

## PREPARING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF YOUR BABIES

**Accurate records** – did you write down the day you attempted breeding your does? Use the gestation chart to determine the date that the doe is due.

**Nest boxes** – Just before time for the babies to be due, you need to thoroughly wash your nest boxes by spraying some Clorox (or other disinfectant) in the boxes. Rinse the boxes thoroughly and then let them dry in the sun. Set them in out of the weather until it is time to place them in the pens with your does.

Place the nest box in with your doe at least two (2) days prior to her delivery date. Place a moderate amount of hay in the nest box and leave it alone as the doe will arrange the nest the way she wants it. You will place the nest box in one corner of the pen. Look below to see where her droppings have fallen to make sure you are not placing the nest box in the corner of the pen that she goes to the bathroom. Otherwise, she may start using it in the nest box.

**Clamp lights** – A clamp light should be placed above the nest box approximately 10-12 inches above. You can use a 60 watt bulb; however, if we have extremely cold temperatures you may consider using a higher wattage bulb (75 or 100). DO NOT USE the red heat lamps as they will “cook” the babies!

\*When the doe is due, you should **CHECK HER OFTEN** throughout the day and evening. This is very important. Because the babies are born without fur (naked), they are extremely susceptible to the cold and will die if they get out on the wire or out from the nest box. You should keep a daily count to make sure that all babies are accounted for. At this stage, do not handle them a whole lot, just check to make sure you have the right count and make sure they are all okay. **ALWAYS** pet the mamma doe first so that she is comfortable with you being in her pen. This is not the time that you want your friends and neighbors to come out to the barn and look at the babies. Keep strangers out for awhile as this can make the does nervous. You should keep on checking the babies OFTEN until they are about 2 to 2 ½ weeks old (until their fur comes on and their eyes open) to ensure that they stay warm and safe. After that, 2-3 times a day is sufficient. Sometimes, they could be nursing and the mamma will jump out of the box and they can fall out on to the wire, get cold and die. I can't say this enough --- **CHECK THEM OFTEN!!!**

\*At about 10-12 days on there fur will come on and their eyes will open up.

\*Once the babies are born, Mamma should get full feed --- not just the 8 oz. you have been giving her prior to delivery. You should be utilizing the pelleted feed during the evening and once the babies begin eating, I place the conditioning feed out during the day and the pelleted feed in the evening. You can mix these together if you wish.

## **PROBLEMS WITH KINDLING**

**Nursing** – typically, the does will only nurse their babies twice a day. 5-6 minutes in the a.m. and 5-6 minutes in the p.m. Other than that, she may jump in and check on them but that is all. So you may not think that she is nursing them but that is because she only does this a couple of times a day. To make sure that the babies are getting fed, check their bellies to make sure at some point in the day, they are filled out and not shriveled or emaciated (ribs showing, lethargic). It is also not uncommon for the mamma to not nurse them during the first 24 hours after birth.

**Too many babies** – an average litter is about 7 but could go as high as 10 very easily. If this occurs, you will want to “foster” over some kits to another doe who may not have as many. Raising 8-10 babies on a meat pen litter will bring down the overall size of the entire litter. **Not enough babies** – Foster some kits from another doe who has too many to one that doesn't have but 2-3 to balance out the litters. If you have a doe that only has one kit born, foster over that baby to another doe, wait 3-4 days and re-breed that doe. Don't waste your doe for 8-10 weeks on one baby. Besides, one kit would not have anybody to cuddle with and will probably die because it will get cold.

Nest box chill – When rabbits are born naked - if they get cold, Californians will come out with what you call a nest box chill. This is a grayish-black “frosting” that tips their fur. Nothing you can do about this if it occurs. It is NOT a disqualification in a meat pen however, if you use one with a nest box chill and the others don’t have it – it will make the pen look “different” . Uniformity is key in a meat pen. The nest box chill will molt out as the rabbit grows older and he will become white again.

Nest box eyes - The eyes on kits do not open up until about 10-12 days old. At this time if you notice a kit whose eyes have not opened when the others in the litter have, it could have nest box eyes. You can gently pry open the eye just a little bit at a time. MAKE SURE that the others in the litter are opening as well before you do this. If the nest box is dirty, some bacteria could’ve gotten in their eye and caused an infection. If the eye doesn’t open, it will be blind as well. If the eye tends to stay shut and gets puffy, once the eye is opened, white puss will ooze out of it. If this occurs, you will have to gently wipe the eye with a clean, warm cloth each day and apply some terramycin ophthalmic ointment a couple of times a day. If a cloudy white spot occurs on the eye surface, that is a blind spot and is a disqualification.

Removing the nest box – you want to make sure that for the first 2 to 2 ½ weeks that the babies are in the nest box that it stays relatively clean and dry. If it is wet and nasty, the babies will get sick. If it is needed, you will have to remove the wet or dirty hay from the box and place fresh hay in there. Try to reserve some of the mother’s fur if at all possible so she will not have to pull more fur. After about 2 ½ to 3 weeks when the babies can get their footing on the wire you can begin to remove the nest box from their pen. You can turn it to the side leaving them some place to retreat for a few days, then pull it out but place a nice patch of hay in the pen for them to huddle on.

Fostering – If a doe has too many babies you may need to foster some to another doe. You should remove the kit(s) that you want to foster from the 1<sup>st</sup> doe and then place them one by one in the new nest box. You can place a dot of vanilla on the foster doe’s nose to throw her scent off for awhile while the new kits smell like her own. Just place them in the huddle of kits in the box.

Getting started on feed – you want the babies to get started eating as soon as possible. Once their eyes open and they start moving around a bit (sometimes climbing in and out of the box), you can sprinkle some raw oatmeal in their box (or in their feeder) to prompt them to start eating. Both the mommas and the babies love the oatmeal. Once the nest box has been removed, you will need to either place a larger food bowl (shallow) in the pen for the babies to eat out of OR utilize one of the larger hanging feeders. Make sure if you use a crock or a bowl that it is heavy enough so that it doesn’t get knocked over. Babies tend to get in the bowl and sometimes get the feed wet or dirty so you may have to keep dumping the bowl every day to clean it out and place fresh feed in the bowl.

**NEXT MONTH** – Conditioning and feeding out the meat pens. Watching their weights.