

Overview of the Rabbit Industry and proposed implementation of protocol throughout.

Introduction:

The rabbit Industry is one of very few where the animal range from companion /pet to agricultural produce with different variants.

Understanding the different Industries and their importance in society is extremely notable to ensure full cooperation from all parts regarding protocol.

Why is protocol needed:

- 1) RHD and protection of livelihood and Indigenous Species:
- 2) Protection of Industrial Agricultural Entities
- 3) Ensuring Animal Welfare and stopping the ongoing suffering that has been overlooked (refer to document Feral Factor)

What types of Protocol is looked at in this document and asked to be implemented?

- 1) Curbing the spread of RHD
- 2) Curbing Dumping of Rabbits
- 3) Identification and Tracing systems in farmed rabbits

Explanation of the Different Industries

- 1) Commercial Agricultural - Human Consumption
- 2) Commercial Agricultural - Petfood Trade

- 3) Sustainable Home Use
- 4) Domestic Pet: Breed Science and Pet Breeders
- 5) Domestic Pet: Petshops
- 6) Backyard Breeding Mills - Petshops & Feral
- 7) Domestic Pet: Touch farm and Nursery Enhancers.
- 8) Domestic Pet: Regular Pet Owner
- 9) Domestic Pet Companion and Emotional Support Animal.
- 10) Rescue and Welfare Establishments
- 11) Indigenous Researchers and Protectors

Industry Explanation, Implication of RHD And Industry Specific Proposals

Note: Rabbit Farmers vs Rabbit Breeders: Farmers have industries where rabbits are agricultural produce while breeders breed for breed preservation, show and pet trades.

Commercial Rabbit Farmers: forms section 1 and 2

1) Commercial Agricultural - Human Consumption: and

2) Commercial Agriculture: Pet Food Trade :

a)Rabbit Farmers

Should follow the specifications of care as per *Annexure compiled by Gauteng Rabbit Breeders Association*, regarding care and registrations.

b)All farmers should have a compulsory registration and listing for Enterprise Public view* at the National Rabbit Council. (Annexure B)

c) All farmers should have markings on Stock animals and have needed permits** to keep and transport rabbits.

d) Specific protocol should be followed before slaughtering to ensure no spread of RHD via meat, esp for products meant for export. This include products made from skin, ears etc.

* a link to the Data base must be able to be produced for people in viable positions to be able to follow up on. These people may include Government officials of certain ranking, Veterinary services, Buyer of Produce, and Abattoirs.

This list will be upheld and maintained, and not for normal public.

** Permits for transport as per Agriculture Rules.

3) Private Rabbit Farmers

a) Farming for own consumption, these farmers should also adhere to minimum specifications of care as per Gauteng Rabbit Breeder Association.

b) home use farmers should have a voluntary registration and listing at the National Rabbit Council in their own category.

4) Rabbit Show and Pet Breeders

a) will/may have different housing regulations than the Commercial Farmers, but should adhere to the minimum requirements and regulations as per the Gauteng Breeders Association.

b) Show and Pet Breeders should have a compulsory registration and listing at the National Rabbit Council in their own category.

c) should properly be educated in RHD and give education to all buyers and prospective buyers.

d) should not sell rabbits during surges in known hot spot areas

5) Petshops: This Industry should be eradicated in order to have any control over our rabbit industry - please refer to document *Feral Factor*

6) Back Yard Rabbit Breeder mills

This industry should be eradicated together with the (5) Pet Shop Trade to stop the excessive suffering. Refer to *document Feral Factor*

7) Rabbits on Touch Farms etc.

- a) Should no longer have public access, as this can spread RHD. Enclosures where rabbits can be seen and admired, but no direct access to touch, or foot contamination.
- b) Should keep their rabbits contained properly, in adequate sized pens and not free roam.
- c) Should have a clear record of the rabbits on their premises,
- d) Should not allow breeding at all, and should be fined heavily if seen allowing it,
- e) Should not be allowed to sell rabbits to the public.

8) Normal Pet Owners

- a) should have
 - i) a traceable document of where they got their rabbits from (breeders invoice, adoption certificate, or letter from a registered welfare establishment, or letter from vet) which states age, colour, sex etc as proof of ownership to eradicate the impulse petshop trade and back yard mills; which is the biggest threat to RHD contamination and spread (refer to document: The feral Factor)
 - ii) OR could fill in a form as proof of ownership at the National Rabbit Council (keep the form number as proof) OR
 - iii) have their rabbits marked according to accepted marking, (rings or ear tatoos) OR
 - iv) have their rabbits microchipped.
- b) Pet owners should not be allowed to breed, and we are asking government to initiate legal sterilization /separation protocol legislation.
- c) Pet owners should have their rabbits contained in an enclosed space, weather a section of yard where no escaping is possible, or coups/ pens, or inside. No freeroaming rabbits should be permitted on farms, smallholdings, with access to indigenous species, and a double fence or wall should be applied (eg, a pen inside a closed off yard) to ensure no direct contact with any roaming animal; also not permitted is residential yards where they have access to streets.
- d) legislation should state clearly how many rabbits is maximum to keep by a pet owner in a residential area, according to Bylaws.
- e) Should have a clear record of the rabbits on their premises.

9) Companion and support animals

a) for many people rabbits have become a companion and emotional support animal due to their quiet nature, as cats and dogs are not allowed in many accommodations. We do not live in a healthy emotional society anymore, and Rabbits have started to form an integral part of keeping many people stable and supported. Rabbits in these situations are inside well trained animals using litter boxes, and usually the most looked after in the Pet Rabbit Industry.

a) Rabbits should have a clear recorded past as in Paragrph 8.a.

10) Welfare organizations:

a) Rabbit rescues should be fully registered or be affiliated with a registered Rescue and have the same standards.

b) Different rescues handle their accommodations differently, according to region, weather, specific specifications. Rescues that have rural spaces with roaming rabbits, should have double fences at least 50cm apart, or a wall, in order to stop any rabbits with meeting up directly with any indigenous or feral rabbits, and in an extra way of containment when a rabbit breaks out the first barrier.

(If you have pens or camps inside a certain space, this space just need to be enclosed, to ensure no other access)

b) no access should be granted to people that did not practice proper biosecurity at all times.

11) Researchers and protectors should enforce RHD protocol at all times, ensuring protocol at all times.

All deaths and discrepancies should be reported to the RHD Of Africa team without fail to uphold constant information streaming, at rhd.of-africa.com

Conclusion:

All industries should have protocol and biosecurity in place at all times and esp 3-4 weeks prior to *surge-known times*.
