

IS YOUR HYGIENE REALLY NECESSARY? **by Tony Kent**

No doubt this little effort of mine will cause much shaking of heads and muttering in beards and Public Bars, in view of this I will admit to doing these things myself. The reason why I do them, is that I have spent a lifetime with stock and have been able to relate many rabbit problems to problems met with in farm animals. As I have an inquiring mind I have experimented with treatments and preventative measures with quite a lot of success. When I think that I have proved my point I get the results checked.

We all know the meaning of the word hygiene so I will not dwell on it. In spite of all our efforts, every unit has a build up of bacteria over a period of time. The stock that live in this bacteria become immune to it by the process of immunisation. This happens by the stock constantly receiving small doses of bacteria from their bedding, food, drink. These small doses are overcome by the red corpuscles in the bloodstream which, having defeated the enemy, get strength to fight future battles, this gathering of strength is known as 'a build up of antibodies'. During pregnancy, the mother feeds her young with globulin through the umbilical cord. This globulin contains the antibodies necessary for the young to survive in bacteria of the unit. Should the mother fail or be unable to pass on the antibodies, the post partum death rate will be very high. The passing on of antibodies continues after birth through the mothers' milk, for the first 72 hours after birth the mothers' milk produces a milk very high in antibodies and protein which is known as colostrum. If the young are deprived of colostrum, they will become retarded as youngsters and in most cases undersized and underweight with poor conformation as adults. Consequently, if one has to foster youngsters, they should be fostered into a litter of equal age or younger, never older.

As previously stated, every unit contains bacteria and unfortunately the bacteria of every unit is different, consequently we have the problem of acclimitising new stock. This can be done quite easily except with mated does. The new

arrival is put in a pen which has been mucked out but not disinfected. After a month in this pen, the animal will have started the conversion process and the doe can be mated, the proof of this is in my own rabbitry at present. I have two chinrex does which have been put through the acclimitisation process before mating and one that arrived mated in a part exchange deal. All three came from different areas, Yorkshire, Essex and Surrey, all have litters. The two processed does have big bouncing baby buns, whilst doe no.3 has a rather seedy looking litter.

When a unit reaches the climax of inbreeding, it may suffer from health problems, particularly amongst stock that is being exhibited. This is a case of stock becoming so immune to one strain of bacteria over the years that they cannot absorb other strains. The answer here is to buy in stock from units most likely to be competed against and pass them through all the pens in the unit to create a new strain of bacteria. To speed the process, soiled bedding can be taken from the new stock and given to the old. I have used this method with great success.

On the subject of hygiene when did you last disinfect your travelling boxes?

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