SUMMER HEAT

Many rabbit breeders experience breeding problems during the hot days of summer. Research has shown that bucks will loose fertility when temperatures exceed 85 degrees and if temperatures exceed 90 degrees, the loss of fertility is extensive. It can take as few as thirty days for a buck to regain his fertility due to heat stress and as long as ninety days under extreme heat conditions. Older bucks are definitely more affected than their junior counterparts. It is always a good idea to have a few young bucks picked out for breeding to carry you through the summer and fall breedings. Housing your bucks in a cool place in the rabbitry or better yet, construct a cool room to house that prize herd buck(s) for the summer.

Another phenomenon, a result of extreme summer heat is what we call the fall slump or fall dormancy. Now, while this phenomenon can also be attributed to the rabbits natural tendency to not breed in the fall coupled with reduced levels of reproductive hormones due to declining light hours. Summer heat is thought to be a key factor in starting this lowered fertility in our herd bucks.

Is there anything that we can do to lessen the affect of heat on reproductive performance? The following management tips may help to lessen the impact of extreme temperatures on herd bucks.

1. House bucks in a cool environment (65 – 75 degrees) during the summer.
2. Maintain 12 -14 hours of light as the daylight hours grow shorter.
3. Keep a few young bucks (6 -7 months of age) on hand for breeding during summer and fall.
4. Maintain proper ventilation in the rabbitry.
5. The use of misters can cool the air in the rabbitry. Makesure you have proper ventilation and your facility can handle the excess moisture in the air without causing excessive ammonia issues in the building.
6. Outside units can be cooled by applying water on top of roofs or use natural coolants such as grape vines and/or trees to provide shade or even shade cloths.
7. Cull bucks that sire small litters as this may be associated genetically with low fertility.
8. Bucks can be used daily in cool weather, use every other day in hot weather.
9. Breed doe’s during the early morning hours during the summer or late evening.
10. Last but now least, our good friend and engineering expert Steve Shafer of Shafer Ltd. Says, “Be sure your fans are all pointing in the same direction when trying to remove warm and stale air out of the building. Thanks Steve!

I hope these summer management tips help as you plan your late summer and fall breeding program.

Submitted By : Dave Mangione