Developing a marketing strategy in rabbit production.

By James Kabinda (Animal Production Specialist).



Introduction

Rabbit production in Zimbabwe has widely been taken as an extra-curricular activity, wherein rabbits were raised on household backyards as pets. Over the past two years there has been an increasing interest for rabbit production at a commercial level. Increased number of producers has been instigated by the high demand of rabbit meat from high level markets. This is mainly due the exquisite taste and high nutritional quality of the meat. When taking on rabbit farming as a business, the producer must establish a market first. The high prolificacy of rabbits means producers would need to plan their marketing properly. Developing a marketing strategy for the rabbit business is therefore imperative. The following assumptions are key in development of a rabbit marketing strategy;

* Dressing % = 60 - 63%
* Live weight at 13 weeks = 2.0 - 2.5kg (breed dependent)
* Production cycle (birth to slaughter) = 13 weeks
* Gestation period of doe = 28 - 31 days
* Litters/year = 5
* Kits/litter = 6 - 8
* Overall Mortality = < 5%
* Reproductive period for doe = 1.5 - 2 years

This article is a summary on the steps to develop a marketing strategy, using a 400 doe

unit rabbit project as an example.

Who is the target market?

Any livestock business needs to establish a market beforehand. Here the producer identifies a target market with certain needs. The producer should take into consideration what this market will require in terms of volume and quality. Additionally, the producer should establish his market size and location such that he/she is able to scale and plan production according to these market variables. Target markets available to rabbit producers include; hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, NGOs, horticulture farmers (manure as the product) and gochi-gochi places such as Ziko in Seke district.

Who is your competition?

In developing a marketing strategy for a rabbit project, determining who your competition is vital. This will involve doing what is a known as a SWOT analysis of the competition available in your market. Here the producer compares the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of his/her project versus the competition. According to the Rabbit Producers Association of Zimbabwe (RPAZ) there are over 2000 rabbit producers in the country.

What are you offering?

In this stage, the producer specifies what he/she is offering in terms of quality, volume and form. In rabbit production, product offering can come in the form of; breeding stock, meat, pelts and manure. For producing meat stock by practicing economies of scale, one would need to establish an abattoir for meat and skin processing. For a 400 doe unit rabbit project, production can be calculated as follows;

* Kits/year = (Number of does * Average kits/litter * Litters/year) - (5% mortality)

  = (400 * 6 * 5) - (5% mortality)

  = 12 000 - 600

  = 11 400

* CDM yield = Kits/year * Average Live Weight at 13 weeks * Dressing %

  = 11 400 * 2.0 * 0.60

  = 13 680kg or 13.68MT per annum

NB: CDM – Cold dressed mass

Basing on the above calculation, the rabbit producer can now plan production for his/her market. In this scenario, the producer can aim to supply 1.14MT of rabbit meat per month to the target market. Consistence in supplying produce will ensure long term relations with the market.

Sales and buying process

At this stage the producer needs to establish his/her sales and buying process to the target market. The sales and buying process can operate on contractual basis or direct personal sales. For the contractual sales and buying process, the producer and contractor will agree on written terms and conditions of payment and supply. For example, part of the agreement could be that the contractor makes payment a week prior to each delivery.

What is the pricing of your product(s)?

The producer needs to develop a pricing model for the business. At this level, establishing a pricing model could emanate from;

* Production costs - farmer can stipulate market pricing of produce based on production cost by putting a mark-up that allows profit generation or;

* Current market pricing - farmer can follow price floors and price ceiling set by the market. For example, if the price ceiling for rabbit meat is $6.00/kg CDM. The producer could sell his/her meat at $6.00/kg CDM.

Promotion and communication

As a way to improve marketing efficiency, the rabbit producer needs to devise a system of promoting sales of produce. To achieve this, the farmer can focus on advertising to target markets via social networks, email, newspapers, farming magazines and internet. With advertising platforms like social networks (Facebook and Whatsapp groups), the producer is able to reach out to a large clientele base in a shorter period.

Conclusion

Rabbit production seems to be offering opportunities for business to farmers. Hence the need to develop marketing strategies for enhancing the future growth of rabbit farming business, especially for the rural producer.

About the writer:

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