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Argenté de Champagne (France)

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SUMMARY – A description of the French breed Argenté de Champagne is carried out. Items that are dealt with are: (i) a general description; (ii) main features of its farming; and (iii) performances.

Key words: Argenté de Champagne, origin, description, performance.

RESUME – "Argenté de Champagne (France)". Cet article présente une description des lapins de la race française Argenté de Champagne. Les éléments suivants ont fait l'objet d'études : (i) une description générale ; (ii) le climat et les principales caractéristiques d'élevage ; et (iii) les performances.

Mots-clés : Argenté de Champagne, origine, description, performances.

The information given below, concerning the general description, pattern and performances, comes from the answer to a questionnaire aiming to obtain information about the history, morphology, importance and basic performances of the European breeds of rabbits. The questionnaire was designed, distributed, and collected within the European project RESGEN CT95-060 (Bolet *et al.*, 2000). The other data come, also, from a report of the same project (Bolet *et al.*, 2000) and are the results of an experiment, trying to evaluate the zootechnical characteristics of several breeds including the Argenté de Champagne, using the strain INRA9077 as control of reference.

1. Breed name

Argenté de Champagne.

2. General description

2.1. Population data

2.1.1. Population size and census data

- (i) Total number of females being used in purebreeding: 2000-3000.
- (ii) The numbers of breeders raising this breed is estimated between 200 and 350 and the common use of the breed is in purebreeding.

2.1.2. Origin of the breed

This breed comes from the local population of rabbits existing at Champagne since the seventeenth century and carrying in homozygosis the silvering gene (si/si). It was recognised as a breed around 1900. At this time there were important migrations to Switzerland and Germany.

2.1.3. Situation with regard to danger of extinction

No danger, the breed is increasing its census number.

2.1.4. Conservation programme: yes

There is a programme of frozen semen and embryos, conducted in the framework of RESGEN by INRA and FFC (Fédération Française de Cuniculture).

2.2. Use of the breed in a descending order of product importance

Meat and exhibition.

2.3. Colour

Black silver.

2.4. General type

2.4.1. Body parts

Middle size breed. Massy and rounded body. Well developed trunk. Imperceptible neck. Low shoulders and raised rump. Dewlap possible in the does.

2.4.2. Head: concave

2.4.3. Eyes: brown

2.4.4. Ears: erect

2.4.5. Feet and legs: short and robust

2.4.6. Tail: adhered to the rump

2.5. Basic temperament (for males and females): docile

3. Pattern

3.1. Main features of farming

3.1.1. Socio-management system

There are several types, from very professional to family-farming. Rabbits of this breed are also kept as pets.

3.1.2. Housing

It is common to raise this breed in cages with straw in indoor or outdoor rabbitries.

4. Performance

4.1. Reproduction (Tables 1 and 2)

Table 1. Information of sexual maturity

Trait	Mean
Age of buck at first service (months)	8
Age of doe at first mating (months)	7

Table 2. Fecundity traits

Trait	Mean	Range
Total born per litter	8	7-10
Born alive per litter	7	6-9
Litter size at weaning	6	5-6

4.2. Post-weaning daily gain

The growth rate between weaning and 11-12 weeks of age has been estimated at 37 g/d, higher than the corresponding figure for the control strain. The growth rate has a trend to decrease with the age of lower intensity than that in the control.

4.3. Carcass and meat quality traits

Table 3 shows the estimated values of several carcass traits of the breed Argenté de Champagne and the corresponding ones of the control strain INRA9077. There are significant differences in hot dressing percentage, that favours the Argenté de Champagne, and percentages of liver, head and fat depots that are lower in this breed than in the control.

Table 3. Carcass traits of Argenté de Champagne (AC) and INRA9077 (CS)

Trait	AC	CS
Slaughter age (days)	80	80
Slaughter weight (g)	2865	2755
Hot dressing (%)	64.1	61.6
Liver (%)	5.30	5.75
Perirenal fat (%)	2.16	3.21
Scapular fat (%)	0.64	0.99
Head (%)	7.2	7.6
Meat/bone ratio (hind leg)	5.18	5.46
pH <i>Longissimus dorsi</i>	6.10	6.01
pH <i>Biceps femoris</i>	6.22	6.15

The traits related with the quality of meat are shown in Table 4, all of them measured in a sample of *Longissimus dorsi*, stored at -20°C . The samples were thawed and tenderness (raw shear force, RWB) and colour [L (lightness), a (redness) and b (amount of yellow) parameters] were recorded in raw and cooked meat. The percentage of type I fibres (slow twitch) in the muscle mentioned before are also given. The complement to 100 corresponds to type II fibres (fast twitch).

The only significant differences for the traits reported in Table 4 between Argenté de Champagne and INRA9077 refer to the losses after cooking that are higher in the control, and the colour parameter measuring the amount of yellow in cooked meat that is also higher in the control strain.

The response to the questionnaire cited at the beginning qualify the meat of the Argenté de Champagne as compact and white.

Table 4. Meat quality traits of Argenté de Champagne (AC) and INRA9077 (CS)

Trait	AC	CS
% of type I fibres at 11 weeks	8.32	4.96
% of type I fibres at 12 weeks	4.30	4.76
Thaw loss (%)	7.68	8.70
Cooking loss (%)	22.78	23.78
RWB (raw meat)	12.53	15.88
RWB (cooked meat)	21.36	25.45
L_raw	60.90	59.39
a_raw	6.07	4.93
b_raw	15.02	14.44
L_cooked	79.17	77.34
a_cooked	0.95	1.40
b_cooked	14.24	15.23

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