



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Survey of Health Status of Domestic Rabbits in Selected Organized Farms in Kenya

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#### ABSTRACT

Rabbit has emerged as a key livestock that is increasingly being raised by farmers in Kenya. However, diseases and inadequate technical knowledge amongst animal health providers on these diseases are the major challenges facing the sustainability of rabbit farming in Kenya. This study was designed to determine the prevalence, etiology and clinical presentation of diseases of domestic rabbits with an aim of enhancing their diagnosis and management in the field situation. The cross sectional survey was conducted in 61 farms in rabbit producing areas in Kenya. Direct observational assessment and structured questionnaires were used to determine husbandry practices and health status in the farms. A total of 61 live rabbits, 320 bacteriological swabs, 363 fecal samples, and 21 skin scrapings were collected from randomly selected rabbits and examined for etiological agents of disease in the laboratory. The frequently reported signs of diseases in rabbits were; diarrhea (81.97%), sudden death (73.78%) and bloat (68.85%). Ear canker (16.39), diarrhea (11.48%) and pneumonia (11.48%) were encountered during clinical examination. During necropsy digestive conditions (65.57%) including; intestinal coccidiosis (29.5%), hepatic coccidiosis (11.48%) and pinworms (3.28%) were commonly encountered. Clinical and sub clinical diseases affecting the digestive system are a major constraint to domestic rabbit production in Kenya. It is therefore recommended that animal health services providers participate actively in management of these diseases of rabbits.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Farmers in Kenya have shown great interest in domestic rabbit production over the years (Hungu *et al.*, 2013). Rabbit has emerged as a key livestock that is increasingly being adopted and raised by small scale farmers in many parts of the country. This has been attributed to the active promotion of rabbit production by the government (Borter and Mwanza 2011; APD, 2010, Serem *et al.*, 2013). However, mortalities and morbidities in rabbits due to diseases are the major challenges facing rabbit farming in Kenya (Hungu *et al.*, 2013; Mailu *et al.*, 2012; Serem *et al.*, 2013). Limited knowledge on rabbit husbandry amongst farmers is another challenge to improved rabbit production (Mailu *et al.*, 2012; Serem *et al.*, 2013).

Diseases of rabbits are caused by known agents including bacteria, parasites, protozoa, fungi, viruses,

genetics and nutritional deficiencies. However, miscellaneous causes comprising of physical and chemicals agents such as trauma, cold, heat and toxins (Martino and Luzi, 2008; Percy and Barthhold, 2008) have also been reported to cause diseases in rabbits.

In Kenya, many disease outbreaks in domestic rabbits have informally been reported by farmers who have suffered heavy losses due to mass deaths of rabbits from unconfirmed diseases (Borter and Mwanza, 2011). Diseases in rabbits have decimated whole stock and discouraged farmers from the rabbit enterprise while a few cases of human deaths have also been reported after consumption of sick rabbits (Gitonga, 2012). Despite these, systematic research in rabbit production and health in Kenya is still scant since emphasis is laid on other food animals (Ngatia *et al.*, 1988). The inadequate laboratory facilities and the inadequate technical knowledge amongst animal health service providers on rabbit diseases further