

# ARBA Recommendations for the Care of Rabbits and Cavies

## Introduction

This document is being created in order to provide guidance to members of the American Rabbit Breeder's Association (ARBA) on the proper care of rabbits and cavies. This document provides general guidance on best practices in caring for rabbits and cavies and is meant to be a recommendation for ARBA members.

### Section 1: Housing for Rabbits and Cavies

#### Cage Size

Rabbits and cavies should be provided a cage of adequate size to accommodate normal breed specific behavior and the size of the animal. The following tables provide suggestions based on the weight of the animal. Available cage space is calculated by multiplying the cage width by length and subtracting the space occupied by the feed and water dishes. It is recommended that the space occupied by feed and water dishes not be counted as available floor space.

Rabbits	Individual Weights		Minimum floor space per rabbit		Minimum interior height	
	kg	lbs	m <sup>2</sup>	ft <sup>2</sup>	cm	in
Individual rabbits (weaned)	< 2.1	< 4.5	0.14	1.5	35.5	14
	2.1 - 4.1	4.5 - 9.0	0.28	3.0	35.5	14
	4.1 - 5.5	9.0 - 12.0	0.37	4.0	35.5	14
	> 5.5	> 12.0	0.46	5.0	35.5	14

Table adapted from the Animal Welfare Act (Title 7 Chapter 54 Sections 2131 - 2159)

Rabbits	Weight of nursing female		Minimum floor space per litter		Minimum interior height	
	kg	lbs	m <sup>2</sup>	ft <sup>2</sup>	cm	in
Female rabbit with litter	< 2.1	< 4.5	0.37	4.0	35.5	14
	2.1 - 4.1	4.5 - 9.0	0.46	5.0	35.5	14
	4.1 - 5.5	9.0 - 12.0	0.56	6.0	35.5	14
	> 5.5	> 12.0	0.70	7.5	35.5	14

Table adapted from the Animal Welfare Act (Title 7 Chapter 54 Sections 2131 - 2159)

Cavies	Minimum floor space per cavy		Minimum interior height	
	square inches	square centimeters	inches	centimeters
Weaning to 350 g (12 oz)	60	387	7	17.8
> 350 g (12 oz)	101	651	7	17.8
Breeders	101	651	7	17.8

#### Cage Construction and Environment

Cages should be constructed in a manner that takes into account breed specific behaviors/needs, should protect the animal from harm by predators, and should protect the animal from injury. Sharp edges should be dulled or covered with a material to prevent injury to the animal and owner. Cage components should be replaced as they wear out and before they become a safety hazard to the animal and its owner. Wire bottom cages are not recommended for cavies unless the floor is constructed in manner that prevents the animal's leg from becoming stuck.

#### Environmental Conditions

Environmental conditions (temperature, humidity, ventilation, and light) are important to maintaining healthy rabbits and cavies. Many rabbitries are not climate controlled and therefore require that environmental extremes (hot or cold) are avoided. Rabbitries should be appropriately ventilated to ensure that air does not become stagnant. Strict climate control is not necessary for rabbits as long as appropriate environmental conditions are maintained. Appropriate light should be provided for the animals.

#### Cage Bedding

Some cages may require the use of bedding for the animal. Typically, bedding is not used in wire bottom cages, but on some occasions hay or straw is commonly used. Bedding used in solid bottom cages typically consists of wood shavings or chips. The type of wood and size of the shaving/chip should be taken into consideration in order to maintain healthy animals.

#### Cage Cleaning and Sanitation

Cages should be kept in a clean and sanitary condition in order to promote a healthy living environment for the animals. Bedding should be changed as often as necessary to prevent over-soiling and wetness. Wire bottom floors should be cleaned to remove any buildup of hair and fecal deposits. Trays should be scraped and emptied frequently to prevent buildup of waste. All cages should be washed and sanitized with an appropriate sanitizing agent on a regular basis in order to kill bacteria, mold and viruses. Keeping cages in a sanitary condition is very important in maintaining a healthy, disease free rabbit and cavy herd.

Cavies are more sensitive to changes in environmental conditions and generally require stricter control. Extreme cold and drafty conditions should be especially avoided, in addition to extreme heat. Due to this, it is recommended that cavies are kept in a climate controlled area. Appropriate light should be provided for the animals.

### Section 2: Nutrition/Water

Proper nutrition is very important to raising healthy rabbits and cavies. An appropriate commercial pellet should be fed to rabbits and cavies. The pellet should be selected based on breed, age, weight, the purpose the animals are being raised (meat, show, breeding, pet, etc.). The milling date should be printed on the feed bag and it should not be used if it is greater than six months. Cavies require vitamin C to prevent scurvy. If adequate vitamin C is not provided in their feed, it should be supplemented in the water or by some other means. Treats, such as fruits and vegetables, may be given, but should not be relied upon as a complete diet. Providing clean, potable water is essential to raising healthy animals.

### Section 3: Traveling with Rabbits and Cavies

In general, carrying cages are significantly smaller than the animal's normal cage due to space restrictions during transit. Cages used to transport rabbits and cavies should be large enough to allow the animal to move around the carrier and the animals should be able to turn around. Animals should be provided with food and water while traveling. If it is not possible to continuously provide food and water, it is recommended that food and water are provided approximately every 4-6 hours. Under certain conditions, withholding feed may be appropriate (e.g. rabbits being transported to slaughter house). Appropriate environmental conditions should be maintained during transit, as previously described in Section 2.

Cooping at rabbit shows should be carefully inspected to ensure it will adequately house the animals. Special care should be taken to look for sharp edges, broken parts, large gaps between wire, etc. that could cause harm to animals or allow them to escape. These cages should be outfitted with food and water receptacles. Cages should be kept clean and sanitary to help maintain a healthy living environment.

Animals are under greater stress when traveling and are therefore more susceptible to disease and sickness. Animals should be monitored for any symptoms that could be indicative of disease or sickness. Appropriate measures should be taken if disease or sickness is suspected. Newly purchased animals should not be introduced into the herd immediately when returning home. These animals should be segregated from the herd for an appropriate time period to be observed for any potential disease or conditions that could be detrimental to the health of the entire colony. Sick animals should be quarantined and treated, or euthanized.