

# Information Sheet 1 – Rabbit Meat Production – Global

## PRODUCTION & TRADE

Official data on rabbit meat production are available for only a few countries. FAOSTAT<sup>1</sup> estimates that around 570 million rabbits (including hares) were slaughtered globally in 2021, producing around 860,000 tonnes of rabbit (and hare) meat (Table 1). Global rabbit and hare meat production was valued at US\$ 1.5 billion in 2021<sup>1</sup>. Production is concentrated in Asia (Table 1) with China accounting for more than half (53.1%) of global rabbit and hare meat production in 2021 (Figure 1). FAOSTAT has no data available for rabbit meat production in North America, although it appears that some rabbit meat production does occur there.

Table 1. Rabbit and hare meat production globally and in various world regions (NB. No data available for North America). Source: FAOSTAT<sup>1</sup>.

Region	Rabbit and hare meat production 2021 (tonnes)	Share of global rabbit and hare meat production 2021 (%)	Rabbits and hares slaughtered 2021 (thousand head)	Share of rabbits and hares slaughtered 2021 (%)
World	861,739	100.0%	572,120	100.0%
Asia	597,147	69.3%	378,380	66.1%
Europe	150,773	17.5%	98,746	17.3%
EU (27)	118,836	13.8%	83,877	14.7%
Africa	98,360	11.4%	82,083	14.3%
Latin America*	15,460	1.8%	12,911	2.3%

\*'Latin America' includes South America, Central America (including Mexico) and the Caribbean.

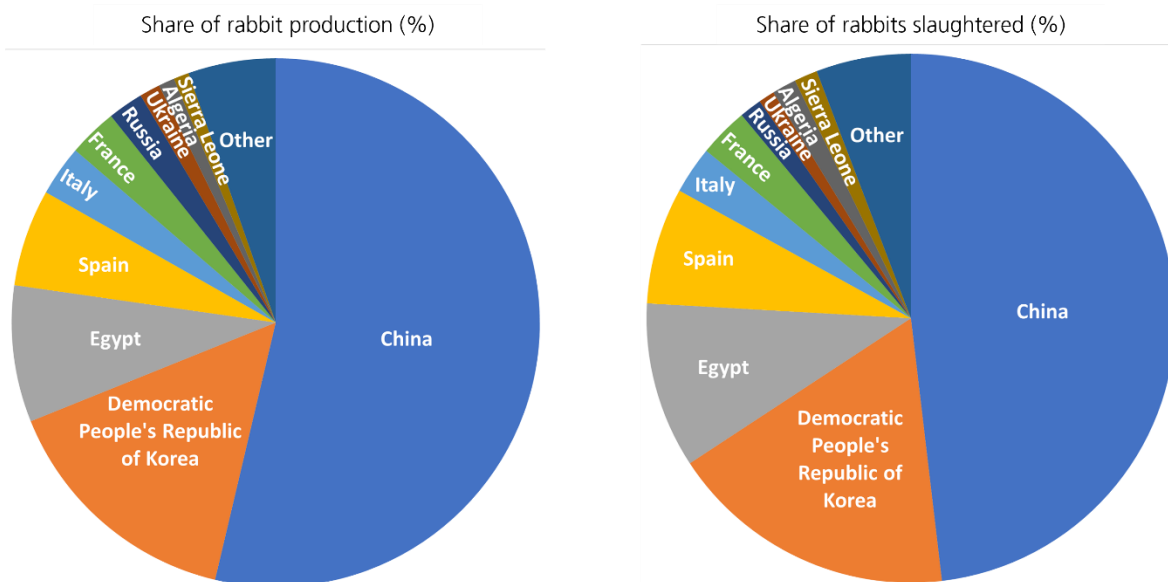


Figure 1. The main global rabbit producing countries by share of global rabbit meat production (%) and share of global rabbits slaughtered (%) in 2021 Source: FAOSTAT<sup>1</sup>

Global rabbit and hare meat exports in 2021 totalled 29,900 tonnes with a value of US\$ 136.7 million<sup>1</sup>. In terms of rabbit and hare meat gross exports in 2021, the largest exporter is Spain, followed by Hungary, China, and France (Figure 2). Spain exported 9,300 tonnes with a value of US\$

32.3 million, Hungary exported 4,600 tonnes with a value of US\$ 29.9 million, China exported 4,000 tonnes with a value US\$ 17.5 million, and France exported 3,800 tonnes with a value of US\$ 18.4 million<sup>1</sup>.

For rabbit and hare meat gross imports in 2021, the largest importers are Germany and Belgium (Figure 2). Germany imported 4,800 tonnes with a value of US\$ 30.9 million, and Belgium imported 4,600 tonnes with a value of US\$ 14.2 million<sup>1</sup>.

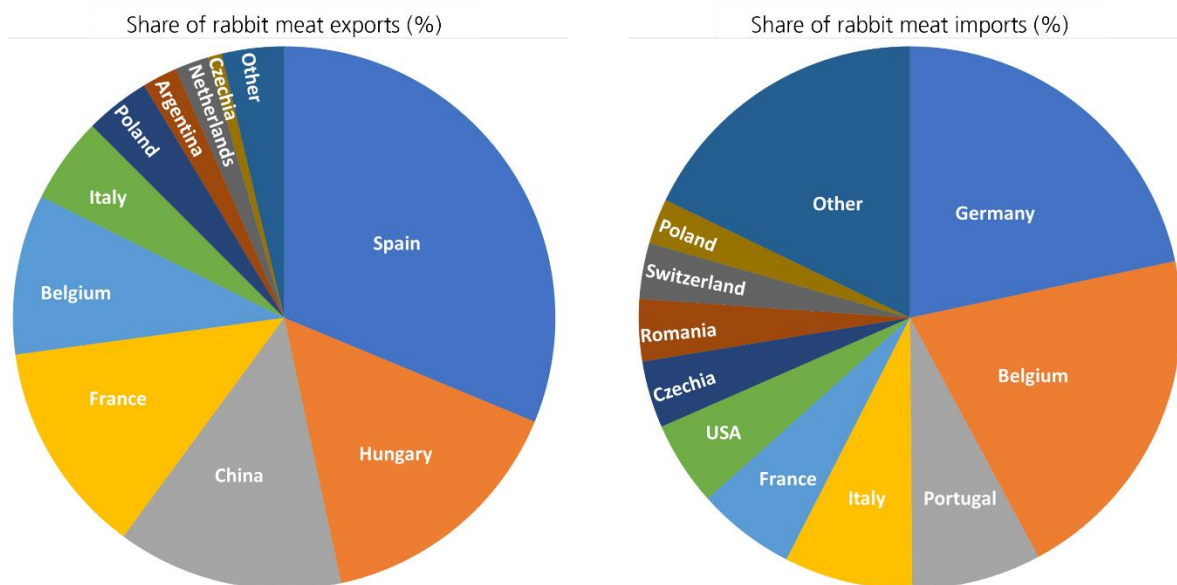


Figure 2. The main global exporters and importers of rabbit meat by share of the market (% of tonnage) in 2021. Source: FAOSTAT<sup>1</sup>

## LEGISLATION AND PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

The vast majority of growing rabbits and virtually all commercial breeding does are housed in cages or hutches. Does are almost always singly housed in cages. Conventional cages, often constructed of wire mesh, provide between 450-600 cm<sup>2</sup> per growing rabbit and have a height of less than 40 cm. A smaller percentage of production uses enriched cages which provide more space per growing rabbit (~ 600 cm<sup>2</sup>) and more vertical space (60-80 cm) as well as a platform and often a plastic footrest. Higher-welfare systems for growing rabbits include “park” systems (small indoor elevated pens often with plastic slatted floors for up to 32 growing rabbits), indoor pen systems (larger slatted or solid floored pens for housing bigger groups of growing rabbits). Some higher welfare indoor systems also include access to a wintergarden – a covered area with an outdoor climate and natural light. Systems with outdoor access can vary from providing access to an outdoor run to pasture-based systems where the rabbits can graze. In some cases, outdoor systems are based on mobile housing that can be moved to different areas of the pasture, while in others, the housing is fixed. Organic housing systems are defined within the EU but not elsewhere (Table 2). Up-to-date data on numbers of rabbits per production system are not available globally. The latest available data from the EU is from 2017 where 94% of rabbits are produced in caged systems (85% in conventional cages, 9% in enriched cages)<sup>2</sup>.

There is currently no specific legislation covering the welfare of rabbits on farm in the main producing countries/regions – China and the EU (Table 2). However, following the successful European Citizen’s Initiative, End the Cage Age, signed by 1.4 million people, in June 2021, the European Commission gave a clear commitment to introduce a legislative proposal to ban the use of cages for farmed animals, including rabbits. Although proposals have yet to be published, the European Commission

has been undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of the animal welfare legislation. For rabbits, any new legislation will set out the minimum standards to protect the welfare of farmed rabbits.

*Table 2. Overview legislation setting out the minimum standards for the protection of farmed rabbits in various countries/regions*



Minimum standards for the protection of rabbits in the UK are laid down in The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended, and related Regulations in other parts of the UK), which require sufficient space for all rabbits to lie on their sides at the same time and sufficient height for rabbits to sit upright on all four feet without their ears touching the top of the cage or hutch.



There is currently no species-specific EU legislation covering the welfare of rabbits on farm, although new legislation is expected under the forthcoming cage-ban. Currently, they are included in general EU animal welfare legislation, including Council Directive 98/58/EC (as amended). Some Member States have prohibited barren cages or all cages for fattening rabbits and does but these countries are not major producers of rabbit meat (see '[Information Sheet 1 – Rabbit Meat Production – EU/UK](#)' for further information). New EU rules on production and labelling of organic products include regulations on rabbit nutrition, housing and husbandry for both breeding and fattening rabbits (Regulation (EU) 2018/848). These regulations stipulate that rabbits must be group housed on solid flooring with bedding and litter material. They must be provided with outdoor access with at least vegetation but ideally pasture. Shelters, hiding spaces, platforms, and nesting material for does must be provided.



There is currently no specific legislation establishing minimum welfare standards for rabbits in China.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> 'FAOSTAT'. The FAO statistics database available at: <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, (2017). Commercial rabbit farming in the European Union : overview report, Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2772/62174>