

DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

Reducing heat stress in the rabbitry during the summer months is a challenge for everyone. Given that 99.9% of us do not have modern environmentally controlled buildings, our ability to maintain a consistently comfortable environment is limited.

Ventilation in enclosed or semi enclosed structures is extremely important. Even on a hot day, the constant movement or turnover of air can alleviate heat stress. The use of fans to move air is the most common mechanical method of cooling the rabbitry. On those 90 plus degree days coupled with high humidity, one can never have too many fans!

I thought I would take some time and share a few tips on surviving the dog days of summer. Hopefully, you may capture some ideas which may be of use in your own rabbitry.

- * Fresh water is absolutely essential in preventing heat stress. Make sure your rabbits have fresh, clean, cool water. Changing their water 3 to 5 times per day when it is hot is very important.

- * Mechanically moving air over top and underneath pens using fans can assist with ventilating stagnant air and bring in fresh air to the rabbitry.

- * The use of misters on fans can lower air temperatures, but must be monitored, as too much moisture in the air can lead to respiratory problems.

- * Pregnant females suffer the most during the summer. Taking a break from your breeding program during July and August may be something to consider to reduce heat stress. However for those breeders who wish to continue their breedings, placing smaller box fans over top of the does pen will provide a cooler environment for the doe and her subsequent litter. Many pregnant females and or their litters are lost during the summer months because their environment was just too hot!

- * Early weaning litters at four weeks of age is a management technique which works very well in the summer and reduces stress for the doe and litter.

- * Reducing the amount of feed to your rabbits during the summer months will reduce body heat and stress. Higher energy feeds produce additional body heat, this coupled with high outside temperatures will add significant heat stress to rabbits. The feeding of low energy diets can also assist with reducing heat stress. In general reducing the amount of feed to be consumed during the summer can reduce heat stress.

- * The use of frozen water bottles actually creates more stress because of the extreme

swings from cold to hot. Even though the outside temperatures are hot, maintaining a constant air environment is more comfortable for the rabbit. Think of yourself going from outside where it is hot to the air conditioning of your home and then back outside again. It seems like the heat keeps getting worse. Either way, staying one place or the other is easier to adjust than switching back and forth. The frozen water bottles are not any different in terms of how they work for a rabbit.

* Rabbitry's nestled in the natural shade of trees will have the best opportunity for cooler air in the summer. There is not a better solution to combating summer heat than to utilize the natural resources of mother nature. Planting trees around your rabbitry, in the long haul may be your best investment.

I hope these tips can help someone get through the dog days of summer. Keeping your rabbits cool during the summer will make a difference in their condition this fall. Until next time, keep cool!

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