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Mini Review

Rabbit Meat is a Potential Alternative Animal Protein Source in the Hunting Communities in Uganda, A Case Study of Soroti District

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Abstract

The need to popularize rabbit meat in the hunting communities of Uganda was after examining the published population and health records in the country. People struggle to hunt and trap rodents which is a very laborious and sometimes a futile undertaking. The challenges of hunting are worsened by the chronic and debilitating diseases which are not uncommon in most areas of Uganda. There are many children and yet about 46.47% of the households live below the poverty line; this implies that families are not able to buy food especially animal protein sources. Though families keep livestock and poultry, it is assumed that they are for meeting other family needs and hardly used for home consumption. In Soroti district, about 35.4% of the children are stunted and 4.4% are wasted possibly because families lack sustainable protein sources, yet hunting is very energy taxing and unreliable. Hunting requires coordinated teamwork of humans and dogs, involving running and sometimes climbing trees; this requires time and a healthy body. Given the prevailing health status of the community, hunting of rodents is not a sustainable means of getting proteins needed especially by children and the patients. It is therefore imperative that communities take up rabbit farming because it is not only an enterprise but provides the best meat for even hypertensive people and children.

Introduction

Rabbits are efficient meat producers although usually just used as research animals or even as pets yet takes about 3 months to be ready for consumption [1,2]. The prices of other meats have generally soared, and rabbits are a possible alternative, because rabbits have high fecundity and prolificacy [3]. Rabbit meat offers several advantages [4,5]. Rabbit meat is low in fat and cholesterol [6]; fat (9.2g/100g) and cholesterol (56.4 mg/100g) [7] . it is thus suitable for diabetics and the hypertensives. Rabbit meat is richer in calcium (21.4 mg/100g) and phosphorus (347 mg/100g) than other meats [7]. In many tropical countries, rabbits are sold at live weights ranging from 2.4 to 2.8 kg achieved when the rabbits are about 20 to 25 weeks old; even in Uganda its prices are attractive [8]. The cost of living in Uganda has increased remarkably in the past few years and there is need for cheap protein sources. Proper nutrition may delay progression of HIV positive patients to reach manifestation of AIDS [9]. Morbidity and mortality due to HIV/AIDS in developing countries is due to chronic undernourishment [10]. Whole body protein turnover is increased in HIV infections [11,12] and early nutritional management is important in HIV patients for gaining lean body mass [13-15]. Proper nutrition is also needed because of the high energy expenditure and progressive wasting [12,16]. Rabbitry provides opportunities even for poor farmers [17-19]. Though the communities are livestock keepers, they hardly slaughter for family consumption. Communities hunt various rodents like ground or tree squirrels, porcupines, giant rats and mice; the non-rodent groups could be wild rabbits and rarely antelopes. Mammals are the main source of bush meat; ungulates and rodents compose the highest proportion [20]. The rodents weigh 18 to 85 grams [21]. Hunting requires an organized team of many people and their dogs, yet the animals are so small to suffice. Hunting is a desperate move to acquire proteins, but it is very expensive in terms of time and energy, yet its meagre benefits are never guaranteed. Rabbit farming may revolutionize human nutrition, poverty alleviation and food security in regions with high chronic diseases prevalence rates [22]. Performance of rabbits can be improved by mating local females with exotics males like Californian rabbit [23,24].

Demographic Literature

The populations have more children than adults; about 48% of the population is below the poverty line [25]. The infant mortality per 1000 was 85.3 for Soroti and 89 for Uganda, the under 5 years mortality rate per 1000 was 161 for Soroti and 156 for Uganda [26]. The percentage number of stunted children was 35.4% for Soroti and 39.1% for Uganda, the number of wasted children was 4.3% for Soroti and 4.1% for Uganda [26]. In Uganda, 16% of children under 5 years are underweight according to the World Health Organization [14] standards [27]. In Soroti 7.2% of households were extremely food insecure and 35.7% were moderately food insecure [28].

Discussion

Information from the population office indicates that a larger group of people are in the age that requires more protein; that is many children below 5 years. The number of people in the growing ranges is more than half the total population for all sub-counties [25]. The poverty levels in the communities which are having many children and youth are likely indicators of poor nutrition. Almost half of the population of the productive force is below the poverty line; this is to imply that they can hardly afford meat of any sort and is possibly the main reason for opting to hunting. The infant mortality rate and the less than 5 year mortality rate are very high possibly due to inadequate proteins in the diets. The percentage of stunted children is unacceptably too high for Soroti and also the number of wasted children in Soroti is high possibly due to protein deficiencies. The WHO classify the Soroti nutrition status as wanting especially for stunting, underweight and wasting of children [28].



Conclusion

The poor nutrition status was possibly due to deficiency of proteins in the diets of the Soroti populations. The wanting nutrition status is likely being exacerbated by prevalence of various chronic diseases which cause progressive wasting.

Recommendation

Laborious risky hunting should be replaced by sustainable and sure rabbit farming for protein provision and food security.

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