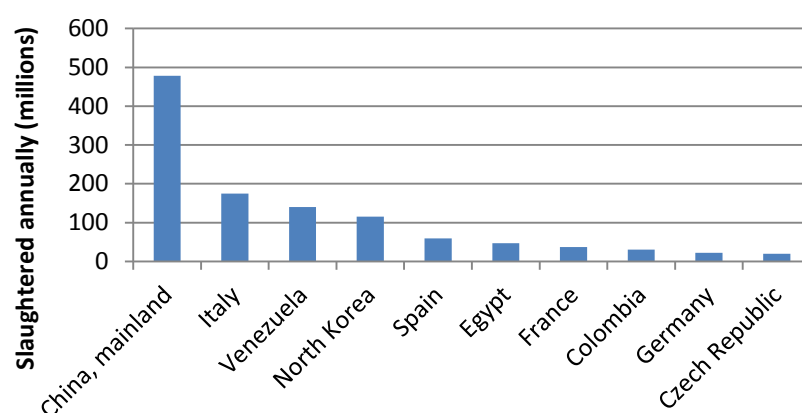


# Rabbit meat production in the EU

## Production

More than 1.2 billion rabbits are slaughtered for meat globally every year (FAOSTAT 2012). China is the largest producer (Figure 1) accounting for more than 462 million rabbits or 40% of global production; China experienced a steep increase in rabbit production over the last decade (up 26% since 2001). The EU27 accounts for 28% of global production, with more than 340 million rabbits produced annually (FAOSTAT 2012). Rabbits are the second-most farmed species in Europe, primarily in Italy, France and Spain.

**Figure 1. Global rabbit meat production, showing the top ten highest producing countries (FAOSTAT 2012)**



There are large discrepancies in the statistics for the number of rabbits produced according to source (FAOSTAT, Eurostat and national statistics), potentially underestimating the French and Spanish production.

## Trade

Table 1 shows the quantity of rabbit meat imported and exported by the top ten producing European countries. In 2011, China exported approximately 9,000 tonnes of rabbit meat; France exported 6,000 tonnes, whilst Belgium imported 6,000 tonnes and the UK imported a mere 97 tonnes (FAOSTAT 2011). Figures from live transport show that France imported 495,000 and the Czech Republic 518,000 live rabbits (and hares) (FAOSTAT 2011).

**Table 1. Top European rabbit imports and exports (FAOSTAT 2011)**

Export Quantity (tonnes)		Import Quantity (tonnes)	
France	6004	Belgium	6017
Belgium	5949	Germany	4885
Hungary	4486	Italy	2939
Spain	3403	France	2034
Netherlands	1412	Portugal	1903
Italy	1126	Switzerland	1798
Czech Republic	494	Netherlands	1232
Germany	405	Russian Federation	654
Portugal	100	Spain	430
Lithuania	46	Czech Republic	375

## Consumption

Little information is available on rabbit consumption in different countries. Yearly estimates range from 0.93 kg/person in France (ITAVI, 2014) and 1.35kg/person in Spain (González-Redondo et al, 2012) during 2010, and as much as 4.4kg/person in Italy (Unaitalia, 2010).

## Legislation and country-specific guidance

Globally, around 99% of rabbits reared for meat are kept in cages. Despite an EU ban on the conventional barren battery cage for laying hens in 2012, barren cages are still widespread for rabbits, and there is no species-specific legislation laying down minimum standards for the welfare of rabbits. Rabbits are given general protection under *Council Directive (98/58/EC) concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes*, during transit under *Council Regulation (EC No 1/2005) on the protection of animals during transport and related operations* (with additional provisions in Chapter V of Annex I to the Regulation), and at slaughter under *Council Regulation (EC 1099/2009) on the protection of animals at the time of killing*.

Some countries are implementing national legislation for the housing of rabbits, see Table 3 for details, and country-specific organic legislation already exists in some Member States (country specific standards are available at: (<http://organicrules.org/custom/subjects.php?id=141>)). Council Directive EC 889/2008 states that herbivores in organic systems shall have access to pasturage for grazing whenever conditions allow. In France, where organic rabbit production is limited to a dozen farms, organic rabbits are kept free-range in a large outdoor enclosure or in outdoor mobile runs, while in Italy organic standards do not require free-range access and still allow cage production (derogation applicable until 2017).

**Table 2. Overview of legislation prohibiting cages (see table 3 below for specific legislation)**

Countries prohibiting:	
Barren cages for fattening rabbits	Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland
Barren cages for does	Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland
Enriched cages for fattening rabbits	Belgium
Enriched cages for does	Belgium (from 2021 dependent on research outcomes for a suitable group housing system)

**Table 3. Country specific legislation for rabbits**

Country & legislation	Details
<b>Belgium</b>  Royal Decree concerning the welfare of rabbits in farms (2014) <sup>1</sup>	Stepwise approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All new systems built for fattening rabbits must be park systems, with exceptions for recent investments until 2025 that shall be enriched cages (enrichment material provided and min. pen size 3000cm<sup>2</sup> and maximum 16 rabbits/m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>• Park systems must be at least 1800cm long and provide:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 800cm<sup>2</sup> per rabbit</li> <li>- groups of at least 20, elevated platforms</li> <li>- space for rabbits to perform three consecutive hops</li> <li>- 80% comfortable plastic flooring, gnawing blocks and tubes one drinking nipple per 20 animals and a rack with permanent hay or straw.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• From 2021, all does must also be housed in park systems (dependent on research outcomes of group housing for does)</li> </ul>
<b>Netherlands</b>  Rabbit Welfare	Current rabbit welfare regulations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Area of 700cm<sup>2</sup>/animal for less than five animals</li> <li>• Group housing of fattening rabbits in at least pairs</li> </ul>

Regulation (2006) <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Height of at least 40cm</li> <li>• Floor mesh at least 3mm in diameter</li> <li>• Platforms (if used) should be at least 10cm wide and 25cm from the top of the cage</li> <li>• Roughage or gnawing material</li> <li>• 8 hour dark period</li> <li>• Ad libitum access to feed and water and <i>veterinary consultation if mortality exceeds 10%.</i></li> </ul> <p>Dutch Rabbit Association – will review plans for park systems and group doe housing between 2010 and 2016</p>
<b>Germany</b>  Regulation on the protection of farm animals (2014) <sup>3</sup>	<p>In force from August 2014 for new holdings and by Feb 10 2024 for existing buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing for fattening rabbits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1500cm<sup>2</sup>/animal for groups of 1-4 rabbits; 1000cm<sup>2</sup>/animal for groups of 5 – 10 rabbits; 850cm<sup>2</sup>/animal for groups of 11 – 24 rabbits; 700cm<sup>2</sup>/animal for ≥25 rabbits.</li> <li>- Cage height of at least 60cm over 70% of the surface area and never less than 40cm.</li> <li>- Minimum pen area of 8000cm<sup>2</sup>, at least 80cm long and 60cm wide.</li> <li>- Maximum floor hole width of 11mm for fattening rabbits and 14mm for breeding rabbits</li> <li>- A raised platform: ≥ 300cm<sup>2</sup> /fattening rabbit and breeding rabbit ≥ 600cm<sup>2</sup> /breeding rabbit. For breeding rabbits this should have a minimum area of 1500cm<sup>2</sup> or 1800cm<sup>2</sup> (&lt;5.5kg or &gt;5.5kg weight rabbits respectively) and at least 30 or 50 cm wide (respectively) and is 60 cm long.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Fattening rabbits should have ≥27cm of height from the floor to the platform and ≥ 35cm for breeding rabbits. No more than 15% of the platform can be perforated and it shall not exceed 40% of fully useable floor space.</li> <li>- All rabbits must have access to rough textured roughage such as straw or hay and suitable gnawing material</li> <li>- During light hours, rabbits must have 40 lux at rabbit head height and direct sunlight is to be avoided. When artificial light used there must be at least 8 hours continuous darkness with &lt;0.5lux. A dusk phase should be provided of 30 minutes.</li> <li>- Veterinary consultation if mortality reaches 10%</li> </ul>
<b>Switzerland</b>  The Swiss Animal Protection Act (TschG 2005) <sup>4</sup> and Swiss Animal Protection Ordinance (TschV 2008) <sup>5</sup>	<p>Enclosures without elevated areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on weight of rabbits pens must be designed so that: &lt;2.3kg must have ≥3400cm<sup>2</sup>, height ≥40cm; 2.3 - 3.5kg must have ≥4800cm<sup>2</sup>, height ≥50cm; 3.5 – 5.5kg must have ≥7200cm<sup>2</sup>, height ≥60cm</li> </ul> <p>Enclosure with elevated areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on weight of rabbits pens must be designed so that: &lt;2.3kg must have ≥2800cm<sup>2</sup> of which floor area is ≥2000cm<sup>2</sup>, height ≥40cm; 2.3 - 3.5kg must have ≥4000cm<sup>2</sup> of which floor area is ≥2800cm<sup>2</sup>, height ≥50cm; 3.5 – 5.5kg must have ≥6000cm<sup>2</sup> of which floor area is 4200cm<sup>2</sup>, height ≥60cm</li> </ul> <p>Group housing of rabbits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rabbits up to 1.5kg: ≤40 animals must have min. 1000cm<sup>2</sup>; ≥ 40 animals must have min. 800cm<sup>2</sup></li> <li>- Rabbits over 1.5kg: ≤40 animals must have min. 1500cm<sup>2</sup>; ≥ 40 animals must have min. 1200cm<sup>2</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum number of young animals from weaning to sexual maturity – 3 rabbits up to 3.5kg, 4 rabbits greater than 3.5kg</li> <li>• At least part of enclosure should be high enough for animals to sit upright</li> <li>• Darkened area required for animals to hide</li> <li>• Does shall be provided with suitable nesting material</li> <li>• Rabbits shall be provided daily with coarse structured feed such as hay or straw and constantly with objects for gnawing.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>The Regulation of the WBF over Ethoprogramme (2008) describes requirements for higher welfare systems:</i></p> <p><i>'Animal-friendly' housing systems ('BTS') must provide: 1500cm<sup>2</sup> per fattening rabbit, a</i></p>

	<i>minimum of 15 lux daylight, group housing of fattening rabbits and does, 3cm<sup>2</sup> litter per rabbit (enough to allow scratching), an elevated platform at least 20cm from the floor (from 36-84 days) and 35% of the surface must be at least 60cm in height. Free range systems ('OUT') must provide daily outdoor access for several hours, with an uncovered area of at least 50%.</i>
<b>Austria</b>  Austrian Animal Welfare Act (as amended 2014) <sup>6</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rabbits must be kept in pens or enclosures, barren cages and wire mesh floor are prohibited (except recently built systems up to 2020)</li> <li>• Gnawing material must be provided (wood etc) along with permanent hay or straw rack</li> <li>• 20 lux lighting should be achieved. Natural light must be provided (minimum of 3% of floor exposed to natural light).</li> <li>• Minimum flooring area for does, bucks and kittens of 6000cm<sup>2</sup> per pen, the area provided must at least be available on 50% of ground level.</li> <li>• A platform (at least 25% of the floor area and 27cm wide)</li> <li>• In groups of fattening rabbits up to 40 animals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ≤1.5kg, minimum: ceiling height 50cm, area 1000cm<sup>2</sup>/animal</li> <li>- &gt;1.5kg, minimum: ceiling height 50cm, area 1500cm<sup>2</sup>/animal</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In groups of 40 or more fattening rabbits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ≤1.5kg, minimum: ceiling height 50cm, area 800cm<sup>2</sup>/animal</li> <li>- &gt;1.5kg, minimum: ceiling height 50cm, area 1200cm<sup>2</sup>/animal</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In adult breeding rabbits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ≤5.5kg, minimum: ceiling height 60cm, area 6000cm<sup>2</sup>/animal and additional 1000cm<sup>2</sup>/animal nest chamber</li> <li>- &gt;5.5kg, minimum: ceiling height 60cm, area 7800cm<sup>2</sup>/animal and additional 1200cm<sup>2</sup>/animal nest chamber</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>United Kingdom</b>  The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 <sup>7</sup>	<p>Rabbits must be able to move, feed and drink without difficulty, should be able to lie on their side all at the same time and to sit up without their ears touching the top of the cage and be provided shelter from the weather.</p> <p><i>The Codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock – Rabbits, describe best-practice guidelines, but are not law.</i></p>

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Public Service Public Health, safety of the food chain and environment – 29 June 2014 – Royal Decree concerning the welfare of rabbits in farms  
<http://www.vvsg.be/veiligheid/brandweer/brandweershervorming/Documents/KB%202014.06.29%20personeelsplan.pdf>

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<sup>2</sup> Regulation of the Dutch Board for Poultry and Eggs dated 9 February 2006, establishing provisions relating to the welfare of rabbits used in rabbit husbandry – Regulations welfare standards Rabbits (PPE) 2006 - [http://www.wrsa-deutschland.de/uploads/media/Kaninchenverordnung\\_NL\\_2008.pdf](http://www.wrsa-deutschland.de/uploads/media/Kaninchenverordnung_NL_2008.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Regulation on the protection of farm animals, August 2014 <http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/tierschnutztv/>

<sup>4</sup> Swiss Animal Protection Act 455 of December 2005 <http://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20022103/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Swiss Animal Protection Ordinance of 23 April 2008 <http://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20080796/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> Austrian Consolidated Federal law – RIS Entire legislation for animal husbandry GBBI. II no. 485/2004 <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20003820>

<sup>7</sup> The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/2078/schedule/9/made>