

HYBRIDS – THE NEXT GENERATION

Plant and Animal breeders have been seeking the ultimate hybrid for ages. A plant that can withstand extreme drought and disease or an animal that excels in growth and performance. Breeders are always seeking ways to improve the genetic makeup of a given population.

Many breeds of livestock that we have today were developed in part by hybridizing the gene pool. Identifying some good trait from one breed and introducing that trait into another breed through crossbreeding. Now it would be a perfect world if we could just take the good traits we were after and neatly introduce them into our existing gene pool but the reality of it all is that we get the good and the bad. The challenge to each of us as breeders of rabbits is how do we filter out the bad traits and keep the good traits so we can improve our breed as well as maintain the integrity of our breed.

In the mid 70's, the Simmental breed of cattle made their splash onto the beef scene in the United States. In order to expand numbers and quality, the Simmental association opened it's registry to accept percentage blood offspring. In other words, I could crossbreed to another breed of cattle and still register the offspring as Simmentals. These hybrids actually improved the existing breed and with checks and balances in place allowed the Simmental breed to move forward. Registration papers would identify the animal as a ½, ¾, 7/8th blood and on up to purebred or 100% Simmental.

As a rabbit breeder have you ever considered producing a hybrid? We are always in search of the perfect rabbit (New Zealand) so why not create hybrids? I know this concept of producing hybrids can be alarming to some breeders as well as welcomed by other breeders. **Webster defines Hybrid as “An offspring of two animals or plants of different races, breeds, varieties, species or genera”**. Simply stated, a hybrid is the result of crossbreeding.

Creating hybrids will result in desirable and undesirable offspring. The breeder must be very strict in the selection of individuals which will remain in the herd for breeding. During this process the infusion of an outside gene pool is taking place with the hope of improving future generations. Identifying superior individuals in your rabbitry is critical to the success of developing hybrids. Line bred herds present the best opportunity to introduce new gene pools, as the variation in offspring from the first generation crossbreds will be minimized. Superior genetics is a must in the creation of hybrids. The most important ingredient in the improvement of any rabbit is PATIENCE! This key element will determine the success or failure of your attempt to make hybrids. The creation of hybrids in our own New Zealand breed is not a new practice. We have introduced breeds to improve fur, type, flesh, color and overall health of our rabbits.

If we are to continue to improve the New Zealand Breed, introducing new gene pools by creating hybrids may just quicken our journey in our quest for the perfect New Zealand. Hybrids just may be our next generation! However we need to be disciplined in our

breeding programs so as to maintain the integrity of our New Zealand breed set forth in our breed standard. I expect this article will provoke a variety of discussions and critical thinking among my fellow breeders. Creating hybrids may not be acceptable to everyone but the next time your rabbit is on the table you might ask yourself this question, "Did I just get beat by a hybrid"?

Submitted By:

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