



Hello, my name is Marti Dill and I am an ex-Michigander, born and raised in Kalamazoo county. I am also a DUTCH BREEDER. My husband and I have raised Dutch rabbits since 1981. We currently live in north Central Alabama on two acres with 2 Dobermans, about 40 laying hens and 75 rabbit cages. In those cages we raise Black, Blue, Steel and Tort Dutch plus 3 Dwarf Hotots. Dutch have always been in our barn while other breeds have come and gone.

Over the years we have traveled many miles and met many friends who share our rabbit hobby. I have served as the past President of the American Dutch Rabbit Club, Chairman of the ADRC Guidebook committee, Chairman of the ARBA Youth Royalty contests but the most fun was being 4-H leaders of two county 4-H groups (Allegan and Kalamazoo).

1. What advice would you give someone just getting into the Dutch breed?

The Dutch breed is not an easy breed to raise and compete with. Marked breeds are always a bigger challenge. I often say they are like black olives, you either love them and raise them all of your life or you become so frustrated that you are in and out within a few years. (Just as a point of interest, the ADRC has more long time breeders than any other rabbit breed.)

If you have never raised rabbits, Dutch are a great breed because they are hardy and have great personalities. Your first Dutch should be one you get to know and love. Learn about the breed, learn how to handle it for it's safety and yours, join the American Dutch Rabbit Club, and meet other young people who have rabbits. Your first Dutch does not have to be a winner.

If you have raised rabbits for several years and want to show I would encourage you to locate a nationally competitive Dutch breeder to purchase your beginning stock from. You may want to start with a *bred proven brood doe*. This would be a doe that has been a mainstay in this breeders barn. It would be experienced in birthing and raising a litter. It will be correct in type and may be correct in most of the markings. Try to keep at least one offspring from the first litter to add to your new Dutch herd. From here add more Dutch that compliment your herd, a little at a time! Staying with the same variety is wise when you start off.

2. When breeding, what do you look for when pairing Dutch?

The easiest answer is OPPOSITES. I wouldn't want to breed two rabbits who both have square cheeks or both have pinched hindquarters. I wouldn't want to breed a long shouldered doe to a buck that is also long and maybe has a flat topline (aka back). Most of the top experienced Dutch breeders will tell you that breeding a Dutch is using PARTS to improve your offspring. I currently have 6 black bucks. Every one of them is in my barn because they have a specific part (i.e. short stops) that when used to breed a doe will provide me with some kits who have better stops.

Each time I do breedings (3-6 at a time) I spend time at my computer looking at does and bucks pedigrees. I am a big believer in breeding closely related rabbits. Breeding mom to son or even brother to sister can be done to lock in specific traits and shouldn't produce 'goofy' looking bunnies. If you really like a trait you see in a specific litter SAVE a brother/sister or put a son to mom. Everytime you bring in an un-related Dutch in your barn you need approximately 2 generations to see if that mating made the improvement you wanted. One mating doesn't tell you what your new rabbit is capable of doing for the improvement of your herd.

3. What do you know now that you wished you knew when you first started in Dutch?

That I would still be doing this almost 40 years later!!!

Actually it still amazes me the challenges raising Dutch offers me. I keep a chalkboard in my barn. It has a saying from a great rabbit breeder. Along with his saying I have a check off list with words that remind me of my current PROJECT. My first note to myself has the word COBBY. The following year I added the words ROUND CHEEKS. This years project is FUR.

My last thoughts on what I wish I knew at first is—Winning is not important. Improving the breed is my number 1 goal! "*Bred on purpose, for a purpose*" This applies to any species you work with.

4. How did you start in rabbits?

Like so many parents we bought a blue Dutch bunny for our son. (I had a New Zealand red trio when I was in 4-H.) Being a competitive person I found a rabbit show was being held at our fairgrounds. Our son took and showed his blue Dutch. The bunny came in last in a class of 3. Our judge that day was Scott Williamson, a nice young man. The National Dutch Show was going to be held in Champagne, Illinois that year and he invited us to come. Silly us—can you believe we took him up on the offer and took our one blue Dutch. After that we were hooked.

5. What markings do you struggle with or are common faults in your litters?

Marking faults come and go. Often when you add a new buck in your herd and he is used on numerous does you will see you get the same marking fault(s). This is where keeping GREAT records are important. Make notes of multiple poor markings in a litter. Make notes if blue eyes or spots in the eyes appear. If you keep one from the litter that *does not have* that poor marking or wrong eye color, make notes on that rabbits pedigree. It is probably carrying that fault in it's genes. Makes notes NOT TO REPEAT that mating.

My current challenge is 1) short stops and 2) eliminating all long and/or flat shoulders.

6. What is something you learned from another breeder that has stuck with you?

This is in reference to buying a herd buck:

“Purchase the oldest herd buck that is still producing for the seller has in his barn. Sound crazy—maybe. But that buck wouldn't have stayed in the Sellers barn if it wasn't producing GREAT offspring.” Thank you Mike O'Connell.

7. Do you use DQ rabbits in your breeding program?

Absolutely. I think we all do however it must be exceptional in everything other than it's one disqualification. I keep type over everything. If your cage space is limited remember when you make a decision to keep a rabbit that has a DQ you are using up a cage that *could have* a show rabbit in it. That said, rabbits have a very short SHOW life. Most rabbits win for no more than 4-5 months and then some really cute junior comes along and knocks them out of the winners circle! The cage a DQ rabbit uses could have been used by one without a DQ but only for a very few months.

8. Where do you see the Dutch breed in 10 years?

That is very hard to answer. So much has changed in all of our lives right now, Covid & RHDV2. I am very concerned. I believe Dutch will always be in existence. They are a very old and strong breed both in the U.S. and in Europe.

Concerning new varieties being added, I feel we need to do more work to perfect what we have .

Now for the question you didn't ask me.

And one of the most important I think—CULLING!

Frequently other rabbit breeders will ask me when I cull? My answer is CONSTANTLY. All of my cages are hung eye level. Everyday I can judge my rabbits while feeding or watering. Yes culling in my barn starts within a few days after birth. It continues when it's time to wean. Again when I sort for those rabbits to go to the show. Later I cull when it's time to select breeders in my barn (and they are not always show winners). Many rabbits have left my barn with 20 or more Grand Champion legs to go to the cull man. I continue to cull when that doe or buck has produced. Does, were they good moms? Am I satisfied with what they produced for me? And I cull when my barn gets too full!

When I get full, I cull for a very *specific* purposes, looking for things like the absence of full lower hindquarters, narrow snipey heads, and lack of short coupled bodies. I want good bone evidenced by thick & short fat feet , quickly finishing fur—and staying in fur, a rise that starts immediately behind the head, good depth of color or ring/ticking and ears with substance that balance with my rabbit. Anything that isn't a good match for the perfect Dutch rabbit I have in my head will probably go.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you about my Dutch.