

FEED PROBLEMS

By Chris Zemny

Having been through a few feed problems over the years, the one thing I have learned is to watch your feed, and watch how your rabbits react to your feed. If they run up, sniff it and then back away, trust me, something is wrong!

Examine the feed for contaminants. Most feed is extruded, which means the feed mix is pushed through a large die with a lot of tiny holes in it, to make the pellets. The problem is that these dies are hard to clean. Most feed mills run feed through to clean it out, and sometimes, switching from one feed to another results in contaminants in the feed if they start bagging the second feed without totally flushing out the first. Some animal feeds contain antibiotics or wormers, which can be toxic to rabbits. So if you see pellets that don't look like the bulk of what is in the bag, you could have contamination. Contaminated pellets can be larger in size, or different in color or texture. The pellets should all look uniform. You should also not see pieces of corn, soybean or other recognizable contaminants.

Mycotoxins and Mold

Watch for webbing or clumps in the feed which would indicate mold. Mold is especially hard on rabbits because of the mycotoxins (especially aflatoxin). Symptoms

of contaminated feed include rabbits not eating, bloating, enteritis, failure to thrive, and even death.

If the rabbits are refusing to eat, there is a reason. Switch out the feed with the same feed if there does not appear to be contaminants in the feed. Sometimes feed can pick up moisture or sometimes a rabbit will accidentally urinate on it. They won't eat it, if it gets wet.

If you suspect that there is something wrong with your lot number of feed, call your feed company. Be sure to provide the lot number that is on the bag. They don't want you to feed bad feed and are usually proactive in checking problems out. If a rabbit dies and you suspect it is due to feed problems, either get an autopsy, or freeze the carcass for possible testing at a later date.

If you suspect mold in the feed, you can have the feed tested, but it is very expensive and you could pay up to \$300 plus to verify the presence of mycotoxins or



Normal Feed
Free of Contaminates



Corn Contaminates



Feed Contaminates



Mold Contaminates

Chris Zemny has been raising rabbits for over 35 years and has been an ARBA judge since 1992. She is the recipient of the ARBA Distinguished Service Award and is in the HLSC Hall of Fame. Chris has served the ARBA and local clubs in many positions and is a popular speaker at conferences and symposiums. Chris lives in California, has been married for 45 years to her husband Matt. Together they have two daughters and two grandchildren. You can reach Chris at: www.crittercoopollands.com



aflatoxins. If you suspect toxins in the feed, and your rabbits are symptomatic (bloating, diarrhea, dehydration, failure to thrive), consider giving probiotics, BioMOS, Questran, low-dose tetracycline (powdered in the water), and lots of hay. If they stop eating, the biggest challenge is to get them to eat. They need to eat something to give them calories to stay alive and keep the gut moving, even if it is only hay or parsley/ cilantro, oatmeal, or other treats.

Taking Precautions

To avoid feed problems, some breeders mix two brands of feed, so that if one has a problem, it is diluted with the other brand feed. This is too much work for me, so I try to be diligent and watch what I am feeding and also watch how the rabbits react to what I am feeding them.

Know When It's Time to Switch

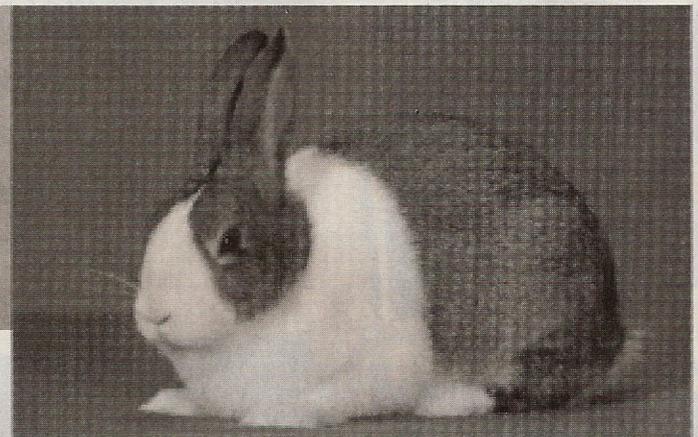
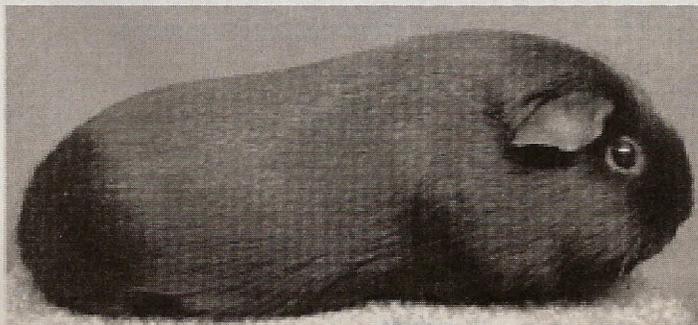
Some breeders also watch conception rates. If your conception runs about 70% and suddenly drops, then it is time for a feed change. While this may sound extreme, it actually makes sense. If there is too much Vitamin A or too little Vitamin E your rabbits will stop conceiving. Switching feed can solve the problem. Of course there are also seasonal variations to conception rates, so be sure to also take that into consideration. But having a low conception rate in the spring or fall should be cause for concern.

In a perfect world, we would be always able to get clean, fresh feed, but the world is not perfect. If you have not had feed problems in the past, consider yourself lucky. They are a part of the challenge of raising rabbits. The trick is to recognize the problem ASAP and treat accordingly.

You've Tried the Rest - Now Win with the Best!

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