Back to Hongthong content

Evaluation of tropical forages as feeds for growing rabbits

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Abstract

This thesis is focused on the potential of using some tropical forages as feeds for rabbits and to test these forages on station as well as on farm. In Paper I the effect of supplementing a diet based on maize, rice bran and cassava chip with three different improved forages and with natural vegetation, a natural herb *Spilanthes acmella Murr*, as a control, on feed intake, digestibility and growth, was studied in an experiment with forty rabbits (New Zealand White x local breed) 20 males and 20 females, weaned at 5 weeks of age. The average initial weight of the rabbits was 787 (11.2) g. The rabbits fed the natural herb had significantly higher growth rate, 18.2 g/day, than the rabbits fed Guinea grass or Cassava foliage, 9.2 and 15.2 g/day, respectively, but not significantly different from rabbits fed Stylo 184, 16.9 g/day. Dry matter (DM) digestibilities of the diets containing Cassava hay, Guinea grass or a natural herb were not significantly different, 0.76 to 0.83, but significantly higher than of the Stylo 184 diet, 0.75. Crude protein (CP) digestibility for the Cassava hay diet was similar to Stylo 184, but significantly higher than for the natural herb and Guinea grass diet.

In Paper II the effect of supplementing a diet based on maize, rice bran and cassava chip with Stylo 184 or natural grasses on feed intake and growth in rabbits was studied in an on-farm experiment. Forty crossbred rabbits New Zealand White x local breed, 20 males and 20 females, weighing 746 (11.4) g and weaned at 5 weeks of age were used in the experiment. The rabbits were distributed to 5 farmers in two villages, with 8 for each household. The animals were individually caged and randomly allocated to two experimental treatment groups of 4 rabbits each. The groups were balanced for sex, with 2 males and 2 females in each group. The treatments were diets containing Stylo 184 or native grasses. Based on this study it was concluded that the rabbits fed the diet with Stylo 184 had a higher daily gain and a lower feed conversion ratio than the rabbits fed the diet with native grasses. The growth rates were in general low.

Key words: Tropical forages, rabbit production, Stylo 184, Guinea grass, Cassava hay.