

1) REGULATIONS WELFARE STANDARDS RABBITS (PPE) 2006

Regulations of the Dutch Product Board for Poultry and Eggs [Productschap Pluimvee en Eieren] dated 9 February 2006, establishing provisions relating to the welfare of rabbits used in rabbit husbandry.

(Regulations welfare standards rabbits (PPE) 2006).

The Executive Board of the Dutch Product Board for Poultry and Eggs [*Productschap Pluimvee en Eieren*]:

Having regard to the sections 93, first paragraph, 95, 102 and 104 of the Industrial Organisation Act (*Wet op de bedrijfsorganisatie*), and the sections 4, 6 and 7 of the Resolution of the Dutch Product Board for Poultry and Eggs,

Resolution:

1. Definitions

Section 1

In these regulations the following definitions shall apply:

- a. Product Board: the Product Board for Poultry and Eggs;
- b. Executive Board: the Executive Board of the Product Board;
- c. Chairman: the Chairman of the Product Board;
- d. rabbits: animals of the species *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, belonging to the Order Lagomorpha, that are reared or kept for the production of offspring destined for human consumption or for the production of rabbit meat destined for human consumption;
- e. rabbit producer: the commercial producer who rears the rabbits;
- f. does: all female rabbits which have been mated at least once or inseminated including un-weaned litters;
- g. meat rabbits(fryers): young rabbits from weaning up to the age of approx. 80 days;
- h. breeders: rabbits not yet mature enough for mating that are reared for breeding, from the age of approx. 80 days until the first mating or insemination;
- i. breeding bucks: male rabbits that have mated a female at least once or rabbits from which sperm has been taken at least once and which are destined for breeding meat rabbits or breeding stock;
- j. weaning: the separation of young rabbits from the doe;

- k. cage: a closed off area destined to house the rabbits;
- l. nest box: the space, attached to the cage, where the doe kindles;
- m. nest material: litter used on the floor of the nest box;
- n. group: a number of rabbits that are housed in one cage;
- o. mortality percentage: the number of dead weaned rabbits removed divided by (the number of bought weaned rabbits plus the number of live weaned rabbits) multiplied by 100 percent.

2. Housing

2) Section 2

1. The housing used for does must comply with at least the following standards:
 - a. 3 days before the expected date of kindling up to and including 18 days post partum the doe must have access to a nest box, with a minimum surface area of 700 cm², provided with nest material;
 - b. the cage must have a horizontally placed platform, of which the surface area must be at least 900 cm². The width of the platform must be at least 20 cm. If the platform is made from mesh, the gauge of the upper wires should have a diameter of at least 2.45 mm. The distance from the platform to the base and from the platform to the upper side of the cage must be a minimum of 25 cm;
 - c. the height of the cage is at least 60cm over at least 950 cm² of the floor surface area. The access from the base to the platform must be at least 25 cm wide;
 - d. per doe a floor surface area of at least 4500 cm² must be available, whereby the surface area of the floor in the nest box and the surface of the platform can be included;
 - e. if part of the cage has a mesh floor, the gauge of the upper wires should have a diameter of at least 3.0 mm. Hereby, the distance between the central point of the upper wires should be a minimum of 10 mm and a maximum of 16 mm.
2. The housing used for gestating does or does ready for mating and for breeders must comply with at least the following standards:
 - a. per doe or breeder a floor surface area of at least 2000 cm² must be available;
 - b. the height of the cage is at least 40cm over at least 80% of the floor surface area.
 - c. if part of the cage has a mesh floor, the gauge of the upper wires should have a diameter of at least 3.0 mm. Hereby, the distance between the central point of the upper wires should be a minimum of 10 mm and a maximum of 16 mm.
3. The housing used for stud bucks must comply with at least the following standards:
 - a. per stud buck a floor surface area of at least 4000 cm² must be available;
 - b. the height of the cage at every point is at least 60 cm;

- c. if the cage has a mesh floor, the gauge of the upper wires should have a diameter of at least 3.0 mm. Hereby, the distance between the central point of the upper wires should be a minimum of 10 mm and a maximum of 16 mm.
- 2) 4. The housing used for meat rabbits must comply with at least the following standards:
- a. meat rabbits are reared in groups of at least 2 animals;
 - b. if a group consists of less than 5 animals there must be a floor surface area of at least 700 cm² available per meat rabbit;
 - c. if a group consists of more than 5 animals there must be a floor surface area of at least 600 cm² available per meat rabbit;
 - d. the distance between the upper side and the bottom side of the cage is at least 40cm over at least 80% of the floor surface area
 - e. if there are platforms in the cage they must be a minimum of 10 cm wide and the distance from the platform to the base and the distance from the platform to the upper side of the cage must be a minimum of 25 cm. The surface area of the platform can be included in the calculation of the total floor surface area. In addition, on a minimum of ¼ of the total floor surface area the distance between the base and the upper side of the cage must be 40 cm ;
 - f. if the cage has a mesh floor, the gauge of the upper wires should have a diameter of at least 3.0 mm. Hereby, the distance between the central point of the upper wires should be a minimum of 10 mm and a maximum of 16 mm.

3. Environmental enrichment

2) Section 3

1. Rabbits must have access to roughage or material they can gnaw on to satisfy their gnawing needs on a daily basis.
2. The material must not be damaging to the health of the rabbits.

4. House climate

Section 4

1. A day and night rhythm is applied in the house that consists of a minimum of 8 hours of light and minimum of 8 hours of darkness, of which in both cases for 4 successive hours.
2. The light intensity in the house for does and stud bucks is a minimum of 20 Lux during at least 8 hours per day at animal level.
3. For does and stud bucks a dusk period of minimum 1 hour is applied between the period of light and darkness.

5. Feed supplies

Section 5

1. Rabbits have unrestricted access to drinking water.
2. Rabbits have unrestricted access to feed. In the event that feed is distributed over a number of portions per day, the total amount given must be a minimum of the daily nutritional needs.

6. Mating age

Section 6

The minimum age of a breeding rabbit for the 1st mating or insemination is 15 weeks.

7. Inspection by the rabbit producer

Section 7

1. The rabbit producer must inspect the health of the rabbits, the correct functioning of the feed and water supplies and the house climate at least twice a day.
2. Clinically sick rabbits must be separated from clinically healthy rabbits, unless a veterinary surgeon decides otherwise.
3. Rabbits in unbearable suffering should be culled.
4. Dead rabbits must be removed from the house immediately.

8. Mortality

Section 8

1. The rabbit producer must ensure that the mortality percentage is not higher than 10% on a monthly basis.
2. As soon as the mortality percentage on a monthly basis exceeds 10%, the rabbit producer must consult a veterinary surgeon.
3. As soon as it has been established that the mortality percentage on an annual basis is higher than 10%, the rabbit producer must consult a veterinary surgeon with specialised knowledge of the leporid health in order to take measures aimed at reducing the mortality percentage. This veterinary surgeon should be a different veterinary surgeon to that consulted in the second paragraph.
4. The advice given by the veterinary surgeon as intended in paragraph 3 should be recorded in writing and this advice must be followed by the rabbit producer.
5. The advice given by the veterinary surgeon must be kept in the administrative records of the rabbit producer for a period of two years.

6. All costs incurred by the veterinary surgeon- relating to activities and work carried out in relation to paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 - are for the account of the rabbit producer.

9. Administrative records

Section 9

1. The rabbit producer must accurately register the following details in his/her administrative records each month:
 - a. the number of liveborn rabbits;
 - b. the number of weaned rabbits;
 - c. the number of does, meat rabbits, stud bucks and breeders supplied to the rabbit producer from outside his own establishment;
 - d. the joint mortality percentage of does and breeders and the mortality percentage of meat rabbits;
 - e. the number of does, meat rabbits, stud bucks and breeders removed live from the establishment ;
 - f. all preventive or curative medicine or vaccinations given to the animals, whether this was done on the advice of a veterinary surgeon or not;
 - g. any non-medical surgery carried out;
 - h. any calamities.
2. The rabbit producer must keep the administrative records in such a way that the information, as stated in the first paragraph, can easily be consulted at all times.

10. Inspection obligation

Section 10

1. The rabbit producer must be audited by an inspection body approved by the chairman, for compliance with the provisions stipulated in these regulations at least once annually. The cost involved shall be borne by the rabbit producer.
2. The rabbit producer is responsible for ensuring that the report of the findings during the audit as intended in the first paragraph are in the product board's possession with fourteen days after the date of the inspection.
3. If the chairman establishes that the rabbit producer is not complying with the regulations, the chairman can oblige the rabbit producer by resolution to undergo a rectification inspection carried out by the inspection body as intended in the first paragraph.

Section 11

1. The inspection body as intended in section 10, first paragraph, can be approved by the chairman on request.

2. The inspection body to be approved must comply with the accreditation criteria as laid down by resolution of the executive board. The executive board's resolution will be published in the '*Verordeningenblad Bedrijfsorganisatie*'.
3. Approval can be granted temporarily and subject to conditions and can be revoked if it appears that the conditions are no longer complied with.

11. Supervision

Section 12

1. The supervision of compliance with the provisions laid down or pursuant to these regulations will be exercised on behalf of the product board by a service appointed by resolution of the executive board and by persons appointed by the executive board. The executive board's resolution will be published in the '*Verordeningenblad Bedrijfsorganisatie*'.
2. Producers are obliged:
 - a. to submit or have submitted to the persons appointed by the executive board, all the information necessary for the fulfilment of their task;
 - b. to allow or have allowed the persons appointed by the executive board, to inspect all the books and documents necessary for the fulfilment of their task;
 - c. at all times to permit access to or have access permitted to the persons appointed by the executive board to their establishment's premises and to those places or vehicles, where stocks (which is taken to include packaging materials), which belong to the establishment of the producer, are stored and/or transported;
 - d. to tolerate that the persons appointed by the executive board take samples from stocks on the establishment of the producer (which is taken to include packaging materials), irrespective of the place where or in where the stocks are stored and that the producer shall cooperate in accordance with the instructions given by the services and persons appointed by the executive board.
3. The persons as intended in the first paragraph are authorised to draw up adjudication reports for the purpose of disciplinary procedures.

12. Enforcement

Section 13

If the provisions laid down or pursuant to these regulations are breached, disciplinary measures will be imposed as stipulated in the Disciplinary Adjustment Trade and Industrial Bodies Act 2004 (*Wet tuchtrechtspraak bedrijfsorganisatie 2004*).

13. Information processing

Section 14

1. Information relating to companies obtained by the product board in respect of these regulations will be handed to the chairman; this information will not be made public, except to personnel of the secretariat of the product board as well as for the enforcement of that laid down in these regulations.
2. In order to protect the privacy of the entrepreneur, the legal entity, service and persons appointed by the chairman must treat the information obtained in relation to enforcement in a responsible and confidential manner.
3. The chairman can, in deviation from that determined in the first paragraph, decide to announce the totalised information relating to groups of companies, however, never in such a way that information relating to a certain company can be derived from its publication.

14. Transitional provisions

Section 15

1. If a housing system for rabbits was already in use at the moment that these regulations come into force, then section 2, first paragraph, under b, c, d and e, and the second, respectively, fourth paragraph, is not applicable to the rabbit producer concerned for a period of 10 years after the coming into force of these regulations.
2. Without prejudice to that determined in the first paragraph, five years after the date of coming into force of these regulations, the housing of the rabbits must comply with a number of elements of the housing standards and to such an extent that a score of minimum 50% of the maximum number of points to be awarded is achieved according to the points system as contained in Annex 1 to these regulations.
3. Section 2, third paragraph comes into force 5 years after the coming into force of these regulations.

15. Exemption

Section 16

1. After a period of five years after the coming into force of these regulations, on written request of the rabbit producer, exemption can be granted by the chairman for that laid down in section 15, second paragraph for a period of maximum five years.
2. Provisions and conditions may be attached to the granting of an exemption. An exemption can be granted subject to restrictions. The exemption can be revoked at all times.

16. Final provisions

Section 17

1. This regulation shall be cited as: Regulations welfare standards rabbits (PPE) 2006.
2. These regulations shall enter into force commencing on the second day after the publication date in the '*Verordeningenblad Bedrijfsorganisatie*'.

Zoetermeer, 9 February 2006

drs. J.J. Ramekers,
Chairman,

drs. S.B.M. Jongerius,
Secretary.

Annex 1

section 2	Points if satisfactory
1) b	10
c	10
d	10
e	5
	35
2) a	10
b	10
c	5
	25
4) a	5
b or c	20
d	10
f	5
	40
Total	100

1 EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE REGULATIONS WELFARE STANDARDS RABBITS (PPE) 2006

General

The welfare of rabbits in commercial rabbit husbandry is a subject of social debate. The points of concern regarding the welfare of rabbits mainly relate to singly housed does, the high replacement percentage and housing rabbits on mesh floors, but also singly housed bucks, the lack of stimuli in the barren cages, the limited space per animal and the one-sided diet that does not satisfy the natural gnawing needs of rabbits.

The National Council for Agricultural Research (*Nationale Raad voor Landbouwkundig Onderzoek*) already drew attention to these issues in 1995 in the report titled "Welfare related problems in a number of sectors in animal husbandry" .

The report "The hidden bio-industry" by the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals (1998) also indicates the frequent shortcomings in the area of rabbit welfare.

In 2001 the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries reported individual housing of rabbits in too small and too low cages as a shortcoming in the memorandum "*Houden van dieren*".

Later, the Policy Document Animal Welfare issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (2002) also drew attention to welfare concerns in rabbit husbandry. In 2005 the Council of Europe drew up recommendations for the housing of rabbits and in September 2005 the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a scientific report on the impact of the current housing and husbandry systems on the health and welfare of farmed domestic rabbits.

On 11 October 2002 the state secretary of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, in a meeting attended by the secretary and the executive board, requested the product board to draw up regulations relating to the housing and husbandry practices for rabbits. In reaction to this request a start was made in the course of 2003 on compiling an inventory of the possibilities of regulation and in relation consultation took place with the Nederlandse Organisatie van Konijnenhouders (NOK) and at a later stage, also with the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality.

In the cited report published by the EFSA which discussed rabbit husbandry in Europe, the points previously mentioned were addressed with great emphasis. In Europe there are no provisions intended to improve the welfare of rabbits. The Netherlands, with the regulation in question, is therefore unique. The regulations do not offer an immediate solution to all the welfare problems described. They do, however, contain the initial impulse towards improving welfare in rabbit husbandry. There are currently various studies taking place into group housing for does and into cage bases as an alternative for the traditional mesh floors. If these studies provide firm results that can enhance and improve rabbit welfare, then the findings should also be included in the regulations. In this light, the regulations should then be considered as the first step towards improving the welfare of farmed domestic rabbits commercially reared in the Netherlands.

The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals renounces the individual housing in cages of social animals. In the opinion of the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals the rabbit is an animal that naturally lives in social groups and therefore considers housing rabbits singly in mesh cages as unacceptable practice. Research into making group housing practicable for does is still in progress and not as yet completed.

The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals praises the fact that the sector is devoting much of its time and energy to this aspect and that it has a positive approach towards this study. The aim of Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals is group housing for all rabbits and in time this will have to be the objective.

With the current regulations for housing standards for rabbits, the Dutch rabbit husbandry sector leads the way compared to the rest of Europe. The standards laid down in the regulations are – according to the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals - indeed a step forward for rabbit welfare, but are far from being far reaching enough.

Moreover, as a consequence of the lengthy transitional period, the situation for rabbits will only improve very gradually. The points system introduced in these regulations, whereby rabbit producers must take steps during the 10 year transitional period and adapt their houses and cages in phases, is a fine approach according to the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals. This stimulates rabbit producers to take a phased approach toward adapting their housing systems, and not to delay making changes until the transitional period had almost elapsed.

The rabbit husbandry sector accepts its responsibility through the NOK(*Nederlands Organisatie van Konijnenhouders*) to aim for better animal welfare. The regulation offers a way of enforcement and reinforces the safeguarding of the provisions, and emphasises the aim of achieving better animal welfare. By increasing the living surface area and taking the animals' natural patterns of behaviour into account animal welfare will be greatly enhanced. The sector will continue to search for ways of improving welfare and does not exclude the possibility that the housing systems of the future will require further modification. In order to continue to safeguard animal welfare it remains essential not to lose sight of the economic profitability.

In addition, the sector also has a responsibility to take account of hygiene and food safety as well as the environment. In the endeavour to achieve higher levels of animal welfare, the aspects mentioned above must also be benchmarked.

In respect to the member states of the European Union, the Netherlands is sending out a very clear signal, by actually safeguarding the welfare of rabbits through this Regulation.

Group housing

The aim of the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals is group housing. However, it is unrealistic to make this system of housing already obligatory at the present time. A group housing system is currently being tested in practice on several establishments. This trial is taking place in cooperation with the Animal Sciences Group. However, it appears that it is not economically feasible for rabbit producers to house rabbits in this system. The study will be continued, and within a foreseeable time other group housing systems will be investigated. It is vitally important that these studies are continued, so that ultimately a group housing system can be developed that gives technical and financial results at least equal to those in conventional housing systems. This regulation contains the possibility to include group housing.

Alternative base/floor

The traditional mesh floor often resulted to problems with feet and hocks with rabbits. In reaction, many types of alternative flooring have been investigated over the years. Until today, however, this search has not resulted in an alternative floor that actually reduces foot-related problems. If studies reveal that an alternative exists, this will also be prescribed in this regulation.

Administrative burden

The administrative burden for the rabbit producer will slightly increase in connection with this regulation. The importance of animal welfare justifies this extra burden. Through correct administration, the mortality percentage can be revealed. With rabbit populations, this is an important parameter for welfare. The regulation includes a maximum mortality percentage. If this percentage is exceeded, a veterinary surgeon must be contacted, to signal and assess the mortality, in order to reduce mortality in the future. For rabbit producers who participate in the Integral Chain Management (*Integrale Keten Beheersingssysteem*) (IKB), the regulation will not create any extra administrative burden.

The aims to be pursued and the expected (side)effects of the regulation

The regulation can be used to set criteria that will lead to measures meaning that rabbits housed by commercial rabbit producers in the Netherlands are cared for and housed in such a way that their welfare is safeguarded.

The regulation is expected to enhance the general welfare levels of rabbits housed commercially in the Netherlands. In addition, the regulation can be used to demonstrate that the rabbit producing sector accepts its responsibility to house and rear rabbits in a way that respects the welfare of the animals. The regulation can also use disciplinary measures to address and expose any excesses relating to animal welfare.

Further motivation for the necessity for public legislation *in casu* the regulation

Social pressure groups have already been expressing their concerns and criticism of the way in which rabbits are housed for a number of years. This criticism has also been expressed by various political parties, which prompted the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality to request the product board to lay down the requirements and standards relating to the welfare of commercially housed rabbits in a regulation. To ensure that all, approximately 150, rabbit husbandry establishments are subject to the welfare standards in an identical manner and in order to enforce their observance, public legislation is essential.

The considerations compared to private alternatives

If the welfare standards are enforced on the sector through a private regulation, there is a possibility that companies withdraw from the regulations. Inclusion of the - according to private law - *Integrale Keten Beheersingssysteem* of the product board could be a possibility, were it not for the fact that the majority of the rabbit husbandry establishments have not (yet) joined the IKB scheme.

Aspects relating to the implementation and enforcement of the regulation

By resolution, one or several inspection bodies will be accredited by resolution of the chairman, which can be called on by the rabbit producer to inspect whether the provisions stipulated in the regulation are being observed. In order to emphasise the own responsibility held by the rabbit producer in regard to the observance of the regulation, an inspection obligation has been provided for, which is for the account of the rabbit producer.

This is in line with the existing inspection practice whereby accredited inspection bodies already visit rabbit producers to carry out inspections and audits in the framework of other

public or private regulations. This will limit the number of inspectors visiting a company to a minimum, which in view of the transmission of pathogens and/or zoonoses is highly important. This will also limit the costs involved for the producers.

Rabbit producers found to be in breach of the provisions in the regulations will be penalised through disciplinary measures.

On the grounds of section 104, third paragraph, of the Industrial Organisation Act persons have been appointed to supervise the observance of the regulation. If instances of non-observance are established, an adjudication report will be drawn up for further disciplinary measures. The chairman of the product board will submit disciplinary cases to an independent Disciplinary Court of the PPE. The Administrative Court for Trade and Industry is the designated Court of Appeal.

The financial consequences of the regulation

The result of the regulations in as far as the rabbit husbandry sector is concerned, is that these producers will be obliged to adapt the way rabbits are housed on their establishments. So as to avoid placing considerable investment obligations on these rabbit producers, certain transitional provisions have been established on the grounds of which rabbit producers are given the opportunity to continue using housing systems that have not yet been fully written off in financial terms for a number of years. In view of the fact that in virtually no other EU member state welfare regulations such as these in question are in force, a slight competitive disadvantage may be created. The representatives of the rabbit producers have, nevertheless, indicated that this possible competitive disadvantage is outweighed by the expected positive effects of the welfare standards provided for in the regulation. Monitoring and enforcing the observance of the regulation entails certain costs. These costs must be borne by the rabbit producers involved.

The relationship to other legislation and to existing and planned international and communautaire regulations

The European Union has established no regulations concerning housing and rearing rabbits. Neither are any preparations being made to introduce similar regulations.

In the Netherlands, welfare regulations apply for various animal husbandry sectors. For example, on 1 January 2003 the implementation of EU-legislation regulating the welfare of layer hens. The product board has also established legislation regarding welfare standards for broiler parent animals, turkeys reared for meat and mink.

The regulation is in keeping with the Netherlands Act on Animal Health and Welfare.

Explanatory notes per section

Section 1

The regulation concerns rabbits that are reared for meat production and rabbits that are reared for the further production of these meat rabbits. The regulation does not concern rabbits that are kept as domestic companion animals, or for the production of domestic companion animals, or for rabbits reared for their fur. For that matter, no rabbits are reared commercially in the Netherlands for fur production.

Section 2

In the rabbit husbandry sector, the animals that are reared can be subdivided into various categories. Each category of rabbit has specific welfare issues which must be complied with.

The regulation distinguishes between the following categories of rabbits: does about to kindle or suckling does, gestating does or does ready to be mated, breeders, stud bucks and meat rabbits.

Per category, minimum standards have been imposed on the housing and established, on the understanding that the same standards apply for does ready to be mated and breeders. The standards mainly relate to the available floor surface area and the height of the cage. The surface of the feeder may, if this is positioned outside the cage, not be included in the calculation of the floor surface area. If the feeder is inside the cage, it does not need to be subtracted from the floor surface area

In addition, for does about to kindle or suckling does, the presence of a nest box, nesting material and a platform is obligatory. Nesting material can vary from wool plucked by the rabbit itself to wood fibres, buckwheat chaff, barley straw and flax.

For meat rabbits, the minimum demanded surface area per animal partly depends on the size of the group of animals. Moreover, for this category there is also the possibility to increase the floor surface area of the cage by introducing a platform.

Finally, for all categories, if wire mesh flooring is used, minimum standards have been established with which these floors must comply.

Section 3

In order to grant rabbits the opportunity to fulfil their gnawing needs, roughage must be supplied daily or enrichment objects must be provided.

These enrichment objects may consist of, for example, wooden dowels suspended from the roof of the cage, compact rolls of straw or blocks of feed supplement (Luzerne blocks).

Section 4

In order to simulate naturally occurring conditions as far as possible, within the realm of practical and financial possibility, a day and night rhythm has been laid down. For does and stud bucks, a minimum light intensity during at least 8 hours of the light period has been laid down. For meat rabbits and breeders applies that they prefer to live in an environment with light levels similar to dawn/dusk intensities. In relation to fertility, a clear day and night rhythm and a light intensity of minimum 20 Lux is demanded for does and stud bucks.

Section 5

Under certain circumstances, the feed intake of rabbits must be limited. For example, for breeders it is important to ensure they do not have permanent access to feed. Ad-libitum feeding can lead to obesity with breeders, which has negative consequences for fertility. In this case, the feed must be provided in rations. The amount of feed dispensed to the animals must be enough to satisfy their daily nutritional requirements.

Section 6

To prevent breeders from being mated at too young an age, it has been determined that animals may only be mated or inseminated for the first time at an age of 15 weeks.

Section 7

This section goes into greater detail about the responsibilities of the rabbit producers regarding the health of the animals. This section lays down that a rabbit producer must inspect the animals at least twice a day, inspect the feed and water supplies, isolate clinically sick animals and remove any dead animals immediately.

Section 8

Each rabbit producer must endeavour to prevent animal mortality throughout the period that the animals are being kept. Despite this, the number of dead rabbits that are removed from production sites is rather high. To encourage the reduction of the average mortality percentage in rabbit husbandry, a provision has been included stating that each rabbit producer must aim to keep the mortality percentage below 10%. The mortality percentage is calculated by dividing the number of dead, weaned animals removed from the establishment by the sum of the number of purchased rabbits and the number of live weaned rabbits and then multiplying this quotient by 100.

If the mortality percentage in a month exceeds 10%, a veterinary surgeon must be consulted.

In addition, each rabbit producer must calculate the annual mortality percentage for the breeders and does jointly, as well as the annual mortality percentage for meat rabbits. If the mortality percentage for the does/breeders or the mortality percentage for the meat rabbits calculated over a year amounts to more than 10%, the rabbit producer is obliged to consult a veterinary surgeon specialised in leporid health. In order to safeguard the independence of the findings, a different veterinary surgeon should be consulted than the veterinary surgeon consulted on the previous occasion. The advice given by this veterinary surgeon in relation to reducing the mortality percentage must be followed.

The advice given by the veterinary surgeon in the framework of the third paragraph, must be stated in writing. This report must be saved by the rabbit producer for a period of two years.

Section 9

The administration obligations laid down in this regulation do not form an additional burden for commercial rabbit producers, as this information is already registered in the framework of codes of good operational management practice.

Registration of any non-medical surgery only concerns measures taken in relation to identification of the various categories of animals. This may concern micro-chips inserted below the skin, application of tattoos or clipping a small part of the ear.

Other surgery is not permitted on rabbits based on the Non-medical surgery resolution (*Ingrepenbesluit*) of the Netherlands Act on Animal Health and Welfare.

All administrative records kept by the rabbit producer must be saved for a minimum of two years.

Section 10

This section is in keeping with the existing inspection regime of the other welfare regulations in the poultry and mink sectors.

To emphasise the own responsibility of the rabbit producer in regard to the observance of the standards on the one hand, and on the other hand in order to be able to better monitor the observance of the provisions included in these welfare regulations, each establishment that keeps rabbits is under the obligation to have an inspection carried out once a year for its own account by one of the inspection bodies appointed by resolution of the executive board.

Section 11

In order to guarantee safeguards regarding the expertise and independence of the inspection bodies, a system of accreditation of inspection bodies is in place.

Now that several qualified and equipped inspection authorities are available and the various welfare demands and inspection thereof have met with a sufficient degree of approval, justice has already been done to market dynamics. The conditions for accreditation of these bodies are laid down by resolution of the board.

Section 12

The supervision of the observance of the regulation is carried out on behalf of the product board. In conformance with the Industrial Organisation Act the board appoints persons or a service to carry out the supervisory tasks to monitor the observance of the regulation.

The extent of the authority of the supervisors is regulated in the Dutch "General Administrative Law Act". Rabbit producers must cooperate with the supervisors in the execution of their activities.

If an infringement of the provisions set out in or pursuant to this regulation is established, the supervisory body is authorised on the grounds of the Disciplinary Adjustment Trade and Industrial Bodies Act to draw up a disciplinary report for the purpose of disciplinary action.

Section 13

This section determines that infringement of this regulation will be enforced via disciplinary measures.

Section 14

This section safeguards that all information submitted to the product board in the framework of this regulation, will be handled with the utmost confidentiality, in order to protect the privacy of the rabbit producer.

Section 15

In order to grant rabbit producers sufficient time to take the necessary measures and in order to allow producers a realistic period of time to write off their existing rearing equipment, the following special provisions have been included in the regulations.

It has been established that for the housing of does, breeders and meat rabbits, existing systems that do not comply with the demands stated in Section 2 may be used for a period of maximum 10 years after these regulations come into force. In addition, it has also been established that five years after the regulations come into force a number of housing conditions must be complied with. A certain points system has been developed for this purpose. The rabbit producer is free to choose to make investments in certain elements of the housing requirements.

An overview of the number of points granted to the various housing requirements as described in section 2 of the regulations follows.

Condition	Score
A minimum floor surface area is available per animal of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does: 4500 cm² • gestating does or does ready for mating and breeders: 2000 cm² • meat rabbits : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * < 5: 700 cm² or * ≥ 5: 600 cm² 	10 10 20
Mesh floor, diameter 3.02 mm and distance between upper wires minimum 10 and maximum 16 mm, or plastic base. For: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does • gestating does or does ready for mating and breeders: • meat rabbits 	5 5 5
Cage height: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does: minimum 950 cm² floor surface area 60 cm • gestating does or does ready for mating and breeders: 40 cm (80%) • meat rabbits: 40 cm (80%) 	10 10 10
Does: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the cage must have a horizontally placed platform, of which the surface minimum area must be 900 cm². The distance between the platform to the case or roof of the cage must be 25 - 35 cm 	10
Meat rabbits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • groups of minimum 2 animals 	5
Total	100

A number of points have been added to each element of the housing requirements. After a period of five years the rabbit producer should have scored at least 50% of the maximum number of points that can be granted, according to the points system as described in appendix 1. If a rabbit producer has a mixed company, he must accordingly score 50 points. For rabbit producers who only raise meat rabbits a minimum of 20 points must be scored, and for companies that only raise does a minimum of 30 points must be scored. If a rabbit producer modifies a part of the cages already present, the points will be awarded in proportion to the modified part.

An exception to the transitional period will be made for the availability of a nest box with a minimum floor surface area of 700 cm² and the presence of nesting material for does about to kindle and suckling does. Both the nest box and the nesting material must be made available to each of the categories of does involved from the moment that the regulation comes into force.

A transitional period of five years will apply to housing for stud bucks.

The transitional measures do not apply to housing systems constructed after the regulation has come into force.

Section 16

After the 5 year period following the coming into force of this regulation, the chairman may grant exemption under certain circumstances and conditions. This concerns an exemption for achieving 50% of the maximum number of points to be awarded according to the previously mentioned points system. This exemption can be granted to rabbit producers for a maximum of 5 years. This concerns rabbit producers who intend to cease their commercial activities within a 10 year period following this regulation coming into force.

Section 17

This section contains the usual provisions regarding the coming into force and official title. The date of the regulation entering into force is determined on the second day after the date of publication of the regulation.

Zoetermeer, 9 February 2006

drs. J.J. Ramekers,
Chairman,

drs. S.B.M. Jongerius,
Secretary.

General

The regulation provides regulations relating to welfare standards for rabbits. Since the enforcement on 23 April 2006 certain technical impracticalities have become apparent and this has given rise to certain nuances being introduced to a number of elements of the provisions. Consultation has taken place with LTO (*Dutch Confederation of Agriculture and Horticulture*)/NOK (*Nederlands Organisatie van Konijnenhouders*) and the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals in regard to these attention points. Both the LTO/NOK and the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals endorse the necessity of implementing the proposed amendments to the regulation. The regulation in question provides in the implementation of the amendments.

The explanatory notes to the regulation state that research is taking place into a number of aspects. In the aforementioned consultation the progress and any results were discussed. The research is proceeding well and a number of results have already been booked. However, at the time of drafting the regulation in question there were insufficient points of departure to justify including any possible amendments indicated by the research in these amendments

Explanation per section

Section I

Part A includes 20 cm as the minimum dimension of the shortest side of the platform. This will avoid the use of very narrow platforms. In addition, a provision has also been included stating the minimum mesh gauge used for upper mesh used for the platform.

Part C determines that the cage must have a height of at least 40 cm over at least 80% of the floor surface area. In the opinion of the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals a surface of 2000 cm² is already too small for breeders.

Part D prescribes that the distance between the upper side and the base must be at least 40 cm over at least 80% of the floor surface area and is therefore in line with that stated in part C.

Part E prescribes the obligation that rabbits must have access at each moment of the day or night (rabbits are actually crepuscular animals) to roughage or enrichment material to gnaw on. In regard to gnawing material, it has also been prescribed that this material must satisfy the gnawing need. An iron chain does not satisfy the desire to gnaw, but a wooden block attached to an iron chain does.

Section II

Section II regulates the entering into force of the regulation. The regulation shall enter into force on the second day after date of the *Verordeningsblad Bedrijfsorganisatie* in which the regulation was published.

Section III

This section determines how to deal with rights that have already been secured. The amendments of section 2 of the Regulation welfare standards rabbits (PPE) 2006 with this regulation influence the points system as included in appendix 1 of the regulation. A situation may arise where points have been accrued based on the stipulations of the old regulation, which would not have been accrued on the basis of that contained in the new legislation. To avoid a situation where, as a result points would probably have to be surrendered again, this section decrees that the number of points held by compliance to the respective paragraphs in section 2, are 'frozen' at the moment that this regulation comes into force.

Zoetermeer, 11 September 2008

J.T. Wolleswinkel,
deputy chairman,

ir. B.M. Dellaert,
General Secretary.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Basic text, laid down on February 2006;
- 2) Amendment to regulation 2008-I, laid down on 11 September 2008.