**MEAT PENS AND FRYERS**
The meat pen and fryer competition is a demonstration of the breeders'
ability to produce a market animal of consistent size and quality.

**BREED FOR BODY TYPE!**
Meat rabbits are judged for body type, condition, and uniformity by the
American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA) Standard of Perfection. Their
type must be meaty, with prime muscle condition. The meat pen should be
uniform in size, all the same color, and all the same breed. The judges
will balance the characteristics of type, condition, and uniformity in
deciding which is the best entry. Some judges will place emphasis on
uniformity.

A meat pen is three rabbits, any gender, more than three pounds and less
than five pounds. A single fryer is a rabbit, any gender, more than three
pounds and less than five pounds. They must not be older than 70 days.

White fur is preferred by processors, but is not required in meat pens. New
Zealand Whites and Californians are the most common meat breed of rabbits.
I thumbed through the Standard of Perfection and picked out some rabbit
breeds that could be suitable for meat rabbits. I included Californians
and New Zealands for comparison.

**Meat Sized Rabbit Breeds
With Senior Buck and Senior Doe Weight Ranges In Pounds**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| BREED | Senior Buck | Senior Doe |
| Semi-Arch / Mandolin Body Type | Weight Range | Weight Range |
| American\* (Blue & White) | 9-11 | 10-12 |
| Beveren\* (Black, Blue, White) | 8-11 | 9-12 |
| Commercial / Medium Length Body | - | - |
| American Sable\* | 7-9 | 8-10 |
| Californian | 8-10 | 8.5 - 10.5 |
| Champagne d'Argent | 9-11 | 9.5 - 11.5 |
| American Chinchilla\* | 9-11 | 10-12 |
| Cinnamon\* | 8.5 - 10.5 | 9-11 |
| Creme d'Argent\* | 8 - 10.5 | 8.5 - 11 |
| Hotots\* (blanc de hotot) | 8-10 | 9-11 |
| New Zealand | 9-11 | 10-12 |
| Palomino | 8-10 | 9-11 |
| Rex | 7.5 - 9.5 | 8 - 10.5 |
| Satin | 8.5 - 10 | 9-11 |
| Silver Fox\* | 9-11 | 10-12 |
| \* On Rare Breed Rabbits List | - | - |

**EQUIPMENT**
Meat rabbits are big rabbits. The adults commonly weigh 9 to 12 pounds. The
kits will get up to 5 lbs each in 10 weeks, so 8 rabbits in a growing out
cage will weigh 40 lbs by processing time. You need at least one BIG cage.
30 inch wide by 24 inch deep by 18 or 24 inch high is good.

You will need feeders or feed crocks, and two water bottles or watering
system nipples for the cage, so two rabbits can drink at once.

If you breed your own rabbits, you will need a nest box. A nest box that is
10 inch wide by 14 inch long by 10 inch high will be adequate. A top on the
nest box is not required, but it is a good place for the doe to get up away
from the litter. Be sure there is a bottom/floor in the box also. Metal nest
boxes have removable floors usually made of wood or pressed fiberboard.

Check to be sure that the door of your cage is big enough for the nest box
to go in and out easily. I recommend using hay instead of straw for nest
material, so the kits can start nibbling hay as early as possible.

**TIMING YOUR BREEDING**
Your meat rabbits may not be more than 70 days old at the time of judging.
You need to calculate back from the judging date. If judging will occur on
Sat August 13, count back 10 Saturdays (70 days) to Saturday June 4. This
is the day you want your litter to be born. Rabbits have a 31 to 33 day
gestation period. Typically they are born on day 31.

So we will count back 31 days from June 4 which happens to be Wednesday
May 4. That is your breeding day for meat rabbits for fair judging on
Saturday August 13. But adjust as needed for the actual judging date.

Take the doe to the buck. Check the doe's vulva and look at the color, it
should be reddish or purple. Whitish color is not very good potential. Watch
them to be sure they breed. Let them breed twice. If the doe does not accept
the buck, try putting the doe in the buck's cage and move the buck to the
doe's cage for the night. Put them back together in the bucks cage in the
morning to see if they will breed.

Do this morning and night until the buck breeds the doe and you SEE it.
Start counting days from the day of breeding.

If there is time to test the buck and doe, I would recommend a test litter
before the fair if you have another big cage. Breed the doe 8 or 9 weeks
before your fair breeding date. Then breed on your fair breeding date. The
test litter will be about 3 or 4 weeks old. While she still has a litter in
the cage, she will be more likely to accept the buck.

**NEST BOX**
The nest box goes in on day 28 with hay in it. If she eats the hay, put more
in. If there is no litter by day 35, take the box out, she missed. Try not
to put the box in the corner where she normally poops or she may decide to
poop in the box.

You must put nesting material in the box. You can put straw in the nest box.
Fill the box loosely with straw. The doe probably remove some straw or will
pack the straw so a little burrow is formed. You can use straw or hay if
you want to. Many people will use hay so the baby rabbits will nibble on
the hay as they grow. I also like to put a half inch of wood shavings on
the bottom of the nest box to help absorb wetness.

The doe will have her litter in the nest box, but not always. Sometimes the
does will have the litter on the wire floor outside the box. Do not panic.
This is especially common with first time rabbit moms. Pick up the kits and
put them in the box.

When the doe is finished having the litter, remove the box from the cage
with the litter inside the box. You can give the doe a piece of apple or
some hay to distract her.

Count the kits and remove any dead kits or afterbirth. Check the corners of
the box so you do not miss any. Get an accurate count now. This is how many
kits you will look for on your daily litter check. This is good time to put
fresh hay in the box. Try to save some fur from the nest box to put back in
with the kits.

You will remove the box everyday to check the kits. Remove any dead kits you
find, and any yucky stuff you find in there. Put in fresh hay if needed. If
it gets very cold at night you may want to bring the nest box into the house
during the night and take it back to the cage in morning. The doe will hop
in to nurse the kits. Leave the box in for the day and bring it back to the
house at night if it will be cold.

**WEANING**
Weaning is when you separate the kits from milk supply and leave them with
pellets and hay to eat. This is usually done by removing the doe or some of
the kits.

Leave the doe in the cage 6 weeks or longer if she will put up with the
kits. Leave the litter in the same cage. Moving the litter stresses them and
they stop eating. Always have pellets and water all the time. Leave the
litter together as long as you can since they eat more when they are
competing for food.

When you separate the doe from all the kits, give her hay and water only for
one day, no pellets, to dry up her milk and avoid any mammary gland
infections.

**SELECTING YOUR MEAT PEN RABBITS**
You can enter two meat pens and two single fryers in the fair. But for
practical purposes, from a litter of eight or ten you should be able to
select five rabbits; three for a meat pen and two for single fryers.
If you have any runts you can cull those so there is more milk for the rest
of the litter.

**TATTOOING**
Choose your tattoo numbers but do not tattoo the rabbits yet. You can send
in your entry form before you tattoo the rabbits. A week before the fair,
you can tattoo the rabbits with the numbers you selected.

**BUYING MEAT PEN RABBITS**
You will need own the rabbits 30 days before the fair. This means you have
to buy them and pick them up at 5 weeks old (35 - 40 days). Put your rabbits
in a cage and leave them in that cage until the fair, unless they start
fighting, then you separate the fighters.

Or if you need to own the rabbit 60 days before the fair, try to borrow a
doe for a litter or buy a doe with the litter.

The 30 day and 60 day rule will be different depending on the rules for your
fair competition. Check the rules of your fair or show to learn which rule
applies to your situation.

**FINDING A BUCK AND A DOE**
Plan now for your meat pen breeding. Even if it is September and your fair
is not until May. You need to locate a buck and a doe. If you do not have
room for a buck and a doe, try sharing with another member in your project.
One of you can keep the buck and one can keep the doe and you can split the
litter for a meat pen.

Or talk to a breeder about borrowing a doe. You pay the the breeder for
breeding the doe. Then you take the doe and keep her and the litter for the
meat pen competition. After you wean the litter, you return the doe to the
breeder.

In the best case situation, you will have use of a "proven" doe and buck,
which means these animals have had litters previously and can be expected to
produce litters again.

**PROOF OF OWNERSHIP**
If you buy rabbits, you can show a bill of sale as proof of ownership.
If you raise your own, take a picture of you and the litter when it is born
with the date written on a piece of paper in the picture to establish your
ownership.
A letter stating you are the owner and signed by you and your parent should
sufficient. Check with your youth program advisor.

**BE PREPARED TO PROCESS A RABBIT**
At auction, the buyer can usually take the rabbits home, donate the rabbits
back to the exhibitor, or request they be processed (butchered or custom).
It is the exhibitor's responsibility to process the rabbits for the buyer.

If you cannot find a butcher to do this for you, try to locate an
experienced hunter to help you or show you. Or you can do it yourself.