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De productie van en handel in konijnenbont in de Europese Unie

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December 2007

Rapport 236

Summary

Rabbit fur does not play an important role in the discussion about the use of animal fur. Nevertheless, rabbit fur is used in a variety of products. There is a gap in knowledge about the production of and trade in rabbit fur. The foundation Fur for Animals wants to know more about the production of and trade in rabbit fur to be able to inform citizens about this part of the fur industry. The objective of this research, therefore, was to gain insight into the production of and trade in rabbit fur.

Keeping (fur)rabbits

The production of rabbit fur can be divided into three groups: rabbits specially bred for their fur (Rex rabbit, Orylag rabbit), rabbits specially bred for meat (their fur is of inferior quality), and rabbits kept for fun (hobby). Meat rabbits are commonly housed in wire cages. The dimension of a cage varies between 50x60 cm for rabbit does and 50x70 for meat rabbits. The meat rabbits are commonly housed in groups of approximately six rabbits. The Orylag rabbit is also housed in wire cages, which dimensions are double the size of the cage of the meat rabbits and animals are housed individually from 8 to 9 weeks of age onwards. No information was found about the housing of Rex rabbits. The Netherlands is the only country in the EU that has legislation for the dimension and construction of the cages for rabbits kept for meat production. Rabbit does produce approximately seven litters per year. This results in 40-55 meat rabbits and 35-40 Orylag rabbits per year. The bucks are not castrated. Meat rabbits are slaughtered at 10-12 weeks of age, whereas the Orylag rabbit is kept until 18-19 weeks of age. At the slaughterhouse animals are electrically stunned and stabbed to bleed. Orylag rabbits have a dual purpose, besides the skin also the meat is used for human consumption. This is not known for Rex rabbits.

Trade in rabbit fur skins in and with the EU

Rabbit fur skins are categorized into three groups in the international trade: raw fur skins, tanned or dressed fur skins not assembled, and tanned or dressed fur skins assembled. Rabbit fur skins are commonly traded in dry form (raw fur skins). Although there are indications that the meat rabbit skin can be used for fur production, this is not common practice. Meat rabbit skins have an inferior quality and are commonly used to produce yarn, wool or felt. Based on Eurostat data it was possible to map the trade of rabbit skins, but no distinction could be made between skins of meat rabbits and skins of fur rabbits. So, numbers given are based on total trade in rabbit fur skins between EU nations and between EU nations and countries outside the EU. The greatest part of the import of rabbit fur skins in EU-countries exist of raw rabbit skins. This import was estimated on 38 million in 2005. In total, 6 million tanned rabbit skins (not assembled) were imported in 2005. The import of tanned whole fur skins (assembled) was 830.000 skins. The export of draw fur skins was estimated on 65 million skins in 2005. The export of tanned fur skins (not assembled) fluctuated around 20 million in the last few years. The export of tanned whole rabbit skins (assembled) is relative small with 2 to 2.5 million skins. The EU is a netto exporter of rabbit fur skins, especially in the tanned fur skins (not assembled). The prize of raw fur skins is substantial lower than of tanned fur skins. Tanned whole fur skins (assembled) have a higher prize than tanned raw skins (not assembled).

Trade in rabbit fur skins per product category

For raw fur skins, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Italy play an important role in the import as well as the export. The import of raw fur skins derive mainly from other EU-countries. Raw fur skins that are being imported from outside the EU come from South-America. More than half of the raw fur skins is being exported to other EU-countries. Besides Belgium, Portugal, and Spain, also Romania, China and the USA are important markets for raw fur skins.

For tanned fur skins not assembled are Spain, France and Belgium the biggest exporters in the EU. Italy is a netto-importer of tanned fur skins, probably due to the fashion industry.

As country of origin Spain is very important, whereas Romania, China and Morocco are developing as exporters of tanned fur skins (not assembled). The EU fur skins are mainly traded to countries outside the EU, China and Turkey are fast developing for this. Spain is the biggest exporter of tanned whole fur skins (assembled). Other EU countries that are trading tanned whole fur skins

(assembled) are Germany, Poland, Denmark and the United Kingdom. The trade volumes in this category, however, are limited. Tanned whole fur skins (assembled) are traded inside as well as outside the EU. Outside the EU the export to China is growing. Tanned whole fur skins (assembled) that are imported into the EU are being derived from China, Morocco and Turkey.

Conclusion

Production of and trade in rabbit fur skins takes place in the EU. Based on statistics, however, no distinction can be made between inferior fur skins of meat rabbits and high quality fur skins of fur rabbits. It is difficult, therefore, to estimate the amount of production of and trade in high quality fur skins that are really used for fur products. Based on the results of this research, the impression is that the trade of rabbit fur skins is limited, both as economic value as numeric value. It is clear that rabbit fur skins are only limited offered to the auctions.

The Orylag rabbit is bred in France. The fur skins as well as the meat is sold. It is unknown whether the meat of other fur rabbits is for human or animal consumption as well. The production characteristics of the Orylag rabbit are roughly known but this is not the case for other fur rabbits.