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Flemish Giant (France)

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

Key words: Flemish Giant, origin, description, performance.

RESUME – "Géant des Flandres (France)". Cet article présente une description de la race française Géant des Flandres. 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 : Géant des Flandres, 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 from a report of the same project (Bolet *et al.*, 2000) and are the results of an experiment that attempts to evaluate the zootechnical characteristics of several breeds including the Flemish Giant, using the strain INRA9077 as control of reference.

1. Breed name

- (i) Flemish Giant.
- (ii) *Breed name synonyms:* Géant Allemand, Le Patagonien.

2. General description

2.1. Population data

2.1.1. Population size and census data

- (i) Total number of females being used in purebreeding: 750-1200.
- (ii) The numbers of breeders raising this breed is estimated between 150 and 200 and the common use of the breed is in purebreeding.

2.1.2. Origin of the breed

This breed originated in Belgium, the first news of individuals of this breed appearing before 16th century. The breed was developed by selection of local rabbits. It was recognised as a breed in Belgium in 1895. In France this breed appeared at the beginning of 19th century and was officially recognised in 1919.

2.1.3. Situation with regard to danger of extinction

No danger, the situation of the breed is considered stable.

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.

2.3. Colour

Depends of the varieties within the breed. Possible colours are: wild grey, hare grey, iron grey, blue grey and fawn.

2.4. General type

2.4.1. Body parts

Large size breed. Large and long body. Developed trunk. Imperceptible neck. Low shoulders and plain rump. Dewlap possible in the does.

2.4.2. Head: straight

2.4.3. Ears: erect

2.4.4. Feet and legs: normal and robust

2.4.5. Tail: adhered to the body, its shape is rectangular but well rounded at the end

2.5. Basic temperament (for males and females)

Docile. This breed seems to have an anti-stress gene.

3. Pattern

3.1. Main features of farming

3.1.1. Socio-management system

Mainly semi-professional and family farming for auto-consumption. Rabbits of this breed are also kept as pets.

3.1.2. Housing

It is common to raise this breed in big cages with straw and forage in outdoor or semi-open air 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)	10-12
Age of doe at first mating (months)	10-12

Table 2. Fecundity traits

Trait	Mean
Total born per litter	9
Born alive per litter	8
Litter size at weaning	6

4.2. Post-weaning daily gain and adult weight

The growth rate between weaning and 11-12 weeks of age has been estimated at 40.79 g/d, higher than the corresponding figure for the control strain that was 34.75 g/d. The growth rate has a trend to decrease with the age of lower intensity than in the control.

The ideal adult weight for females ranges between 8-9 kg, the minimum authorised being 5.5 kg. For males the corresponding figures are: 7.5-8.5 and 7 kg.

4.3. Carcass and meat quality traits

Table 3 shows the estimated values of several carcass traits of the breed Flemish Giant and the corresponding ones of the control strain INRA9077. There are significant differences in live weight, hot dressing percentage and both pH. The differences in percentages of liver, scapular fat and head are also significant but lower in Flemish Giant than in the control.

Table 3. Carcass traits of Flemish Giant (FG) and INRA9077 (CS)

Trait	FG	CS
Slaughter age (days)	80	80
Slaughter weight (g)	3126	2352
Hot dressing (%)	61.2	58.3
Liver (%)	5.55	5.84
Perirenal fat (%)	1.22	1.28
Scapular fat (%)	0.46	0.46
Head (%)	8.6	9.6
Meat/bone ratio (hind leg)	5.88	6.12
pH <i>Longissimus dorsi</i>	6.04	5.71
pH <i>Biceps femoris</i>	6.07	5.89

The responses to the questionnaire cited at the beginning qualify the meat of the Flemish Giant as compact and fibrous.

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