

# Index

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	1
1.1. Rabbit production	2
1.1.1. Rabbit meat characteristics	2
1.1.2. Rabbit meat production	3
1.2. Genetic improvement in rabbits	4
1.2.1. Selection for litter size	6
1.2.1.1. Genetic parameters	6
1.2.1.2. Response to selection for litter size	9
1.2.2. Litter size components: ovulation rate and prenatal survival	12
1.2.2.1. Ovulation rate	12
<i>Ovulation process</i>	12
<i>Estimation of ovulation rate</i>	14
1.2.2.2. Prenatal survival.	15
<i>Embryonic and foetal development</i>	15
<i>First stages of development until implantation</i>	15
<i>Placentation and late stages of gestation</i>	16
<i>Causes and distribution of prenatal mortality</i>	18
<i>Estimation of prenatal survival</i>	20
1.2.2.3. Selection for ovulation rate	20
<i>Genetic parameters</i>	21
<i>Response to selection</i>	23
<i>High ovulation rate and prenatal mortality</i>	23
1.2.2.4. Selection for uterine capacity	26
1.2.2.5. Selection for ovulation rate and litter size	29
1.3. References	30
<b>Chapter 2: Objectives</b>	46
2.1. Objectives	47
<b>Chapter 3: Selection for Ovulation Rate and Litter Size Using Independent Levels in Rabbits: Genetic Parameters, Direct and Correlated Responses on Reproductive Traits</b>	48
3.1. Abstract	49
3.2. Introduction	50

3.3. Materials and methods	51
3.3.1. Animals and experimental design	51
3.3.2. Traits	52
3.3.3. Statistical Analysis	53
3.4. Results and discussion	55
3.4.1. Genetic parameters	56
3.4.1.1. Heritability	56
3.4.1.2. Repeatability ( $r$ )	59
3.4.1.3. Genetic correlations between litter size and other traits	60
3.4.1.4. Genetic correlations between ovulation rate and other traits	62
3.4.1.5. Correlations between permanent effects	63
3.4.1.6. Phenotypic correlations	64
3.4.2. Response to selection	68
3.4.2.1. Selection for ovulation rate	68
3.4.2.2. Selection by independent culling levels for ovulation rate and litter size	71
3.5. Conclusion	74
3.6. References	74

**Chapter 4: Selection for Ovulation Rate and Litter Size Using Independent Levels in Rabbits: Genetic Parameters and Correlated Responses on Growth Traits** 81

4.1. Abstract	82
4.2. Introduction	83
4.3. Materials and methods	84
4.3.1. Animals and experimental design	84
4.3.2. Traits	85
4.3.3. Statistical Analysis	86
4.4. Results and discussion	88
4.4.1. Genetic parameters	89
4.4.1.1. Heritability	89
4.4.1.2. Maternal effect ( $m^2$ ) and common litter effect ( $c^2$ )	90
4.4.1.3. Correlations between reproductive traits and growth traits	92

4.4.1.4. Response to selection	95
4.5. Conclusion	97
4.6. References	97
<b>Chapter 5: Effect of Increased Ovulation Rate on Embryo and Foetal Survival as A Model for Selection by Ovulation Rate in Rabbits</b>	101
5.1. Abstract	102
5.2. Introduction	104
5.3. Materials and methods	105
5.3.1. Animals	105
5.3.2. Treatment with eCG	105
5.3.3. Traits	105
5.3.4. Statistical Analyses	106
5.4. Results and discussion	107
5.4.1. Ovulation rate, number of implanted embryos and foetuses	109
5.4.2. Survival rates	110
5.4.3. Placenta and foetus weight	113
5.5. Conclusion	115
5.6. References	116
<b>Chapter 6: General Discussion</b>	120
6.1. Background	121
6.2. Relevant findings	123
6.2.1. Selection for ovulation rate	123
High ovulation rate and prenatal mortality	124
Selection for ovulation rate and litter size	126
6.3. References	129
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusions</b>	135
Genetics and environmental parameters	136
Response to selection	136
High ovulation rate and prenatal mortality	137