Generally, enteritis could be categorized depending on the causative agent in dietetic, bacterial, viral, parasitic, enteritis of unknown cause and in enteritis from antibiotics due to the injudicious use of certain antibiotics. Apart from the various pathogenic microorganisms, the role of several not contagious factors in the appearance of enteritis in rabbits is also important. Among these factors housing conditions and management practices applied in rabbitries are significant. Moreover, the irrational and non-hygienic nutrition causes changes in the composition of the normal microbial flora of the intestine, as well as an increase of number and spread of several pathogens (1, 2).

Prevalence of enteritis in Greek rabbitries

The incidence of rabbit enteritis constitutes the most important problem in industrial greek rabbitries. This was concluded from the cases of rabbits that came from greek rabbitries and were treated in the Clinic of Productive Animal Medicine of the School of Veterinary Medicine of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki over the last 6 years. The diseases that more often appear are: coccidiosis, «enteritis complex» and particularly the mucoid enteropathy, as well as in a smaller percentage the Tyzzer’s disease.

The incidence of coccidiocis is noticeable in a significant number of rabbitries. Factors, as the non appropriate microclimate of the stable and the housing conditions of rabbits (e.g. low temperatures, particularly when it is combined with increased levels of humidity, non-hygienic nutrition, sudden dietary changes, stress) increased the incidence of coccidiocis. Furthermore, the diagnosis was complicated when the feed used contained coccidiostats, because several coccidian strains can become resistant to these drugs.

Figure 1: Most common enteritis of rabbits in Greek rabbitries for the period 1998 - June 2004



The mucoid enteropathy as part of the «enteritis complex» was observed in older rabbits and associated with mucus production in the intestine. In those cases, the mortality was lower than the classic “mucoid enteritis” which is common in young rabbits, just after weaning age which is the age when the caecal microflora is becoming established and the animals are most vulnerable. The mucoid enteropathy was noticed in rabbitries that did not feed a high fibre diet or used excessive quantities of grains, proteins and fats in the diet, as well as when sudden dietary changes, stress or injudicious application of certain antibiotics occurred.

The Tyzzer’s disease was observed in rabbitries with low health status animals, in which various stress factors occurred and an improper disinfection programme was applied. Clinical signs were acute in the young rabbits and high mortality rates were observed at this stage, while the older ones developed chronic weight loss.

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