



Chapter 009, Rabbit Colony Management and Related Health Concerns (American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine)

Mark Suckow

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NOTE: This is a single chapter excerpted from the book *The Laboratory Rabbit, Guinea Pig, Hamster, and Other Rodents*, made available for individual purchase. Additional chapters, as well as the entire book, may be purchased separately.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the management of rabbits within a research setting. It discusses the housing, caging, feeding, and the environmental conditions required for it. The housing of rabbits in the laboratory setting is conceptually the same as housing them for meat production, show, or pet purposes. The primary difference comes in the steps taken to preserve their health status or to contain infectious agents used within these animals for research purposes. Feed distribution systems may be incorporated into the cage design or food may be provided in separate dishes on the cage floor. Most commercial caging for research use incorporates a “J” type feeder. Water may be provided via water bottles, automatic watering systems, or water bowls. As with any other equipment that enters the rabbit's primary housing environment, enrichment materials must meet the same rigorous sanitation standards as the caging itself. Rabbits seem to perform better when fed pellets than when they are fed mixed grains, meal diets, or textured feeds. Dietary toxins are generally of low concern in the laboratory setting when high-quality, laboratory-grade feeds are provided.

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