

Rabbit industry ready to boom across the nation

The rabbit industry may be ready to take off and become a booming business in the United States.

All it needs is a little push from the public, clarification of some misconceptions, new marketing methods and stronger political clout from needed grower organizations.

Those are the opinions of Peter R. Cheeke, director of research for Oregon State University's Rabbit Research Center, the only one of its kind in the country.

Cheeke said that it is time to aggressively tackle the issue that the "rabbit is too cute to raise for food."

"The rabbit has the potential to become a major livestock species," Cheeke stressed. "It has high productivity, can efficiently convert forages into meat, can be fed diets low in grain and it produces tasty high protein, low fat, low cholesterol meat."

Cheeke added the rabbit industry must overcome the "Easter Bunny" syndrome. Most people accept the raising of cattle, pigs, poultry and other livestock as meat animals, but many react negatively to rabbit production and eating rabbit meat.

"In the wild, rabbits are

food sources for many other animals," Cheeke noted. "They have a very high reproductive rate. In developing the rabbit industry, we are exploiting this tremendous meat potential for the production of human food."

The existence of custom slaughtering for rabbits might result in more people taking up rabbit raising. Most people who raise beef cattle for a living don't do their own butchering, Cheeke said, so why should it be considered that you're not a fully adequate rabbit raiser unless you do your own butchering?

New ways of marketing rabbit are vital for the growth of the industry. Possibilities include specialty restaurants that feature rabbit and, perhaps, other less common types of meat.

Barbecued rabbit was served at OSU's Rabbit Research Symposium last year and a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise experimented with the meat. Rabbit has been well accepted by people who had not consumed it regularly.

"I don't think it will be difficult to expand the market if we develop promotional campaigns at large gatherings, such as state fairs,"

Cheeke said. "That's where people can get an opportunity to sample our product. Our challenge is to get more people to take that first bite of rabbit meat."

A state rabbit association could exert some political pressure and requests to the U.S. Department of Agriculture might reawaken interest in rabbit research. The USDA closed its Rabbit Experiment Station in California about 20 years ago. Now OSU has the only rabbit research center in the country.

Contributions and gifts from rabbit growers throughout the U.S. help

finance the program.

The rabbit industry offers hope for a lot of young people to get into agriculture and is one of the few enterprises in that field that can begin on a small scale. Land requirements are few and the starting capital investment is small.

The next few years should offer a make-or-break situation for the industry, Cheeke said.

"The industry is poised for a take-off," he noted. "If it doesn't do it now, when the signals look right, it may never be much more than the minor activity it is now."

Italian dishes offer something for dieters

Italian dishes are a great way to indulge oneself. If you are hooked, as many persons are, on pasta and sauces with Italian influences, you may still eat these and hang on to some form of a diet.

Just eat smaller portions. This takes a certain amount of willpower but when watching calories it is either cut down drastically or eliminate some favored foods completely.

Lasagna roll-ups offer the option of savoring a classic Italian dish, in smaller portions.

LASAGNA ROLL-UPS WITH MUSHROOM SAUCE

- 1 can (1 pound 12 ounces) tomatoes, broken up
- 1 can (6 ounce) tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper, divided
- 1 can (6 to 8 ounce) sliced mushrooms
- 1 pound ricotta or cottage cheese
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 12 lasagna noodles, cooked
- 4 ounces mozzarella cheese, sliced

In a large saucepan combine tomatoes, tomato paste, onion powder, sugar, Italian seasoning, 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, garlic powder and 1/4 teaspoon of the black pepper. Bring to boiling point.

Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Or, replace with 1 jar (5.5 ounce) marinara sauce. Add mushrooms; simmer, until sauce is thickened, about 10 minutes longer.

Combine ricotta, eggs and remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper. Spoon about 1/4 cup ricotta mixture onto one end of each lasagna noodle; roll-up, jelly-roll fashion.

Place in a 13x9x2-inch pan. Pour mushroom sauce over all. Top with mozzarella.

Bake in a preheated 400-degree oven until hot and cheese melts, 3 to 5 minutes. Makes 6 portions.

- 1 teaspoon tarragon leaves
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1-4 cup chopped onion
- 1-8 teaspoon pepper
- 4 tablespoons (4 envelopes) unflavored gelatin
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 1-2 cups (two 14 1-2-ounce cans) asparagus spears and liquid
- 1 cup cottage cheese
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- Olives, if desired

Combine tomatoes and liquid, sugar, salt, bay leaf, tarragon, lemon juice, chopped onion, and pepper in medium saucepan. Stir to break up tomatoes.

Heat to boiling; reduce heat and simmer 30 minutes. Sieve tomato mixture; reserve liquid (about 2 1-2 cups).

Soften 2 tablespoons gelatin in 1-2 cup water. Dissolve gelatin in hot tomato liquid. Chill to consistency of unbeaten egg whites. Stir in celery. Pour into lightly oiled 8-cup mold. Drain asparagus well, reserving 1 1-4 cups liquid.

Soften remaining gelatin in remaining water. Heat asparagus liquid to boiling. Dissolve softened gelatin in hot asparagus liquid; chill to consistency of unbeaten egg whites. Beat cottage cheese in small mixer bowl or blender until smooth.

Cut asparagus in 1-2 inch pieces. Stir cheese, asparagus, and seasoned salt into partially set asparagus liquid. Carefully spoon over tomato mixture. Chill until firm.

Serve with olives, if desired.

Carrot cakes are being discovered by a new generation of bakers and their families. The raw carrot used contributes a good sweetness and a pebbly texture. It also keeps the cake moist and thus more delectable.

Adding to this tasty cake is the cream cheese filling and the nutted icing which make it a modern-day winner.

SPICED CARROT CAKE

- 2 cups all purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup salad oil
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups shredded raw carrots
- 2 cups chopped pecans, divided (or peanuts)
- 1 package (1 pound) confectioner's sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Sift together flour, cinnamon, baking powder and salt. In the large bowl of an electric mixer, beat sugar and oil for 2 minutes or use rotary beater. Beat in eggs, one at a time, beating thoroughly after each addition. Add flour mixture, beating just until blended. Mix in carrots and one cup of the pecans.

Pour batter into 2 greased and waxed paper lined 9-inch layer-cake pans. Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven until a cake tester inserted into center comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes.

Cool in pans 10 minutes. Turn out of pans onto wire racks; peel off paper and cool thoroughly. Beat cream cheese until light. Stir in confectioner's sugar and vanilla extract. Use to fill and frost cake.

Sprinkle the sides of the cake with remaining 1 cup chopped pecans. Garnish with pecan halves, if desired. Makes one 9-inch layer cake.

TOMATO ASPARAGUS CROWN

- 3 1-2 cups (28-ounce can) whole peeled tomatoes and liquid
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 bay leaf



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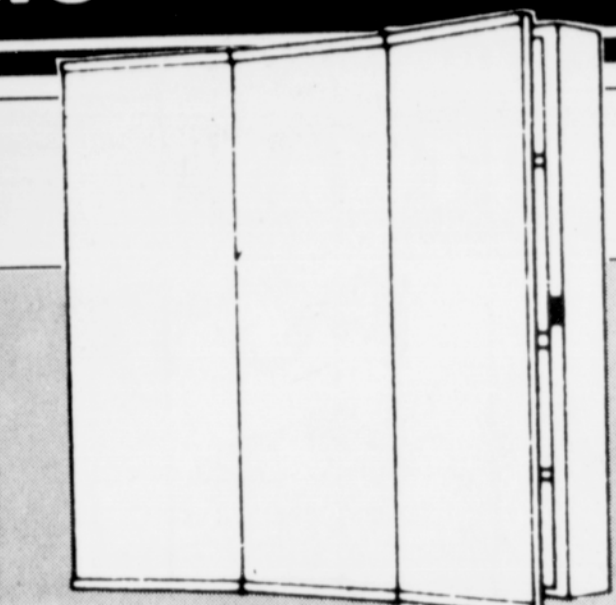
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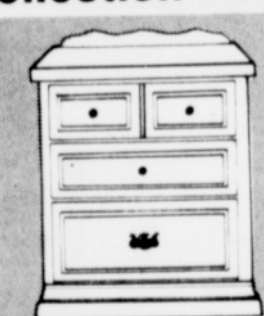
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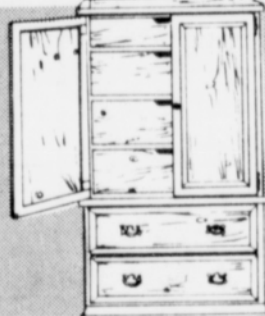
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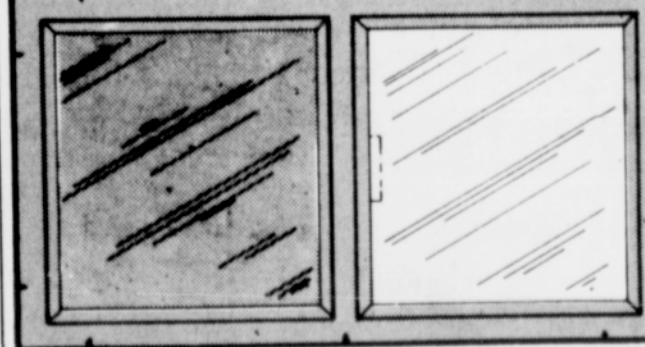
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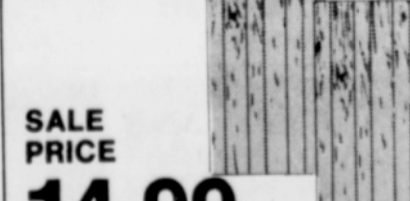
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