

Entrepreneur`s Guide to Starting a Rabbit Agricultural Enterprise

A Senior Project

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Introduction

At San Luis Obispo, the University Cal Poly has an Animal Science Department that offers over twenty enterprises pertaining to livestock production which “provide the environment for students to get outside the classroom and work with the animals in teams of students” (Cal Poly 2017-19). As reported from the “Animal Science Department Enterprise Class List”, the classes involved help develop technical skills by having students learn and work in active production settings with livestock such as cows, steers, pigs, lambs, goats, and chickens (Animal Science Department 2017-19). However, when compared to the livestock accounted for at a traditional county fair setting, there is a deficit of one species. Henceforth, it became the authors mission to create an Entrepreneur’s Guide to Starting a Rabbit Agricultural Enterprise in the form of a manual with the hopes that the previous knowledge and experiences can inspire and assist in advocating the growth of the rabbit industry.

The Entrepreneur’s Guide to Starting a Rabbit Agricultural Enterprise was developed and proposed to the University Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. It intended to be implemented as a new enterprise to help aid the enrichment of the university experience, raise awareness of agriculture and agricultural products in a niche market, gain knowledge on how to develop additional revenue from the existing business, and help determine if the entrepreneur would like to pursue a career in rabbit production. The publication should be utilized to aid in determining what type of rabbit enterprise the entrepreneur may wish to operate; how to start, manage, and market their enterprise; how to train and instill protocols on the site; take into consideration of regulations and which ones will need to be addressed if wanting to implement the enterprise in a school setting; and how to use the enterprise in the variety of niche markets. The Entrepreneur’s Guide to starting a new Rabbit Agricultural Enterprise also includes resources the author gathered from her years involved with rabbit production (Maldonado 2016).

With the creation of a rabbit enterprise, students will be able to obtain knowledge and provides experiences of working in a niche market, and the practice of working with an animal that requires specialization. This enterprise would be created with the hopes of showing students the basics of a production and how to create profit, manage and expand a rabbit enterprise.

Background

According to Mississippi State University, there are considerations when deciding when to start a rabbitry enterprise, such as space and finances (Smith 2003). Smith claimed that “due to similarities in the methods of production with those of caged laying hens, the responsibility for assisting new rabbit producers has traditionally resided with the Extension Poultry Department in most states” (2003). Requiring very little space, the poultry department can be contacted and asked to consider adding in a rabbit area in an unused facility since the equipment can be used for both enterprises. In doing so, a test run can occur to observe the financial net gain or loss that enterprise would create. The enterprise would consist of the same method as the broiler or the quail enterprise. Recommended advisors would be Dr. Spiller or Dr. Bennett to oversee the enterprise if available due to the fact that both are familiar with the husbandry and processing aspect of the industry. Advisors should solely be in charge of advising and guiding the class in rabbit husbandry. Students would be responsible for feeding, cleaning, and checking on rabbits on their designated days and assist with transferring the rabbits to be processed at the end of each enterprise. In an academic year, the enterprise can be replicated or reused four times, most preferably in quarter increments. As an enterprise at Cal Poly, the class would have been offer in the fall, winter, and spring quarter for rabbit production tends to falter in warmer climates. Students would go through the process of researching which type of enterprise they would like to be in and gain insightful knowledge of which rabbits are used for the production of commercial,

wool, show and breeding stock. Rabbit husbandry tends to be small, clean, inexpensive, and a great start and branch out to enterprises.”Rabbits respond to kind treatment and are easy to work with. It requires informed selections, good equipment, consistent sanitation, planning, and diligence” (Maldonado 2018).

Rabbit enterprises can be adjusted to have a low starting cost since rabbits don’t have to rely on solely pellets for sustenance, instead their meals can be entirely hay, grass, or weeds (Brown 2012). Furthermore, medium breeds tend to be more economical choice than large rabbits which consume more without any benefit to carcass weight (Rusk et. al., 1925).

Two does and a buck, the ideal start up set, provides up to 90-140kg of meat per year when produced (Harkness. et. al., 1995).

Methodology

To create a Rabbit Agricultural Enterprise Manual the author outlined the project needs, researched sources and materials for the manual, formatted the manual layout, reviewed and lastly the finalization of the project. When beginning the project, the author used visuals of other manuals and start up guides like the “For Dummies” series as inspiration for frame work for the manual. It was then further developed in Microsoft Word to draft the manual chapters that were the most reverent for an entrepreneur. Each chapter was developed by comparing basic livestock manual themes and drafting a rabbit version of those samples.

After the manual was created, the proposition was proposed to Cal Poly’s Animal Science Department where it was foreseen that the idea of creating an enterprise would take too long to construct and become approved by the college. For this reason, the author branched to Soledad’s FFA chapter to request five students to create a rabbit enterprise with only the aid of the manual.

In the end, when the students have fully completed a full production cycle, the students were questioned on the ease, clarity, and overall effectiveness of the manual. All feedback was taken in consideration to improve the manual. Nearing the end, the formatting of the manual was compromised and had to be entirely redone in different programing.

Results

Student feedback was the most important aspect to have heard, because it influenced a lot of the design and helped guide the overall tone for the manual. The majority of the feedback consisted of fixing syntax and diction. After evaluation of all feedback from the trial goes in addition to the faculty, changes were made to alter the design, form, and content of the manual. Four out of the five students were able to successfully complete and show their rabbit projects for their enterprise projects and fair competitions. The projects that were successful have all successfully placed amongst the top five in showmanship and sold their animal at a high price. All students who were successful all commented that the manual prepared them well for all the processes and helped them better understand why past mistakes occurred in their past projects as well.

When have had asked for factors and reasons for a non-complete the enterprise project, the student answered, “when going into this enterprise, I started late, I had been off for family matter and was unable to receive my project on time and started late which was why completion was delayed” (Ferguson 2018). Having noted that, much like a lesson plan, the manual was altered to display key times in the season to have start the project for future references.

Once completed, the author decided to market her publication on the website Amazon for a low rate to promote her work and experiences on an international level while still being affordable. Official publications will be produced by *Lulu Press* and include an English and Spanish version of the text in e-book and paperback versions.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations:

The manual's future use would help enrich colleges, high schools, and the public. Reported feedback revealed that the manual was clear, concise, accurate and useful to find resources about rabbit enterprises in one resource. The conclusion the project had determined was that the rabbit enterprise manual is successful and profitable if given the time and energy to dedicate to the enterprise. When reflecting back, the author recommends locating more volunteers from different areas in the state where resources are scarce or contains high poverty levels. In doing so, a study can be conducted to analyze if the manual can still be profitable in those variables.

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