



THE PHILIPPINE ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY

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POSITION PAPER OF THE PHILIPPINE ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY (PAWS) ON THE DRAFTING OF RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR RABBIT SLAUGHTER

While the Animal Welfare Act (Republic Act 8485, as amended by RA 10631) allows for the humane slaughter of certain animals used for food, rabbits are not considered a regular source of meat for consumption in the Philippines and are classified- at best – “exotic meat”.

The Covid-19 pandemic which traces its origins to the consumption of animals in the meat markets of China teaches us to be circumspect in approving new classifications of meat, especially from animals that are not endemic to the Philippines.

The National Institute of Health has published a study entitled “Seroprevalence of Encephalitozoon cuniculi and Toxoplasma gondii in domestic rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) in China”, viz:

The breeding of domestic rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) for human consumption has a long tradition in China. Infections that can affect the production of meat or even be transmitted from animals to humans are important to monitor, especially for public health reasons as well as for their impact on animal health.

Thus, a total of 1,132 domestic rabbit sera from 4 regions in China were collected for serological screening for Encephalitozoon cuniculi and for Toxoplasma gondii by ELISA and modified agglutination test (MAT), respectively. Antibodies to E. cuniculi were detected in 248/1,132 (21.9%) sera tested while antibodies against T. gondii revealed a seroprevalence of 51/1,132 (4.5%).

We believe that the **present results are of epidemiological implications and public health importance due to the acknowledged susceptibility of humans to E. cuniculi and T. gondii infections.** (*underscoring, ours*)

The Association of Rabbit Meat Producers, Inc (ARaMP) has stated in their position paper that “In the Philippines, like in the US, rabbits are classified under poultry” and that “rabbits have long been listed as livestock”. However, ARaMP has failed to mention that, in the US, rabbits are not recognized as an agricultural commodity by the US Department of Agriculture and are instead regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Rabbit processing plants must pay for federal meat inspection and rapid response to disease outbreaks (ie. rabbit calicivirus disease) may not be provided and rabbits are not included as a separate species in agricultural censuses. As a

consequence, no reliable statistics exist that describe the meat rabbit industry such as the number of producers and the tonnage of rabbit meat produced.

This treatment of rabbits by the US FDA instead of the Department of Agriculture is presumably arising from the fact that, unlike other meats typically consumed, rabbit meat may be prone to certain infections or diseases which could have serious implications on human health.

Aside from the cited NIH study, the EPA and USDA also released information on Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV), viz:

There is a current outbreak of RHDV2 in other countries. It is a small, non-enveloped emerging virus, which means it is in the category of the hardest to kill viruses.

Though not a threat to humans, it is unwise, even catastrophic, to introduce non-endemic animals to the country where a virus is considered one of the deadliest, difficult to diagnose and with no vaccine in sight.

There is also documentation of possible poisoning as a result of consumption of rabbit meat called “protein poisoning” due to the leanness of rabbit meat. Symptoms of said protein poisoning include initial onset of diarrhea, then headache, fatigue, low-blood pressure and slow heart rate.

PAWS recommends that the National Meat Inspection Service be called in to study the pros and cons of allowing such industry to grow and operate as a “regular” meat provider given that there are numerous red flags on rabbit meat.

Further, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) should be asked to study the effect of the mass production of animals that are not endemic to our country in the event that these rabbits may find themselves in the wild and the effect on our country’s natural ecosystem.

In the interim and in the absence of such studies, PAWS maintains that the rabbit meat industry proceed as a closely monitored “exotic meat” industry source and that plans for construction of rabbit slaughterhouses and its mass production systems be held in abeyance.



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