Tehya Read, J Fisheries Livest Prod 2015, 3:2
http://dx.doi.org/10.4172/2332-2608.S1.003

OMICS International
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International Conference on Livestock Nutrition

August 11-12, 2015 Frankfurt, Germany

Feed composition at the onset of feeding behaviour influences slaughter weight in rabbits

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We aimed to assess the influence of feed composition at the onset of solid feed intake on growth performance and health in young rabbits until slaughter. 796 rabbit kits were divided into 2 experimental groups differing in the diet that the rabbits received from 18-28 days. From 18–28 days, young rabbits in the RF group received a diet meeting the needs of reproductive rabbit does, while young rabbits in the FF group received a diet meeting the needs of growing rabbits. From 28–70 days, rabbits of both groups received the F diet. Feed was offered ad libitum before weaning and from 63-70 days but was restricted from weaning to 63 days. Feed intake, animal weights and health status were recorded weekly. Mortality was recorded daily. Feed intake was higher in the RF group than in the FF group from 18–28 days ($p<0.01$), but was similar from 28–35 days. This resulted in a higher average daily gain from 18–28 days and a higher weight at weaning in the RF group compared to the FF group ($p<0.001$). Differences in live weight between groups was reduced at slaughter ($p<0.05$) due to a lower feed conversion rate in the FF group at 42–49 days and 63–70 days ($p<0.05$). This suggests that (i) suckling rabbits do not regulate feed intake based on energy content of the diet at the onset of solid feed intake, and that (ii) when feed intake after weaning is controlled, the feeding strategy before weaning has an impact on live weight until slaughter.

Biography

Tehya Read is currently working on her PhD at the Institut de Polytechnique de Toulouse, France. Through a partnership between INRA (Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique) and Terrena, she is able to dedicate her time to the study of rabbit nutrition and health.

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