



4th Quarter—2020

Rocky Mountain High Shows Inc.

A message from Robin:

Hope this newsletter finds everyone happy and healthy and looking forward to an awesome 2021! 2020 was definitely one to not remember with COVID-19 and RHDV2 limiting and challenging our hobby.

As we look to 2021 I do feel that, as a strong group, we can learn to show within the confines of COVID-19 and RHDV2. It may not be easy but can be done. Neither virus is leaving so we must learn to show within the confines of them. Arba must acknowledge and adjust their regulations to allow the western states and the rabbit breeders not to die off. I do feel the 250 mile radius to hold shows is effective, however, I feel strongly that the 150 mile radius should be adjusted to account for what has successfully worked in Europe. Currently Europe is 30 miles, maybe a compromise of 50 miles is warranted and acknowledgement/proof of vaccinated animals. Biosecurity is key and will be a driving force in getting back on the show tables and continuing to enjoy the hobby we all support.

Thanks to Cook Veterinary Clinic in Colorado Springs and Dr Michelle Leak in Greenwood Village we have successfully vaccinated Adyson's herd. The first round was the most expensive (although doable) and have since them done two rounds of promising juniors. The added cost of the vaccination, even though affordable at \$17-\$20, has certainly caused us to be more discriminating as to which ones stay. This has improved the quality of rabbits in our barn which has been good! We have seen zero side effects of the vaccine on brood animals, kindling or bred does. Biosecurity has certainly been our focus and many changes have occurred in our barn to strengthen our biosecurity program. I do feel the vaccine is another very helpful tool in protecting our herds though. It is an individual decision to do what you can and what you feel is best.

I think people and voices working together is a strong force, we can figure out how to do this! Please communicate with those of us at RMHS, your district director and Arba with ideas and suggestions!! The fact is RHDV2 and COVID-19 are devastating in how they pick their victims. My heart breaks for those have been affected by either virus.

Let's hope 2021 brings some positive changes and soon we can all get back to the hobby we all love and enjoy!! As always I am available if you have any questions/suggestions regarding RMHS. Thank you and hope your nestboxes are all full with future Best In Show winners!!!

Robin Vogel

RMHS MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the RMHS statewide organization shall be

- to promote, improve, protect and grow the rabbit hobby;
- to educate, enrich and assist rabbit hobbyists; and
- To enhance, coordinate and unify policies and procedures in the best interest and high standards of our membership

Rmhshows.com

WILL WE EVER SHOW AGAIN?

RHDV2 and COVID in the Ranks

Out with 2020 and in with the New Year! In hindsight 2020 has taught us many valuable lessons.

While COVID 19 is nothing to be sneezed at, with new vaccines being administered daily, the end is in sight. Certain rabbit show protocol may still have to implement social distancing, but chances are shows will not be canceled due to COVID for most of 2021.

RHDV2 in another story altogether. While COVID19 is stealthy and hides in asymptomatic carriers and is choosy about critical cases, RHD (RHDV2) is bold and fatal. COVID can most often be traced to a specific human contact. RHD has carriers among the aliens (insects, birds, rodents and scavengers). Even worse RHD comes from the DEAD – the dead rabbits....

About 25 % of the nations' land area has been affected by RHD, but it is still considered a foreign disease. Because of its designation as a 'foreign disease', vaccines that are nearly 100% effective must be imported. This is governed by USDA and monitored by state vets. The process is tedious. Colorado is fortunate to have a dedicated rabbit vet, Michelle Leak of Greenwood Village Veterinarian, who has navigated through the red tape and is very willing to talk other vets through the process. She also is willing to do 'farm calls' for groups of 50 rabbits, and has a very reasonable fee for the brief exam and the vaccination.

Our rabbit family is diverse – with pet owners and National breeders among us. We are judges, exhibitors, mentors, geneticists and rabbit health care monitors. Our facilities differ too, from outdoor colonies to temperature controlled, daylight timers and hot water plumbed, enclosed rabbitries. We have heard individuals claim this will become a hobby for only the 'rich', because feral populations and colony herds are at extreme risk for RHD, and enclosed rabbitries are expensive, AND the vaccination cost can be prohibitive.

Most of us heard Dr. Chris Hayhow suggest a lockdown and quarantine of our rabbitries to reduce the spread of the virus. Soon thereafter ARBA implemented the 'no sanctioned rule' within a 250 mile radius of a case, with exhibitors within 150 miles banned from attending shows. Like our COVID lockdown and quarantine, that effectively brought the show season to a halt within the southwest US where most of the cases are reported. The rabbit industry plummeted, with the inability to sell or transport rabbits.

RHD was relentless and continued to march across the southwest. Texas, New Mexico and Arizona were the first states with huge wild rabbit population die offs. That spread north to Colorado, to Utah, to Nevada and California. It is worthwhile to note that Mexico has also been heavily infested. It is a federal USDA mandate that state veterinarians report confirmed cases. The individual state vets are governed by their own states Department of Agriculture and Department of Wildlife can be involved as well. Originally any suspected carcasses were sent away to have diagnoses confirmed. This was funded by State resources. Soon the state resources dwindled so states declared the disease 'endemic'. That means government funding is not available for testing and cases are no longer being monitored by the OIE – EXCEPT for cases where the owner pays for the testing, which then, by law, must be reported if found to be RHD positive or when the case is presumptive.

These policies coupled with the ARBA policies have effectively shut down the rabbit industry in Colorado. We have wide open plains that are the perfect ecosystem for thousands of rabbits, coyotes, hawks and other scavengers. Mother Nature continues to do her thing. Rodents and insects carry the disease to neighboring areas and outdoor facilities are at great risk. Eventually domestic or feral rabbits (domestic rabbits living in a colony) contract the disease. There is less and less evidence that humans are moving the virus. THEORETICALLY it can and will happen – Preventing its occurrence on your own property via biosecurity is first and foremost! IF or WHEN you detect the disease in your rabbitry, EVERY possible method of biosecurity, sanitization, and quarantine MUST happen. As a responsible breeder you will NOT sell or transport rabbits for 120 days.

Because RHD is in the wild population it is here to stay. Forever. It will wax and wane, but it is not going away! We have to learn to live and show our rabbits knowing it exists.

From OIE ***"In regions where RHDV circulates in wild rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), eradication is not feasible. Instead, this disease is controlled in domesticated rabbits with biosecurity measures including sanitation and disinfection, the maintenance of closed colonies, and vaccination"***

Our number one defense beyond biosecurity is vaccination! We have documented cases where vaccinated rabbits next to infected rabbits survived. Also scientific researchers inoculated vaccinated rabbits who did NOT contract the disease. Vaccinated does also pass some initial immunity to their kits. By 60 days of age those kits need to be vaccinated as well.

ARBA must also implement modifications to their policies. One of the major premises that their policy is based on is that humans are spreading the disease when in fact the spread is through the wild population and only through theoretical and direct circumstances are humans involved. If the rabbit is infected it will DIE! Quickly and since the predators are hungry due to dwindling numbers of rabbits for food, that carcass is gone quickly also.

Uneducated backyard pet owners and newbies are the largest risk to humans spreading the disease – not the responsible breeder.

In Europe the radius to ban exhibitors is 30 mile diameter from an outbreak. If a breeder has rabbits die from RHD, that breeder must quarantine for 120 days. Colorado has quarantined for 180-210 days. The recommended quarantine (with accompanying disinfecting etc) is 120 does IF YOU EXPERIENCE AND OUTBREAK! In the UK there is no governing bodies regulating quarantine. Responsible breeders will not risk their reputation. When asked, one respondent claimed they knew of ZERO cases where RHD was linked to a show. In fact one told of a breeder returning from a show to find RHD had hit his rabbitry. There were NO reported cases linked to his participation at the show.

If you have visited the ARBA website you have seen the maps and diagrams of 150 or 250 mile radius which defines their policies regarding sanctions and exhibitor participation. Even if you accept the

number of miles radius the ACTUAL location of the case is not specified – the county seat is used as the center of the radius..... hmmm is that fair? Also the USDA website show many outbreaks in Mexico. What about circles that should radiate from Mexican cases?

Also much of the educational brochures emphasize clothing, tires, etc. can carry the virus – HOWEVER THOSE ITEMS MUST COME IN CONTACT WITH THE VIRUS IN ORDER TO CARRY IT. IF YOU HAVE THE VIRUS YOU KNOW IT! IF YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THE VIRUS YOU ARE HYPER VIGILANT.

Once again I ask you read and understand the quote from the OIE, which is the leading international authority on animal disease:

From OIE ***“In regions where RHDV circulates in wild rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), eradication is not feasible. Instead, this disease is controlled in domesticated rabbits with biosecurity measures including sanitation and disinfection, the maintenance of closed colonies, and vaccination”***

The most important factors here are that because the disease exists in the wild ecosystem, eradication is NOT FEASIBLE. Therefore the only means of control is biosecurity and vaccination!

Submitted by Linda Hibbert



Wishing you all a joyful and prosperous 2021!

From your RMHS Board of Directors

Outdoor Biosecurity & RHDV2

The RHDV2 virus was initially found in the Southern US and has spread rapidly across the western states. Informally this disease has been referred to as 'Bunny Ebola' – it causes internal hemorrhaging which nearly always results in death. The virus is incredibly tough and long-lived. The viral particles can remain active for six months on fomites (surfaces)- think the bottom of your shoes, dirt from a garden plant, or the hay you give a doe to fill her nest box. It's helpful to think of this virus like glitter- it's sticky, tough to wash off, and gets everywhere. The virus can be carried minimal distances by wind, but flies, rodents, and fomites will readily spread it. Even more worrisome, the strain spreading in the Western US is genetically distinct from previous outbreaks; RHDV2 is now capable of jumping species from our domestic rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) to American rabbits (genus *Sylvilagus*). Because this virus is now being found in wild rabbits it's nearly impossible to contain the spread. So, what is the fancier with an outdoor set up to do? Even if you cannot put four walls and a roof up, there are many biosecurity strategies you can employ to keep your animals safer:

-Mark a physical 'biosecurity' line surrounding the rabbitry. **Only allow sterilized items and properly stored feed to pass over the biosecurity line.** After this line is marked, stick to it!! It is your bio secure zone and you need to keep it that way.

-Identify what items are needed to properly care for your rabbits and maintain their sterility. Examples include: shoes, clothes, watering supplies, muck barrels, other animals, feeding, cleaning, & grooming supplies. The virus spreads readily via fomites- **any items shared between the rabbitry and the world must be cleaned & sanitized before entering the bio secure zone.** I found it easier to purchase painting coveralls, shoe covers, and doubles of other supplies to store in the bio secure zone.

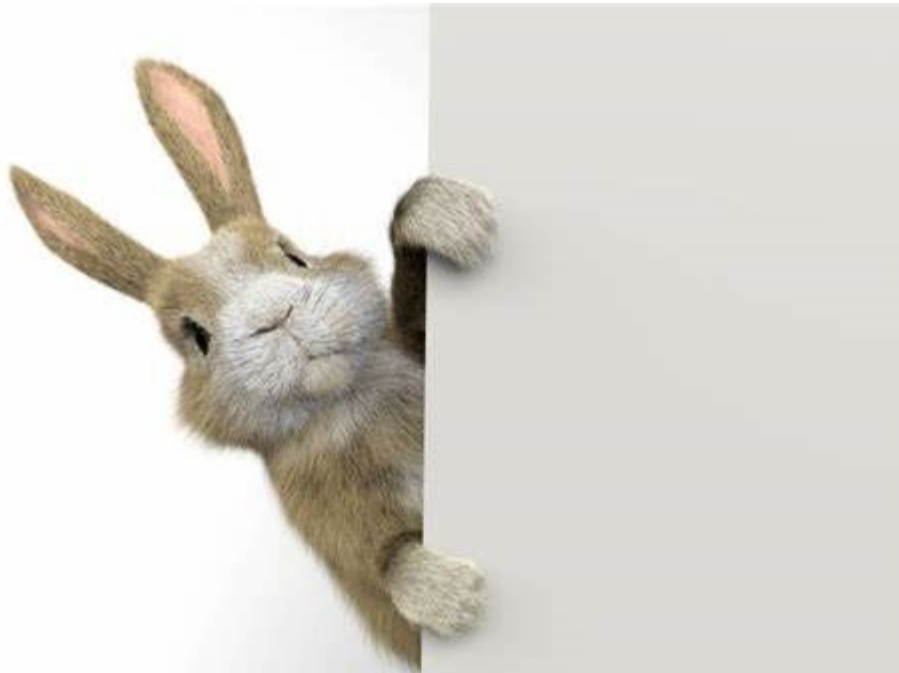
- Develop a weekly cleaning & sanitizing protocol in addition to normal cleaning practices. Before sanitizing, all organic material (dirt, hair, manure, etc.) must be removed from surfaces. **Thoroughly clean all surfaces and sanitize by soaking in either: 10% bleach solution or Virkon™ solution for ten minutes.** Sanitize all contact items, surfaces (cages, resting mats, walkways), and clothes worn in the biosecurity zone. Remember flies and rodents will readily spread this virus so keeping both to an absolute minimum is critical.

If you desire to implement a greater level of biosecurity, there are additional options to protect your rabbits:

- Build a fly tent with a magnetic screen door
- Use concrete mixing pans to catch manure for easy, daily cleaning.
- Use Sweet PDZ and diatomaceous earth under cages to minimize maggots.
- Install fly sprayers

Simple measures will allow you to protect your animals. Remember- we are all in this together. While we cannot change many of the events unfolding around us, we can do our small part to protect ourselves and our community.

Submitted by Kara M. Wintersteen-Perez



RHDV2 Saving Our Hobby!

This is at LEAST the fifth attempt at writing something for this newsletter. Previous attempts total about 15 full pages!

There is so much frustration in our area right now! COVID has shut us down. RHDV2 is threatening our hobby. Nearly every breeder I know pursues rabbit breeding, partly to show, partly because of the camaraderie with friends, but MOSTLY because we find a certain peace from this crazy world in the rabbit barn, our Happy Place!

My research has led me to two important conclusions.

First, RHDV2 is here to stay – anyone who thinks otherwise has their head in the sand. Seven states are considered endemic, it will continue to spread throughout the nation. Sorry!

Second, aside from good biosecurity and common sense, vaccination is the only truly effective way to protect your rabbitry. Sorry!

I am not going into the efficacy and safety of the RHDV2 vaccine. It is safe and effective. Working it into the budget is possible – there are a couple of strategies involving choices to be made. Rabbits vaccinated are almost guaranteed to make it through an outbreak on your premises. They will not shed the virus and they will not infect other rabbits.

“Overall, it seems unlikely that carrier rabbits play an important part in the spread of RHD in domestic rabbits. Insect vectors, body fluids from carcasses, faces from scavengers or contaminated food are much more likely to be the source of infection.” © 2000-2020 by [Frances Harcourt-Brown](#)

Probably the most important quote from all of the research. According to the World Animal Health Organization OIE:

“In regions where RHDV circulates in wild rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), eradication is not feasible. Instead, this disease is controlled in domesticated rabbits with biosecurity measures including sanitation and disinfection, the maintenance of closed colonies, and vaccination.”

Among changes in our thinking and our rabbitries, consider the following:

1. Breeders will need to work toward closed and ENCLOSED rabbitries. Outside colonies, hutches etc. cannot be effectively protected.
2. Until the US develops its own vaccine, breeders will need to budget for annual vaccinations. Within an enclosed, biosecure rabbitry, vaccinations can be limited to high value rabbits and show stock.
3. USDA will need to encourage and implement development of vaccine in US (Perhaps ARBA could help with funding its development).
4. We will have to adjust our show protocol toward much better sanitation and biosecurity.
5. ARBA will need to adjust their policies to resemble European procedures, such as:
 - A. Strict quarantine of infected premises for 120 days .
 - B. Shows must be allowed, even in the HOTZONES – certain temporary show regulations may need to be implemented in those areas. Show protocol may need to mimic COVID restaurant guidelines with traceability built into the entry system.
 - C. Every breeder needs to diligently quarantine when returning from shows for a period of 7-10 days. Some rabbitries have completely separate areas for show rabbits that come and go.
6. Breeders will have to realize that pet rabbits, and backyard breeders pose a great risk to the rest of us, if they are not carefully educated about RHDV2. Many of these individuals do not necessarily belong to clubs or organizations that promote the education process. Maybe organizational memberships need to be required for participation in shows.

FYI only 15 of Colorado's 64 counties have case reports. Reporting in Colorado continues, unlike New Mexico and Arizona. Regulations are different in different states. Just because there have not been recent reports in New Mexico and Arizona does NOT mean the disease is no longer there. RHDV2 is considered endemic in Colorado along with 6 other states. As the nation accepts the 'endemic' classification the 'foreign disease' classification recedes and should help the development of a US made vaccine.

The technology for manufacture of the vaccine is established. Therefore the manufacture and distribution of it in the US could be expedient. In the meantime we will need to spend our 'bunny money', not on shows, but on vaccines!

What can you do? Please write to ARBA District Representatives, the Executive Director, judges, and other board members. YOU are the membership. They need to hear your frustrations. I am attaching the list of ARBA board members, with their emails. Please write to them – emails are OK. Written letters to the President are perfectly OK too!

Use the quote from OIE. Provide other quotes as well – It is also OK to write an emotional letter with your frustrations!

From OIE ***“In regions where RHDV circulates in wild rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), eradication is not feasible. Instead, this disease is controlled in domesticated rabbits with biosecurity measures including sanitation and disinfection, the maintenance of closed colonies, and vaccination”.***

Submitted by Linda Hibbert

RHDV2

THE VIRAL VILLAIN

Where to begin?? As if COVID-19 isn't bad enough we rabbit breeders have to contend with RHD!

If it weren't for those sweet little faces from the nest box, we may have already abandoned the project. All of us within the rabbit hobby, cherish the time with our friends, the competition and the feedback from the judges.

PROTECTING OUR HERDS

While the world waits for a COVID vaccine, rabbit fanciers in the US wait for PERMISSION to use a vaccine that is proven safe and effective.

First a few basic facts about RHDV2 (hereinafter called RHD). This strain of RHD affects both the domestic and wild species of lagomorphs (rabbits). It is currently endemic (considered a standard and chronic disease) in many countries of the world, including many European nations, New Zealand, Australian, Mexico, Canada, Iceland and a few African nations. Of those nations France and Spain have developed vaccines that are highly effective. When rabbits are considered livestock and a source of meat, the virus is even more critical.

The North American continent has experienced a few minor RHD outbreaks in the last couple of decades. Those were primarily in domestic rabbits and of the earlier strain of RHD. By strict quarantine and aggressive depopulation the virus was contained and did not spread. Score 1 point for Human intervention! In 2020 however RHD evolved to affect wild rabbit species.

The ecosystem which includes wild rabbits does not allow human manipulation. Rabbits die, birds, coyotes, flies feed on the carcasses and the feces from these predators spread the disease across the country. As more rabbits die, more predators spread more virus and the cycle magnifies. Eventually, in the natural world so many rabbits would die, that the predator population would also dwindle and the spread of the virus would narrow, only to begin again as the few surviving rabbits multiply and contract the disease to begin the cycle once again. That is a natural waxing and waning cycle. Score 1 point for Mother Nature

There are several government agencies tracking this disease. The international organization, OIE (World Health Organization) is a robust international agency encompassing all sorts of diseases from pigs, to giraffes to fish and birds. Its scope includes conferring with government agencies to promote necessary global vision regarding animal disease. I will quote several passages from the DISEASE CARD for RHD from this organization. This is a link to the RHD disease card:

https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Animal_Health_in_the_World/docs/pdf/Disease_cards/RHD.pdf

“Survival:

RHDV and EBHSV are very resistant to inactivation, particularly when protected by organic material. Virus may persist in chilled or frozen rabbit meat, as well as in decomposing carcasses in the environment, for months. It is protected within tissues, and can survive >7 months in organ suspensions stored at 4°C, at least 3 months in the dried state on cloth at room temperature, for up to 20 days at 22°C in decomposing rabbit carcasses and at least 2 days at 60°C in an organ suspension and the dried state.”

Reading that carefully there are a couple of things to note – First, the RHD virus is resistant to inactivation *when protected by organic material* – Not so much otherwise. No mention of viability on car tires after 10 miles of driving down the road at 50 mph, not to mention that you MUST first contact that tire with a rabbit carcass. As the natural population dies off, the scavengers are seriously hungry and it is doubtful that the carcass remains ANYWHERE very long, much less on the road. The virus lasts 3 months in the dried state on cloth at room temperature. OK. I would argue that cloth is organic – as opposed to tires, and roads and clean metal cages. So you used a ‘cloth’ to clean up after the dead carcass and you left it lying around and your own rabbits got into it and ingested the virus... Ummm. OK. Next? Experimentally it can survive in suspensions for various amounts of time... useful knowledge if you are a researcher. Probably doesn't mean much to rabbit breeders. So, all of those suspension discussions are laboratory environments – The dried state may be a little harder to ignore. Blood dried on (insert fomite) and transferred to a new location. Something to think about.

(Excerpt from Frances Harcourt-Brown website)

“Transmission

Direct contact with infected animals through the oral, nasal or conjunctival routes.

Exposure to an infected carcass or hair from an infected animal.

By means of fomites, including **contaminated food, bedding and water.**

Experimental transmission by oral, nasal, subcutaneous, intramuscular, or intravenous routes. (laboratory, research application)

Importation of infected rabbit meat. This could be one of the main means of transmission of RHD to a new area. Meat contains high levels of virus-infected blood, which survives freezing well.

Mechanical transmission. Flies and other insects are very efficient mechanical vectors; only a few virions are needed **to infect a rabbit by the conjunctival route.** Wild animals can transmit the virus mechanically. Although virus replication does not seem to occur in predators or scavengers, these animals (dogs, foxes, etc.) can excrete RHDV in feces after eating infected rabbits. (BTW Mice do not eat meat, but flies could feed on the feces)

How long rabbits that have recovered from RHD may remain infectious remains unknown. A low level of serum antibodies is sufficient to protect rabbits from the disease, but infection at the intestinal level could occur with shedding of the virus in the feces. High sensitivity PCR demonstrated a long-term persistence (up to 2 months) of the viral RNA in recovered or in vaccinated and then infected rabbits. Whether this is due to real and active persistent or latent RHDV infections is still to be demonstrated.”

As a summary to the TRANSMISSION paragraph above: RHD is NOT like COVID with asymptomatic carriers. INFECTED rabbits die. Quickly. Scavengers consume the carcass and drop infected feces wherever. Flies may feed on the feces or the carcass and carry the virus onward. (FYI there is scientific evidence that vaccinated rabbits and even rabbits that have survived the disease are NOT carriers)

PROTECTING YOUR HERD WITH COMMON SENSE

So, to protect your herd, you definitely must adjust your rabbitry to prevent flies. Human transmission is possible, **if that human has had contact with an infected rabbit.** While it IS POSSIBLE, to have a fly carrying the virus hitch a ride in the car, that specific fly has had to have contact with the virus (dead carcass or feces) and then that specific fly needs to find its way into your enclosed rabbitry and find a waiting rabbit eye to lay the viral agents into. Or maybe put a fly spot on the feeder that the rabbit then licks. Yeah, it is possible.

On the other hand, if you run over a dead rabbit – (first that rabbit had to be infected – likely it won't be running on the road, if it is sick) – and then you have to make contact with that dead rabbit on the road – most of us avoid running over even a dead critter – and then your tires must hold onto that viral contamination at 30-80 miles an hour for a while, until it gets to your rabbitry. And THEN a fly needs to find it, become infected, find its way into your rabbitry, etc. etc. Sure, it is POSSIBLE...

Otherwise, you could be out hiking, and you accidentally step in some coyote shit. Then you travel home, and walk into your rabbitry – then your rabbit (who lives in a cage, off the floor) has to have contact with and lick or otherwise ingest the virus from off your shoe... Sure, it is possible...

Because RHD is in the wild population this cycle is humanly impossible to manage. It is now endemic in the southwestern US. It is not going away – no matter what ARBA or any other organization tries to do. RHD is here to stay.

(Excerpt from OIE Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Card)

“In regions where RHDV circulates in wild rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), eradication is not feasible. Instead, this disease is controlled in domesticated rabbits with biosecurity measures including sanitation and disinfection, the maintenance of closed colonies, and vaccination. - Vaccination may be limited to breeding animals if RHD has not been reported on a farm, but all animals should be vaccinated if an outbreak has occurred.

The individuals I have visited with who have dealt with RHDV2 in their rabbitry generally struggled with biosecurity, not having the means to completely enclose their rabbitries. It wasn't that they brought in a rabbit with the disease. It wasn't that they attended a show where rabbits were sick. It wasn't that they visited the neighbors' rabbitry and carried the virus into their own rabbitry. AMAZON PRIME did not deliver the virus on its many trips through the neighborhood – neither did the postal service. One individual blamed it onto mice, another to flies, because the mosquito netting she put up kept being shredded by either the rabbits or the wind.

I am researching cases by visiting with the individuals involved. So far I have yet to find a single case where the owner can point a finger to a HUMAN TRANSMISSION. The evidence in all cases that I have so far documented points to deficiencies in the biosecurity systems. (Not neglect, but the inability to control the external wild contact). Humans are not the main transporter of this virus, with the possible exception of importing or selling rabbit meat or pelts which is suspected as the introduction of the virus to most new countries.

PROTECTING YOUR HERD WITH VACCINATIONS

Nationally there are at least three categories of people facing the vaccine dilemma. Colorado and the other southwestern states have the disease so the vets are allowed to import vaccine. Colorado also has vets who understand the 'herd mentality' as opposed to individual pets. Therefore, we are not expected to pay upwards of \$100 per animal for a vaccination. **However, because we are in the HOTZONE, even our vaccinated rabbits cannot attend shows.**

In states who have not yet reported the disease, vets cannot even apply to import the vaccine! Those rabbit breeders are sitting there within miles of an outbreak on the other side of the state line and cannot protect their herds. By the way, it is illegal for a vet to vaccinate animals that reside in another state. Rabbit breeders in (so far) unaffected state are panicked that a human will bring the disease to them, when in reality Mother Nature will eventually deliver it. They know it is coming and cannot preemptively protect themselves.

And the third set of breeders are when the rabbit is considered strictly a pet. Pet owners can and will spend lots of money on their beloved bunny, but the breeder with 50 or 100 rabbits cannot begin to afford over \$100 per rabbit for vaccinations. There are some vets absolutely taking advantage of the situation and charging indiscriminately huge sums – office fee, exam charge, administration charge, return checkup fee, microchip fee. While it may be a while before the rabbit owner/breeder can administer their own vaccines, that would be an end goal.

The long-term solution is for the US to manufacture their own vaccines. While a few drug companies expressed interest, in 2020 that interest has been superseded by COVID-19 vaccine research and production. Fortunately the research has been done in Spain and France and the process is established. Hopefully it will be available here sooner rather than later. In the meantime, serious breeders will need to figure into their costs annual vaccinations. Choosing the 20% of your herd that is most valuable, or that will be leaving your bio secure property for shows may be a way to avoid the high cost of vaccinations.

In conclusion there are three facts impossible to ignore, and even argue with.

1. **RHDV2 is here to stay!** While its location and distribution throughout our huge country will vary over time, RHDV2 will NOT ever go away!
2. **The only real protection for your herd is vaccination.** There are many difficulties with vaccination, primarily with cost due to its import requirements, and also due to vets who are focused mainly on the pet market. Its efficacy and value is not to be questioned as it is backed with sound scientific research.
3. **Diligent biosecurity must not be ignored.** Common sense and an understanding of the transmission by wild vectors supports high levels of biosecurity and sanitation.

Submitted by Linda Hibbert

How RHVD2 hit our Rabbit Den

A Breeders View—Giving her Voluntary account of the outbreak in her barn.

We believe the first sign of the virus hitting our rabbitry was on May 27th but we didn't know it yet. At this time we had a colony of 4 retired Holland Lops living together in an outside pen. On this day we lost 2 of the 4 rabbits. No sign of distress or struggle, they were just gone. By May 28th, the other 2 rabbits in that colony were also dead.

I suspected the virus, but all of the other rabbits seemed to be fine. Some of our rabbits were living outside the rabbit barn in their cages under the overhang. We also had 2 rabbits that lived free range under the barn. No signs of anything. We also don't ever see any wild rabbits around our property.

Almost 2 weeks later, on June 10th, the one free ranging Himalayan doe was found dead. No signs of anything that may have killed her. The other free ranging rabbit still was doing fine. At this point, we moved the show rabbits from outside the barn back inside just as a precaution in case it was the virus.

Four days later, June 14th, the virus hit our rabbit barn. We had a Himi doe with a litter of 6 week old babies. On this day we lost one of the babies. On June 15th we lost another baby. On June 16th we lost 2 more babies and mom. At this point, we knew it had to be the virus. The State Veterinarian was contacted and he planned a trip down the next day to get some samples. June 17th we lost the last himi baby in that litter. This was the only baby that actually hemorrhaged when it died. All the previous bunnies that passed were fine in the morning and gone by the evening or fine in the evening and gone in the morning. No signs of any problems.

The State Vet did confirm we were positive for RHVD2 and a quarantine order was put on our rabbitry for 90 days if we culled our whole herd or 120 days if we decided to wait it out and see what happened. The Vet recommended after the quarantine was up, introducing an outside rabbit to see if it survived.

At this point, we did move a few of our rabbits including two other does with their babies to a new location on our property to hopefully save them from the virus. They were given their own supply of food and water so as to not cross-contaminate them with anything from the rabbit barn.

On June 18th we lost a Holland Lop baby. June 19th we lost 3 rabbits including our Grand Champion Himalayan Doe. We lost one on the 20th and two more on the 22nd. Fortunately, this was the last day we lost any rabbits. When the dying stopped, we had lost 20 of our 40+ rabbits in our rabbitry.

As far as biosecurity measures we took to prevent the spread. The rabbits that had been moved to another location were fed and cared for before all other rabbits. Their food and water was completely separate from the other rabbits. Rabbits in the rabbit barn were not handled except to be fed and watered. We also sprayed our feet with a bleach solution after leaving the barn.

After we were pretty certain the rabbits remaining were immune to the virus or just lucky to survive, we removed the cages that were "infected" and all were cleaned and sterilized and put outside in the sunlight to kill any virus remaining.

Once the quarantine was lifted, we did get 6 of our rabbits vaccinated. We also brought in a mix breed rabbit to see if it would survive. This rabbit has done great and showed no signs of getting the virus. We have also moved some of our older, retired rabbits back out to the colony outdoor pens and all have done great. We have not lost another rabbit since June 22nd.

My guess is this virus was brought in by mice or flies. We did have quite a mice problem and have since done everything possible to eliminate that issue. Our barn has all been redone, flooring, walls, et cetera.

It did appear that our does were definitely more susceptible to the virus than the bucks were. We lost considerably more does. We also have some concern about the virus affecting the breeding ability of our rabbits. We have tried to breed a few of our does we have left and so far we have not gotten any babies.

We desperately hope this virus disappears but don't think that is going to happen. Hopefully, the vaccine will become more readily available and more reasonably priced so everyone that wants to participate in rabbit shows can once again do so.

Thank you for your honest and open account of this situation and everyone wishes you the best outcome!

RMHS

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Mike Martinez 2020-2021 mlrabbitry18@gmail.com

Additional Staff

RMHS Club Charter

contact Linda Hibbert rmhsmemberships@gmail.com

RMHS New or Renewal Membership

contact Linda Hibbert rmhsmemberships@gmail.com

RMHS Club Show Sanctions

contact Robin Vogel robvogel71@gmail.com

Webpage Admin/Facebook Admin

contact Sonya Garcia triplehrabbits@gmail.com

RMHS Sweepstakes

contact Laurie Hauska hiddenlops@ftconnect.net

Newsletter

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Johnny Haussener Director District 9

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Email: JohnnyHaussener@gmail.com

Please write a letter and send to at least our District Representative - but maybe to every single ARBA official on this list!". Let them know how you feel and ask them to get involved!