

# RABBIT TRACKS: *Nutritional Value of Rabbit Meat*

## Introduction

**R**abbits are often pets or show animals. Sometimes they are used for research. They may also be raised for meat or fur.

Rabbit is a low-cost, nutritious meat. Most of the world's rabbit meat is produced by Russia, France, Italy and Spain. About one million metric tons of rabbit meat were produced worldwide in 1984!

The United States provides only about 1.5 percent of the world's supply of domestic rabbit meat. (Domestic means the meat is from rabbits that were raised in captivity.) It is interesting that the United States doesn't raise or use more rabbit meat, since the meat has a very good taste. Americans eat less than an ounce of rabbit meat per person each year.

Rabbits are efficient meat producers. This means that they provide good meat without a high cost or much waste. Some reasons for their efficiency are that rabbits:

- Don't need much space.
- Can use foods humans don't need.
- Grow and reproduce quickly. In a year, one doe can produce ten times her own weight in the meat of her offspring.

It only takes about 3 months from the time a doe mates until her litter is ready for the table.

## Meat Production Breeds

All breeds of domestic rabbits can be used for meat. However, many meat producers prefer breeds such as the New Zealand white and Californian. These breeds have good body shape and conformation. Their dress-out percentage (the amount of meat they will



provide) is also good. A short-bodied, cobby (heavily muscled) rabbit usually yields more meat than a long-bodied, lean, racy rabbit. (See 4-H 1462, **Rabbit Tracks: Choosing a Breed**. This bulletin describes other breeds of rabbits that are good for meat production.) Many producers also choose rabbits with white fur. White hairs that stick to a skinned rabbit carcass aren't as obvious as colored hairs.

## Fryers and Roasters

Rabbits processed for meat are called fryers, bakers or roasters, and sometimes stewers. Their age and weight determine their title.

A fryer is less than 10 weeks old. It weighs 3.5 to 5 pounds live. A fryer's carcass should be more than half its live weight. This includes the liver, heart and kidneys. The flesh of a fryer is tender, with a fine texture. It has a bright pearly-white color. They are the most common type of domestic meat rabbit.

## Nutritional Values of Common Meats<sup>1</sup>

Meat (edible portion, uncooked)	Percent Protein	Percent Fat	Percent Moisture	Calories per Pound
Rabbit (fryer, with giblets)	20.8	10.2	67.9	795
Chicken (fryer, with giblets)	20.0	11.0	67.6	810
Veal (medium fat)	19.1	12.0	68.0	840
Turkey (medium fat, with giblets)	20.1	20.2	58.3	1190
Lamb (medium fat)	15.7	27.7	55.8	1420
Beef (fat)	16.3	28.0	55.0	1440
Pork (medium fat)	11.9	45.0	42.0	2050

<sup>1</sup>Taken from Circular No. 547, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

Roasters are 10-week-old to 6-month-old rabbits. They commonly weigh 5½ to 8 pounds. A roaster's carcass should weigh more than half of the rabbit's live weight. The flesh is firmer than a fryer's. It is also slightly darker, with a coarser texture.


Fryers and roasters can be sold alive. They may also go to market as a whole carcass. Sometimes they go to market in six or seven pieces as a cut-up carcass. Certain edible organs (the heart, liver and kidneys) are sold with the carcass most of the time. The total edible parts of a rabbit carcass make up about 85 percent of the dressed weight. The dressed weight is the weight of the carcass after it has been skinned and the nonedible organs have been removed.

## Rabbit Meat

Domestic rabbit meat is mild flavored, tender and pearly-white. It can be used instead of poultry in most poultry recipes. Some desirable characteristics of rabbit meat are its:

- High protein content
- Low fat content
- Low cholesterol content
- Low sodium content
- Low amount of saturated fatty acids

- Fine texture
- Low bone-to-meat ratio
- High digestibility
- Pleasant taste
- Year-round availability

The table at the top of this page shows that rabbit meat is at least as nutritious as other meats. 



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