

***Farmer to Farmer* Program Haiti Rabbit Project**

Overview

Partners of the Americas' USAID-funded *Farmer to Farmer* program provides technical assistance to local agricultural producers, producer organizations and agribusinesses in Jamaica, Haiti and Guyana. Through the program, US agricultural volunteers spend two to three weeks working with their counterparts in the Caribbean on a specific technical assignment to address local needs. Partners has had a successful program in Haiti for over twelve years working on a variety of agriculture projects including vegetable production, beekeeping, rabbit production and food processing.

Project Description

Rabbit meat is excellent source of protein that supplement farmers' diets and increase their income. *Farmer to Farmer's* Rabbit Project works with communities throughout Haiti to provide technical training for new and experience rabbit producers as well as workshops and on-farm assistance to address specific issues. Topics covered include: cage construction, diet and nutrition, disease prevention and control, reproduction, rabbit management, slaughter and meat quality. And as rabbit meat is a sought-after product by restaurants and hotels in the Cap-Haitien and Port-au-Prince areas, rabbit production is becoming increasingly popular.


Project Impact

With *Farmer to Farmer* assistance, rabbit health and nutrition have improved significantly. The majority of rabbit health problems are related to the climate, nutrition, or pests. The heat and humidity of the Haitian climate make rabbits susceptible to heat exhaustion and dehydration. Following the advice of volunteers, rabbit producers now take these factors into consideration when constructing and placing cages, ensuring shade and ready access to water for rabbits.

Forages are the most readily available and affordable food source for rabbits. However, little was known about the nutritional value of forages, making it difficult to ensure

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that rabbits received a balanced diet. A *Farmer to Farmer* tropical forage expert worked with rabbit producers on reducing the use of grasses, which were too high in fiber, and increasing use of legumes and forbs, which are easily digestible and good sources of protein. As some legumes can be toxic to rabbits, the volunteer also taught rabbit keepers how to test varieties for suitability. Rabbit producers also worked with an entomologist who taught them to identify and control pest outbreaks. As a result of volunteer technical assistance, rabbit production has increased by 600% in some areas with an increased earning potential of \$20 per week for each farmer.

Along with these improvements in the health and nutrition of the rabbits, *Farmer to Farmer* volunteers have also helped improve the processing of the rabbit meat. For example, certain medicines can be damaging to meat at injection sites so training seminars on application of medication for pest control and injection have taught farmers how to both effectively care for the animals and at the same time maximize meat yields. *Farmer to Farmer* volunteer veterinarians have also improved local knowledge of rabbit health. For example, the normal treatment for ear mites was to inject Ivermectin (or another similar drug); now producers know that the medication can be applied in drops between the ears to achieve the same effect more efficiently.

“Backyard domesticated rabbit production in Haiti – where the average monthly income is only about \$50 per month – can double or triple a household’s wealth.”

- Dr. Jeff Tomberlin
Entomologist, Texas
Cooperative Extension

Volunteers have trained rabbit producers on the importance of standardization and sanitation in the processing of the rabbit meat. Producers can now sell higher quality meats and are establishing linkages in local markets. Tanning rabbit skins is another area where *Farmer to Farmer* has made a difference. Until recently, most of the hides had been wasted upon butchering. Workshops were held on producing hand made buck skins, which can add significant value to the rabbit. Using all parts of the rabbit will help producers increase their return on their investment.

Over the course of the *Farmer to Farmer* Program, volunteers have worked alongside and trained leaders of Makouti Agro Enterprise, a Haitian agribusiness cooperative, in all aspects of rabbit production. In this way, when the *Farmer to Farmer* Program ends, new rabbit producers can consult directly with Makouti’s rabbit experts, increasing the local ownership and sustainability of the project. Nearly all rabbit producers in the program are reporting increases in production. One member now earns over \$700 per month raising rabbits and has hired an employee. And as local demand for rabbit meat increases and more producers are trained in rabbit management, the impacts will continue to grow.

For more information on Partners of the Americas and the *Farmer to Farmer* Program, please visit www.partners.net.