



Pilot Animal Welfare Standards For Rabbits

- If in a particular situation or circumstance, a standard as written might compromise the welfare of the animals in the producer's care, the producer should contact Whole Foods Market Global Quality Standards for a variance.
- We expect our supply partners to conduct their business in full compliance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations. The WFM Pilot Animal Welfare Standards for Rabbits are specific to Whole Foods Market and are not an attempt to supersede laws related to rabbit farming practices.

Section 1: Farm Plan and Documentation

- 1.1 The farm must have a written plan that includes:
- Overview of the farm
 - Breed(s) used
 - Health plan (such as vitamin and mineral supplementation, vaccination programs and/or other practices used to promote health)
 - Routine husbandry procedures
 - Animal handling procedures
 - Pasture/outdoor access and management of outdoor areas, if applicable
 - Catching, crating and transport procedures
 - Training of all animal caretakers
 - On-farm euthanasia for sick and/or injured animals
- 1.2 The farm must maintain records of:
- Twice daily inspections of all groups of animals
 - Changes to the group composition, including introduction or removal of animals, and the reasons for those changes
 - Mortality and culls, recorded separately for each production stage
 - Breeding animals
 - Kits
 - Fryers
 - Daily air quality evaluations
 - Animal husbandry practices such as
 - Toenail trimming
 - Tooth trimming
 - Treatments for any illness, parasitic infestation or any other malady, including alternative remedies and/or medications for:
 - Internal parasites
 - External parasites (including mange, ear mite infestation, etc.)
 - Sore hocks
 - Feedback from slaughter plant including:
 - Footpad lesions and abscesses
 - Condemnations
 - Downgrades
 - DOA's (dead on arrival)
 - Training records for all people with animal management tasks
 - Transport records demonstrating chain of custody

Note: *Informal records such as those written on calendars or notepads are acceptable but must be presented in an organized manner and available for review if requested.*

Section 2: Breeding and Source of Animals

- 2.1 Genetically engineered and/or cloned rabbits, their progeny and semen are prohibited.

- 2.2 Breeding programs must be designed to include welfare traits (such as good mothering ability, longevity, temperament and the ability to sustain lactation) rather than solely for production.
- 2.3 i) If artificial insemination (AI) is used, the procedure must be carried out by trained personnel.
- ii) Breeding does that have been artificially inseminated must not be included in the meat supply for Whole Foods Market.
- 2.4 Does must not be bred before 6 months of age.
- 2.5 In systems where bucks and does are kept separately, does must not be re-bred until after their existing litter is weaned.
- Note:** See standards 4.2, 4.7, 5.3, 6.1 and 6.2 for additional requirements pertaining to breeding animals.
- 2.6 In systems where bucks and does are kept separately, does must be taken to bucks for breeding, to minimize aggression.

Section 3: Animal Health

- 3.1 Rabbits must be inspected at least twice daily.
- 3.2 Sub-therapeutic (preventive) levels of antibiotics, ionophores, growth hormones, beta agonists or sulfas are prohibited.
- 3.3 i) The therapeutic use of antibiotics, ionophores or sulfa drugs is prohibited for rabbits sold to Whole Foods Market;
- ii) Failure to treat an ill or injured rabbit in order to maintain eligibility for sale to Whole Foods Market is strictly prohibited;
- iii) Any rabbit that has been treated with antibiotics must be identified and must not be supplied to Whole Foods Market.
- 3.4 If a rabbit is injured or sick it must receive treatment.
- 3.5 If treatment for illness or injury is not effective, veterinary advice must be sought or the rabbit euthanized.
- 3.6 No medicines may be used in an off-label manner unless prescribed or advised by a veterinarian.
- 3.7 Where tooth trimming is necessary, it must be conducted by a veterinarian or trained operator.

- 3.8 Nails must be trimmed if they become overgrown.
- 3.9 Any area in which rabbits are segregated from their group, whether within the existing pen or in a separate location, must meet all housing requirements in Section 7.

Section 4: Animal Management

- 4.1 Rabbits must be managed to minimize aggressive behavior.
- 4.2 Routine mixing of rabbits is prohibited, except for adding replacement breeding stock.
- 4.3 Rabbits must be handled in a calm manner.
- 4.4 Care must be taken to avoid startling or panicking rabbits.
- 4.5 The minimum weaning age for rabbits is 30 days.

***Note:** Does and kits begin a natural separation at about 4 weeks of age when doe milk yield drops and kits begin to eat more solid food as their digestive system matures.*

- 4.6 Ear notching is prohibited.
- 4.7 Breeding animals must be identifiable by more than one person on the farm; rabbits may be identified with an ear tag or an ear tattoo.
- 4.8 Castration of rabbits is prohibited.
- 4.9 The removal of toes or dewclaws is prohibited.

Section 5: Feed and Water

- 5.1 All rabbits must have continuous access to drinking water.
- 5.2 Fryers must have *ad libitum* access to feed that meets their nutritional needs for optimal health.
- 5.3 Breeding stock must be fed at least once per day.
- 5.4 Rabbits must have continuous access to edible fibrous materials such as grass or hay.
- 5.5 The feeding system must be designed to minimize competition among rabbits.
- 5.6 Rabbits must not be given feed that is moldy, mildewed or otherwise compromised in quality.

- 5.7 Feeders must be clean and free of debris.
- 5.8 Rabbits must not be fed animal by-products or wastes, with the exception of direct-fed probiotics.
- 5.9 When transitioning to different feed types and/or sources, changes must be gradual to minimize disturbance to digestion.

Section 6: Housing Requirements for Rabbits

While it is the intention of Whole Foods Market to raise rabbits in as natural setting as possible, we recognize that raising breeding and replacement does in groups is not commonplace and an increase in aggression may occur.

The welfare of all rabbits including does, is extremely important to Whole Foods Market. Standard Version 1.02 amends the standards pertaining to group-raised does to the following until such time that group systems are more fully developed.

- 6.1
 - a) Kits and fryers must not be kept individually.
 - b) Does can be kept individually only if it is necessary to minimize aggression

Note: *A group size of 2-5 breeding or replacement does is encouraged - this group size was based on research of the behavior of rabbits in near-to-natural conditions. Does formed stable breeding communities when kept in groups of 5 with one buck and their offspring; conflict and injury between does was extremely rare (Stauffacher 1992).*

- 6.2 Bucks must be kept either:
 - i) permanently with breeding and replacement does OR
 - ii) in an individual pen adjacent to the group pen where they can see and smell their breeding group

Note: *if the buck remains permanently with the group, does in a group give birth every 31-32 days. After 4-6 litters they go into an **anoestrus** period for several weeks.*

- 6.3 After weaning, fryers from the same doe group must be kept together.
 - Breaking the litter group into sub-groups is permitted.
- 6.4 Rabbits must have enough space to express their natural behavior such as allo-grooming, hopping, foraging, gnawing, and playing.
- 6.5 Stocking density must not exceed 2lbs/ft².

Note: *Nest boxes are excluded from this measurement.*

- 6.6 Housing must allow rabbits to sit upright on their back legs with ears erect.

- 6.7 Thermal comfort must be maintained by management of the environment and/or provision of supplemental heat or cooling.

Note: *The optimal temperature range is between 40°F and 77°F.*

- 6.8 i) Air quality must be monitored daily using calibrated tools or through sensory evaluation.
- ii) If ammonia levels exceed either 20 ppm or are found to be aversive using the sensory evaluation protocol, a plan must be immediately implemented to improve air quality.

Note: *See Appendix I for specific evaluation protocols*

- 6.9 Rabbits must have at least 8 hours of continuous darkness in every 24 hour period.
- 6.10 Dry bedding must be continuously available for all rabbits.
- 6.11 Does must be provided with nest boxes at least 2 days prior to kindling.
- 6.12 There must be at least one nest box per doe.
- 6.13 Nest boxes must contain bedding for the doe to make a nest.
- 6.14 Nest boxes must be separated from each other either by space or by partitions, to minimize doe aggression.
- 6.15 Rabbits must be provided with raised platforms large enough to allow all rabbits to lie on their sides simultaneously and high enough off the ground for an adult rabbit to lie underneath. Either one large platform or a set of smaller ones is acceptable.
- 6.16 Rabbits must be provided with structures in the pen that provide opportunities to hide such as tunnels and solid partitions. Nest boxes and tunnels leading to nest boxes do not qualify.

Note: *Hiding areas help does get away from other rabbits or kits trying to suckle.*

- 6.17 Gnawing blocks must be provided.

Note: *Gnawing blocks must be non-toxic to rabbits. Check with your veterinarian if you are unsure.*

- 6.18 Flooring must be solid. Slatted flooring is only permitted around the drinking area but not in other areas of the pen.
- Slats must not extend more than 12" from the drinkers.
 - The slatted flooring should allow feces to fall through.
 - Openings between slats or mesh must be no wider than 14mm or 0.5".

- 6.19 Equipment, fittings, flooring, protrusions, and any other structures must be maintained so that they do not pose a risk of injury.
- 6.20 If ventilation, water, or feeders are reliant on electricity, a back-up power supply must be in place and tested regularly.

Section 7: Outdoor Conditions

Although outdoor access is not required, the following standards apply in order to qualify a system with outdoor access or as an outdoor-based system.

***Note: Outdoor access** describes a system where rabbits live primarily in housing and have access to an area outside of the house. **Outdoor-based** describes a system in which rabbits live primarily in an outdoor area and have access to housing.*

***Note:** It is permissible to install a wire mesh base in outdoor areas to prevent rabbits from escaping or predators from intruding.*

- 7.1 Rabbits must have continuous, unobstructed outdoor access by 21 days of age.
***Note:** If seasonal conditions pose a welfare risk, rabbits can be housed for the duration of the risk.*
- 7.2 Equipment, fittings, openings, protrusions, housing, fences and any other structures must be maintained so that they do not pose a risk of injury.
- 7.3 Objects or materials must be provided in outdoor areas that allow rabbits to perform natural behaviors (e.g. foraging, gnawing, digging). Objects or materials may include but are not limited to bales of hay, tree branches, or material to build tunnels.
- 7.4 Outdoor areas must be managed to prevent degradation and denuding and to minimize parasite and disease risk.
- 7.5 Outdoor areas must have at least 75% vegetative cover at all times.
- 7.6 Rabbits must have access to natural or artificial cover that provides hiding places.
- 7.7 Shade must be provided in all outdoor areas that accommodate all rabbits simultaneously.
- 7.8 All rabbits must have continuous access to housing.

Section 8: Catching and Handling

- 8.1 Rabbits must not be mistreated in any way.

- 8.2 Rabbits must be caught calmly and with a minimum of chasing.
- 8.3 Rabbits must be picked up individually either by the loose skin on the back of the neck or with a hand under their chest, and must be supported under the body when carried.
- 8.4 Water must be continuously available until the animals are crated.
- 8.5 Feed withdrawal must not occur more than 12 hours prior to slaughter.

Section 9: Transport

- 9.1 Transport crates must provide enough space for all rabbits to lie down without lying on top of one another and without their head touching the top of the crate.
- 9.2 Transport crates must be in good condition and not cause injury to the rabbits.
- 9.3 Transport crates must be cleaned thoroughly between each group of rabbits.
- 9.4 Transporting unhealthy, non-ambulatory or injured rabbits is prohibited. Such animals must be euthanized on the same day that fit animals from the same group are sent to slaughter.
- 9.5 Transport must not exceed 8 hours.
Note: transport time must be calculated from the time the first rabbit is caught to the time of arrival at the destination.
- 9.6 Rabbits must be protected from heat or cold stress during transport.
- 9.7 The driver is responsible for the rabbits during all aspects of loading, delivery and unloading that are under his/her control.
- 9.8 Transport records must be kept for each group of rabbits, including loading start and end times, departure and arrival times, and reasons for any stops or delays on the route.
- 9.9 There must be clear, written procedures for the driver to follow that include actions and contact numbers to ensure the highest welfare of the rabbits in case of accident or other emergency.

Section 10: Rodent and Predator Control

- 10.1 Lethal control of rodents is permitted only if the following conditions are met:
 - a) exclusion was ineffective and rabbits are at risk
 - b) the method of control (i) is swift, efficient and does not cause undue suffering, or (ii) causes rapid and irreversible insensibility immediately followed by death

c) the method of control targets only rodents

Note: *Glue boards and drowning traps do not meet the above requirements*

10.2 Any live traps for rodents must be checked daily and acted upon immediately.

10.3 Lethal control of predators is permitted only if the following conditions are met:
a) non-lethal methods are ineffective and rabbits are at risk

b) the method of control (i) is swift, efficient and does not cause undue suffering, or (ii) causes rapid and irreversible insensibility immediately followed by death

c) the method of control targets only the offending predator(s)

Note: *Poisons, drowning, all snares, and all traps other than live traps do not meet the above requirements.*

10.4 Any live traps for predators must be checked daily and acted upon immediately.

References cited in this document:

Stauffacher, M. 1992. Group housing and enrichment cages for breeding, fattening and laboratory rabbits. *Animal Welfare* 1: 105-125

Appendix I: Air Quality Protocols

If using an ammonia monitor, readings of 20 ppm or higher are unacceptable and immediate action must be taken to reduce ammonia levels. Make sure readings are taken at the level of the animal.

If using the sensory evaluation technique, score air quality when you first enter the barn and when you are about to leave the barn.

If you check more than two shaded boxes, this is unacceptable and requires immediate action to reduce levels of ammonia and dust.

Smell	Respiration	Eyes	Mouth
Not noticeable	Able to breathe easily	Normal eyes	
Hardly noticeable	Wheezy breathing	Watery eyes	
Noticeable	Coughing	Stinging eyes	Stinging mouth
Distinct	Excessive coughing	Burning eyes	Pain swallowing
Irritating	Pain when inhaling		

Note: People lose sensitivity to these criteria with repeated exposure.