THE SCIENCE WORLD
A Monthly e Magazine
ISSN:2583-2212
Popular Article
Oct, 2026 Vol.6(10), 3373-3377

Rabbit Farming in India: Emerging Opportunities, Challenges and Future Prospects

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doi.org/10.5281/ScienceWorld.23950562

Abstract

In India, rabbit farming is gaining popularity as a small-scale livestock business that may provide meat, superior animal fiber, and additional agricultural revenue. Although rabbits mature early and procreate quickly, these benefits may not always translate into a viable business. In comparison to traditional livestock, the 20th Livestock Census of 2019 found that there were about 5.5 lakh rabbits in India. Opportunities in value-added products, Angora wool, organized meat marketing, and farmer collectives have been identified by recent study. However, expansion remains limited by poor market connections, a lack of high-quality breeding stock, expensive feed, and heat stress. This article explores potential growth areas for rabbit farming, the need for responsible management, and the need to prioritize climate appropriateness and guarantied buyers over farm expansion.

Keywords: Rabbit farming; micro-livestock; Angora wool; rural entrepreneurship; animal welfare

Introduction

India's livestock economy is usually discussed in terms of dairy animals, goats, sheep and poultry. Rabbits seldom enter that conversation. Yet their small body size, relatively short reproductive cycle and ability to fit into carefully managed small-scale units make them worth examining. The important question is not whether rabbits breed quickly; it is whether farmers can rear them humanely, keep them healthy and sell the resulting products at a price that covers the true cost of production (Gopi et al. 2026 and Bharathy et al. 2022).

Rabbit farming, also called cuniculture, can serve different markets: meat rabbits, wool-producing Angora rabbits, breeding stock and composted manure. These activities should not be treated as one business model. Each needs its own climate, skills, buyers and investment plan.

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Published 30/10/2026

Where Does India Stand?

According to the 20th Livestock Census, there were around 5,49,941 rabbits nationwide in 2019 compared to roughly 5.92 lakh in 2012. These numbers indicate that raising rabbits is still a modest and unevenly established activity; they do not show a consistent pattern of expansion. According to Gopi et al. (2026), the main challenges include fragmented marketing, little consumer familiarity, and a lack of high-quality breeding animals.

Why Rabbits Attract Attention

Rabbits are often referred to as "micro-livestock" since they have a gestation period of around one month, require less area per animal than cattle or goats, and reach breeding age relatively early. Under suitable management, a doe can produce several litters annually. However, the number of surviving, marketable young—not the theoretical birth rate—determines farm output Pandian et al. (2026)

Rabbits can be fed suitable green fodder along with a balanced diet, making them a useful addition to integrated crop–livestock farming systems. However, green fodder and crop residues alone cannot meet all their nutritional requirements, particularly under intensive farming conditions. Therefore, providing good-quality feed, proper storage, sufficient dietary fiber and a continuous supply of clean drinking water is essential for maintaining their health and productivity. (Pandian et al., 2026 and Meena and Prasad, 2016)

Future Opportunity

1. A Specialized Meat Market

Pandian et al. (2026) highlighted that rabbit meat is a rich source of protein with relatively low-fat content, making it a promising alternative to conventional meat products. Its market potential is particularly encouraging in regions where rabbit meat consumption is already accepted. However, demand remains limited in many parts of India. Therefore, farmers should assess local market opportunities and establish reliable connections with consumers, restaurants, meat retailers and processors before expanding their rabbit farming operations.

Scientific slaughter, hygiene, chilled transport, labelling and food-safety compliance will become increasingly important if this market develops. India’s food standards recognise fresh, chilled and frozen rabbit-meat categories; compliant handling is therefore a practical requirement, not merely a marketing advantage.

2. Angora Wool and Hill Livelihoods

Angora rabbits produce a fine, soft fibre used in high-value textiles. Cooler and temperate hill areas—rather than hot plains—offer more suitable conditions for wool-oriented rabbit enterprises. The future development of the Angora wool industry in India may depend on the

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establishment of systematic fiber grading, quality assurance and traceability mechanisms, along with the promotion of value-added processing activities such as spinning, knitting and textile manufacturing. Strengthening women-led producer organizations and small-scale wool-processing enterprises could improve market access, enhance product value and generate additional income opportunities for rural households.

3. Small Rural Enterprises

Rabbit farming can be integrated into existing mixed farming systems as a supplementary livestock enterprise, contributing to income diversification and improved resource utilization through the application of properly composted rabbit manure in agricultural production. Additionally, the establishment of quality breeding-stock production units and demonstration farms may provide further opportunities for rural entrepreneurship, particularly in areas with established market demand and access to technical support.

4. Research, Training and Farmer Groups

Bharathy et al. (2022) reviewed the potential and challenges of rabbit farming in India, highlighting the importance of factors influencing production performance. Accordingly, future rabbit improvement programmes should emphasize the selection of breeding stock adapted to local agroclimatic conditions, improved litter survival, greater feed efficiency, effective disease prevention and systematic recording of reproductive and productive performance. However, breed selection alone cannot ensure optimal productivity, as nutritional management, environmental temperature and husbandry practices also play important roles in determining the overall performance of rabbits.

Farmer producer organizations, veterinary universities and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) have considerable potential to promote the sustainable development of rabbit farming through structured capacity-building programmes, dissemination of scientific management practices, collective procurement of production inputs, implementation of quality assurance measures and strengthening of market linkages. Furthermore, the integration of digital record-keeping systems for monitoring reproductive performance, breeding intervals, litter size, kit survival, feed consumption and economic returns could facilitate systematic assessment of farm productivity and profitability. Such data-driven management approaches may improve production efficiency, support evidence-based decision-making and enable farmers to evaluate the technical and economic viability of rabbit farming enterprises.

The Biggest Test: Heat, Health and Welfare

The suitability of rabbit farming across different agroclimatic regions of India is largely influenced by environmental conditions, particularly ambient temperature and relative humidity.

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Rabbits are highly susceptible to heat stress because of their limited thermoregulatory capacity, primarily associated with poorly developed sweat glands and the insulating properties of their dense fur. According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA, 2020), rabbits are generally maintained under indoor temperatures ranging from 15°C to 25°C, while exposure to temperatures exceeding 25°C may increase the risk of thermal stress. Prolonged exposure to elevated temperatures, particularly under humid conditions, can adversely affect feed intake, growth performance, reproductive efficiency and overall animal welfare. Therefore, appropriate housing design, adequate ventilation and effective environmental temperature management are essential for sustainable rabbit production, particularly in the hot and semi-arid regions of India. (National Farm Animal Care Council, 2018)

What Must Change Before the Sector Expands?

Three gaps need attention. First, marketing: farmers require dependable purchasing channels, product standards and transparent prices. Second, services: quality breeding stock, veterinary care, feed supply and practical training must be accessible. Third, climate resilience: farm design should be matched to local summer temperatures and the actual cost of cooling.

Prospective entrepreneurs should begin with a market survey, visit a functioning farm through a recognised institution, prepare a complete budget and only then establish a small pilot unit. Expansion should follow documented survival rates, costs and confirmed sales—not projected litter counts. Claims of universal subsidies or fixed monthly profits should be checked against the latest official scheme rules.

Conclusion

Rabbit farming presents promising opportunities for diversification and development within the Indian livestock sector. However, its long-term growth and commercial viability are likely to be influenced by regional agroclimatic suitability, consumer preferences, market accessibility and the availability of institutional support. Future development could focus on strengthening organized rabbit meat production in regions with established consumer demand, promoting Angora fiber production in climatically suitable areas and encouraging small-scale rabbit farming enterprises through scientific training, improved management practices and effective market linkages.

The integration of these measures could enhance production efficiency, generate supplementary livelihood opportunities and contribute to the sustainable development of the rabbit farming sector in India. Such an approach could contribute to the economic viability and long-term sustainability of rabbit farming in India. With better breeding services, practical extension support and responsible animal care, rabbit farming could become a useful part of diversified rural

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livelihoods. Its progress will depend less on how fast rabbits reproduce and more on how well farmers manage health, climate, costs and customers.

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