RABBIT MEAT AS A FUNCTIONAL FOOD: MEAT QUALITY PRODUCED WITH AND WITHOUT FRESH ALFALFA AD LIBITUM

Gustavo CAPRA¹, Florencia FRADILETTI¹, Rosana MARTÍNEZ², Sonia COZZANO², Luis REPISO³, Facundo IBÁÑEZ¹, Rosa MÁRQUEZ³

¹- Instituto Nacional de Investigación Agropecuaria
²- Universidad Católica del Uruguay
³- Laboratorio Tecnológico del Uruguay

Rabbit meat has widely recognized nutritional and dietetic qualities, but its contribution of bioactive substances can be improved through modifications in the diet of growing rabbits. The aim of this study is to provide information on rabbit meat’s nutritional value obtained with two different feeding strategies: commercial pelleted food ad libitum (T1) and commercial pelleted food plus fresh alfalfa both ad libitum (T2). Samples of meat fat (L. dorsi) and dissectible fat were analyzed in order to determine intramuscular fat content and fatty acid composition. Vitamin E and mineral content (zinc, iron, magnesium and sodium) were analyzed.

Differences in content of intramuscular fat were not significant (1.41 vs. 1.39 g/100g of meat). The inclusion of fresh alfalfa in the rabbits’ diet showed a significant effect on the composition of dissectible and intramuscular fat, with a relevant increase of α-linolenic acid (1.82% vs. 3.28% and 2.29% vs. 5.15%, P<0.0001, for T1 and T2 in intramuscular and dissectible fat respectively). Consequently the ratio n-6/n-3 was significantly improved.

The low fat content in rabbit meat allows to fulfill the recommendations in the nutritional energy contribution of these sources. The increase in fatty acids n-3 obtained in rabbits which were supplemented with alfalfa reinforces the recognized positive effects on the cardiovascular health and other non-transmissible chronic diseases. The nutritional value of rabbit meat can be improved even more by varying the composition of the diet. As a consequence, this product should be considered a functional food and also an alternative to traditional meats.