

Apply ethics where justified - The case of the Papillon rabbit breeds

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Abstract. In this paper we will refer to a particular case of unethical practices, used strictly for selection and entertainment purposes such as rabbit shows. There are several so-called Papillon rabbit breeds with certain color variations clearly defined by the standard. These breeds have a pattern of lines and spots that must have some symmetry. Breeders can observe the quality of the rabbit fur design from the age of one day. Thus, newborns that do not meet the criteria described in the standard are sometimes removed from the nest for two reasons: i) they do not have commercial value as individuals and ii) they consume the milk of valuable specimens from the nest of newborns. We consider that this practice, which also applies to other breeds in which the color or pattern on the body can be selected at the age of one day, is not justified and is unethical.

Key Words: Papillon, rabbit breeds, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, unethical practices.

Introduction. Nowadays, there is a lot of propaganda about the human transition to a vegan diet for ethical or climatic reasons (González et al 2020). Specifically, some scientists and politicians are campaigning to reduce human consumption of meat in order to limit carbon emissions, but also for ethical reasons (Schiermeier 2019).

Indeed, studies show that human consumption of food from species in the upper levels of the trophic pyramid requires higher energy consumption in the production process, so more emissions than in the direct consumption of plants, fruits or seeds (DeLay 2020; González et al 2020). It is also said that man, as an empathic superior being, should no longer consume food of animal origin to avoid cruelty to animals (Fischer 2019). However, I believe that before taking these drastic measures, we can start with the beginning: eliminating unnecessary slaughter of animals, reducing the waste of meat through full consumption, raising the minimum age for slaughtering animals and reducing super-intensive exploitation in favor of raising extensive or semi-intensive. In the case of extensive or semi-intensive farming, the animals live happily in the comfort of space, with natural food, and the size of slaughter is reached later. We could say that, in this way, animals live a large part of their lives, and their life expectancy, at least in theory, exceeds the life expectancy of animals in the wild. Also, the products of animal origin thus raised are healthier for the consumer, according to the slow food concept (Petrescu-Mag 2009).

The Purpose of the Paper. In this paper we will refer to a particular case of unethical practices, used strictly for selection and entertainment purposes (rabbit shows, exhibitions). There are the so-called Papillon rabbit breeds, some smaller, some larger, with certain color variations clearly defined by the standard (see details in Petrescu-Mag et al 2016). These breeds have a pattern of lines and spots that must have some symmetry. For example, in the German Papillon butterfly breed, we have a description of the breed as follows.

Head drawing. The head drawing consists of the butterfly drawing, the rings around the eyes, the dots on the cheeks and the drawing of the ears. The butterfly drawing should

be well defined, with bilateral wings that arch to the top of the mouth and enclose the mandible on the side. The rings around the eyes should surround the eye with a closed band and as regular as possible. If a tip forms at the top of the rings around the eyes, it will not be considered a defect. The base of the ear is strongly encircled at the root. This encirclement is not allowed to touch the color of the ears or the points of the cheeks. The points of the cheeks are round or oval and stand independently under the rings around the eyes (European Association of Poultry Pigeon and Rabbit Breeders 2003; UGCPPAMR 2010).

Trunk design. The design of the trunk includes the back stripe and the design of the parts. The dorsal stripe extends from the back of the neck to the tip of the tail and is also about 3 cm wide. The design of the sides shows independent, not very large spots, about 3 cm in diameter, evenly distributed on both sides, on the flanks and on the hind thighs. On both sides there should be a number of about 6-8 spots. The spots on the chest, abdomen, legs and tail area have nothing to do with them (European Association of Poultry Pigeon and Rabbit Breeders 2003; UGCPPAMR 2010).

Fur color. Black-white, blue-white and havana-white tones are allowed. The base color is white in the cover color and underneath. The color of the drawing must be clean, without any interference from other colored hair (European Association of Poultry Pigeon and Rabbit Breeders 2003; UGCPPAMR 2010).

The Less Ethical Part of Rabbit Selection. Breeders can observe the quality of the rabbit fur design from the age of one day (Figure 1). Thus, newborns that do not meet the criteria described in the standard are sometimes removed from the nest for two reasons: i) they do not have commercial value as individuals and ii) they consume the milk of valuable specimens from the nest of newborns. We consider that this practice, which also applies to other breeds in which the color or pattern on the body can be selected at the age of one day, is not justified and is unethical.

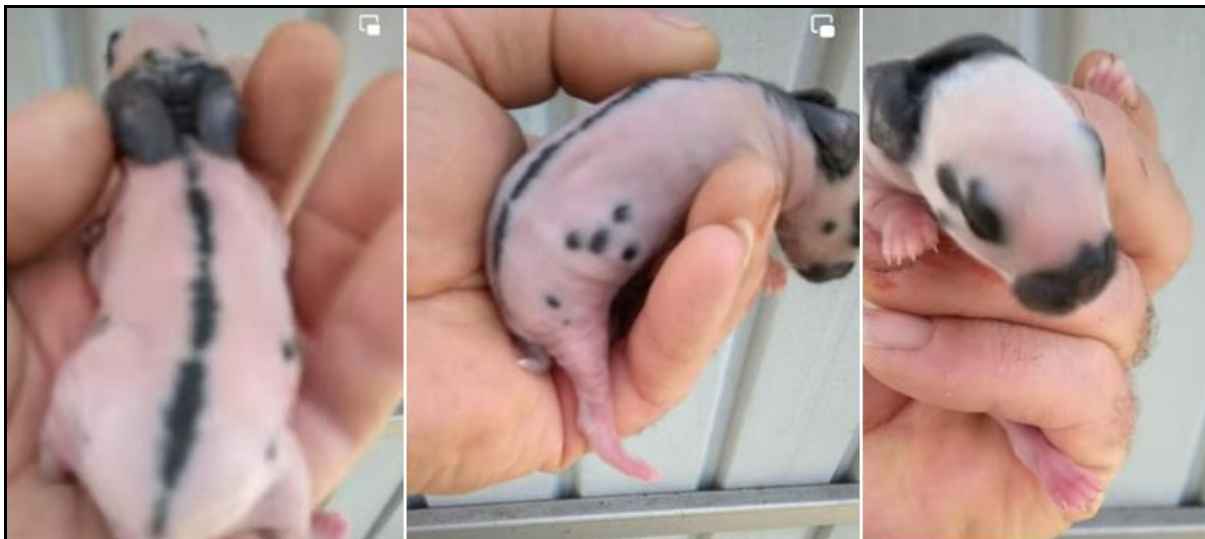


Figure 1. One day old kit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, German Giant Papillon breed (source: Marian Cernăuțanu).

What Would It Mean to Give Up the Consumption of Food of Animal Origin?

Reducing or eliminating carnivorous behavior would mean the disappearance of tens or hundreds of animal breeds and the elimination of thousands of years of selection work. Animal breeds would disappear just as traction horse or donkey breeds disappeared after mechanization (Quaresma et al 2014). Not even keeping the breeds in sperm banks or gene banks does not guarantee their preservation. The reduction in population numbers, the bottle-neck effect and genetic drift can irreversibly affect the gene pool of each breed

(Allendorf 1986). Therefore, I propose to maintain the consumption of products of animal origin and the extensive or semi-intensive breeding of animals on farms of happy animals.

Conflict of Interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.

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