



2018 Beginning Farmer Webinar Series

Getting Started with...
Raising Rabbits

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Katie Holcomb, Ionia County

- Have raised rabbits for almost 40 years
- 4th Generation rabbit raiser (out of 6 generations)
- Served on many committees at all levels
- Member of local, state, and national clubs
- Show and participate at all levels of competition
- 4-H leader for 18 years

 **WARNING**



**MAY SPONTANEOUSLY
TALK RABBITS**

Things to consider before getting started

1. Why do you want to raise rabbits
2. Choose your breed
3. Housing and Supplies
4. Nutrition
5. Breeding
6. Marketing

Why do you want to raise rabbits?

As a pet or companion?

To show or for a hobby?

For meat?

To make money?

Ways you can use rabbits

- Pet
- Show
- Meat
- Wool
- Pelts
- Fertilizer

No matter what your reason, you need to examine all of the following elements to make the best educated decision for you and your family.

Choosing your breed

There are 49 recognized breeds of rabbits in the American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA) Standard of Perfection.

4-Class (Fancy) Breeds

6-Class (Commercial Breeds)

Differences

- Size
 - 2.5 – 20+ pounds
- Fur / Wool
 - Normal
 - Rex
 - Satin
 - Wool
- Pelt Color
 - Solid Pattern
 - Broken Pattern
- Use
 - Meat
 - Pelts
 - Wool
 - Laboratory Use

Choosing your breed

4-Class or Fancy Breeds

American Fuzzy Lop

American Sable

Belgian Hare

Britannia Petite

Dutch

Dwarf Hotot

English Angora

English Spot

Florida White

French Angora

Harlequin

Havana

Himalayan

Holland Lop

Jersey Wooly

Lilac

Lionhead

Mini Lop

Mini Rex

Mini Satin

Netherland Dwarf

Polish

Rex

Rhineland

Satin Angora

Silver

Silver Marten

Standard Chinchilla

Tan

Thrianta

6-Class or Commercial Breeds

American

American Chinchilla

Argente Brun

Beveren

Blanc de Hotot

Californian

Champagne d'Argent

Checkered Giant

Cinnamon

Creme d'Argent

English Lop

Flemish Giant

French Lop

Giant Angora

Giant Chinchilla

New Zealand

Palomino

Satin

Silver Fox

Housing and Supplies

Indoors or Outdoors

Cage

- Wood
- Wire
- Both

Feeder

- Bowl
- J Feeder

Water

- Bowl
- Bottle
- Automatic System
 - ❖ Great to ensure constant water
 - ❖ Cannot see how much they are drinking

Other

- Cage Tray
- Nest Box
- Straw
- Shavings
- Carrying Cage

Housing and Supplies

Indoors (House)

- Wire Cage with Tray
- Feed Bowl
- Water Bottle

Indoors (Barn)

- Wire Cage with or without Tray
- J Feeder
- Water Bowl

Outdoors (Hutch)

- Wood & Wire Cage
- Feed Bowl or J Feeder
- Water Bottle or Bowl

Proper Ventilation is very important for rabbit health.

Housing and Supplies

Appropriate cage size for rabbits					
Individual weights		Minimum floor space		Minimum interior height	
Pounds	Kilograms	Square feet	Square meters	Inches	Centimeters
Less than 4.4	Less than 2.0	1.5	0.14	14	35.5
4.4-8.8	2.0-4.0	3	0.28	14	35.5
8.8-11.9	4-5.4	4	0.37	14	35.5
Greater than 11.9	Greater than 5.4	5	0.46	14	35.5



A good standard cage for a single rabbit is 24 x 24

Appropriate cage size for nursing rabbits					
Weight of nursing female		Minimum floor space per rabbit		Minimum interior height	
Pounds	Kilograms	Square feet	Square meter	Inches	Centimeters
Less than 4.4	Less than 2.0	430	0.37	14	35.5
4.4-8.8	2.0-4.0	5	0.46	14	35.5
8.8-11.9	4-5.4	6	0.58	14	35.5
Greater than 11.9	Greater than 5.4	7.5	0.7	14	35.5

Housing and Supplies



SAMPLES

Nutrition

What is the most important nutrient for a rabbit?



- Water helps a rabbit control their body temperature and condition.
 - If you can feel their spine, they lack condition
- Rabbits need fresh water 2-3 times daily
 - More in extreme temperatures

Nutrition

Rabbits only need to be fed once a day.

- Preferably at night when they are most active.
- 16% Protein is enough for good gain
- 18% Protein can be beneficial for lactating does, but not necessary.
- A higher fiber content is needed for wool breeds
- Amount depends on size of rabbit
 - Most meat breeds need 8 – 12 ounces per day
- Quality timothy hay can be a good treat

Here is a good treat that will help with fur and flesh condition that can be given in a small dose daily.

One part each:

Rolled Oats

Rolled Barley

Black Oil Sunflower Seeds

12% Horse Sweet Feed

Nutrition

Everything needed in food is found in the various commercial brands of feed.



SAMPLES

Nutrition



Compare Feed Tags to find the feed that will work best for your program.

development in young rabbits.

GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

Crude Protein, min.....	17.0%
Crude Fat, min.....	2.5%
Crude Fiber, min.....	14.0%
Crude Fiber, max.....	18.0%
Calcium (Ca), min.....	0.7%
Calcium (Ca), max.....	1.2%
Phosphorus (P), min.....	0.6%
Salt (NaCl), min.....	0.3%
Salt (NaCl), max.....	0.8%
Vitamin A, min.....	5,000 IU/lb

and body composition.

GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

Crude Protein, min.....	16.0%
Crude Fat, min.....	4.0%
Crude Fiber, min.....	15.0%
Crude Fiber, max.....	19.0%
Calcium (Ca), min.....	0.7%
Calcium (Ca), max.....	1.2%
Phosphorus (P), min.....	0.6%
Salt (NaCl), min.....	0.3%
Salt (NaCl), max.....	0.8%
Vitamin A, min.....	5,000 IU/lb

Check your local pet supply stores or feed mills to see what they sell.

Breeding

- Breed your does once they hit the senior weight for their breed, so you don't slow or stunt their growth.
- Gestation is 28-31 days
- Always bring the doe to the buck's pen
- You may palpate at 14 days
 - To palpate is to "feel" the developing kits by pressing through the skin on the abdominal wall with your fingers.
- Put the nest box in at day 27
 - Nest box size varies on the size of the rabbit – DO NOT give them one too big, or they will lay in it and crush the kits or use it as their bathroom.
 - Place enough large flake shavings in the bottom, then stuff the box full of good yellow straw.
 - Every doe is different, some make their nest days before, some...the day of.



Breeding

Purebred vs. Crossbred

- Once you decide what you want to use your rabbits for, then you will know how you want to breed them.
- If you are going to show them, stick to breeding true as you want your animals to be as true to their standard as you can get them.
- If you are going to use them for meat, the possibilities are endless, but I would still recommend breeding pure and not crossbreeding them.
 - Some claim crossbred rabbits can grow faster, but I know that a purebred New Zealand kit can reach 3 ½ to 5 ½ pounds by 10 weeks of age if proper nutrition is given.

Argente Brun



SCHEDULE OF POINTS	
GENERAL TYPE	25
COLOR	25
EVENNESS OF COLOR	10
FUR	15
CONDITION	5
TOTAL POINTS	100

SHOWROOM CLASSES & WEIGHTS

Senior Bucks—8 months of age and over, 8 - 10 pounds. Ideal weight 9 pounds.

Senior Does—8 months of age and over, 8 1/2 - 10 1/2 pounds. Ideal weight 9 1/2 pounds.

Intermediate Bucks—6 to 8 months of age, not over 9 pounds.

Intermediate Does—6 to 8 months of age, not over 9 1/2 pounds.

Junior Bucks—Under 6 months of age, not over 8 pounds. Minimum weight 5 1/2 pounds.

Junior Does—Under 6 months of age, not over 8 1/2 pounds. Minimum weight 5 1/2 pounds.

Pre-junior bucks & does—Under 3 months of age, not over 5 1/2 pounds.

NOTE: Juniors and Intermediates which exceed maximum weight limits may be shown in higher age classifications.

No animal may be shown in a lower age classification than its true age.

GENERAL TYPE

Type—Bucks and does of both sexes of medium length, with depth of body to approximate equal width; shall have good depth of hindquarters and well developed shoulders, with the shoulders being slightly lower and narrower than the hips, forming a slight taper. The back is to rise gradually from the middle of the neck to the high point over the hips. The entire body must carry firm and sound flesh throughout especially over the hips, with no suggestion of softness.

HEAD & EARS—Head should be broad and bold and set into the shoulders on a short neck. Ears of medium length, well furled and carried close together and erect.

FEET & LEGS—Legs to be of medium bone and straight.

Fur—Bony angular frame, large paunch, excessive dewlaps especially in bucks. Hat, pinched or undercut hips. Cut fur long or flat shoulders.

COLORED—Points 20: Surface color is to be an even silvered or frosted chocolate brown throughout. White evenness is stressed, slightly darker muzzle butterfly ears and feet are desirable. Longer, dark brown guard hairs are to be evenly interspersed over the entire pel. The undercolor is to be a

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American Rabbit Breeders Association Standard of Perfection

- ❖ This is the “bible” when it comes to showing rabbits.
- ❖ The rabbit that best meets the standard for their breed will win the show.
- ❖ Use this in your breeding program to ensure the best results.

rich chocolate ideally carried right to the skin. Allowance to be made for some overall fading due to age. Teenage to be dark brown. Eyes—Brown

Faults—Uneven color or fading around cheeks or eyes; extremely dark ears or muzzle; excessive molt; poor condition; hutch stains.

Evenness of Color—Points 10

FUR—Points 15: (Hyback) Medium length, having good texture and density.

Disqualifications from Competition—Any suggestion of a slate surface cast or any other off-color spots or patches, white teenage, lack of chocolate guard hairs, eyes other than brown.

CONDITION—Points 5: Per ARBA definition

Sample

**I DON'T NEED ANY MORE
RABBITS, I HAVE ENOUGH.**



OH, LOOK!! A RABBIT!!

Marketing

Here are just some of the ways that you can market your rabbits or rabbit products.

- Pets
- Show
- Rabbit Meat
- Wool
- Pelts
- Fertilizer
- Worms
- Laboratory

Again, you have to decide what you want to do and how much time you want to put into your project. Your budget and profit margins will vary greatly dependent on your choices and only you can determine these levels.

Marketing

➤ Pets

- Sell to Pet Stores
- Sell to Individuals

➤ Show

- Sell to 4-H members
- Sell to other breeders

➤ Meat

- Must be processed through a licensed USDA facility.
- Sell live and buyer can process.
- May process own for personal consumption.

➤ Wool

- Sell as raw wool
- Sell as spun wool
- Spin and make products for sale
 - Knit
 - Crochet
 - Needle Felting

➤ Pelts

- Sell for someone else to tan
- Tan and sell
- Tan and make products to sell.
 - Hats
 - Coats (solid colors, as broken patterns are never the same)

Marketing

- **Fertilizer**
 - Use in your own garden
 - Sell your rabbit poop

- **Worms**
 - Grow and sell

- **Laboratory Use**
 - Sell your rabbits
 - Prefer White

NOTE:

I am not knowledgeable in the use of rabbits for laboratory use. You will have to do your own research if you want to learn more about this aspect for raising rabbits.

Marketing

**Sell at 8
weeks**

Pets

- Talk to local pet stores about supplying them with young rabbits.
- Share on Facebook / Craigslist
- Word of mouth
- Newspaper
- Animal Swap Meets
- Breed for the “Holidays.” ~Easter~


Show

- Share on Facebook / Craigslist
- Word of mouth
- Newspaper
- Advertise at your local fair(s) and show(s)

Marketing

Meat

- Restaurants
- Animal Swap Meets
- Flea Markets
- Facebook / Craigslist
- Newspaper
- Family & Friends
- Word of Mouth
- Cull Buyers
 - Use for animal food



Make sure you check the Health Department and State rules and regulations for processing and selling rabbit meat in your area.

Marketing

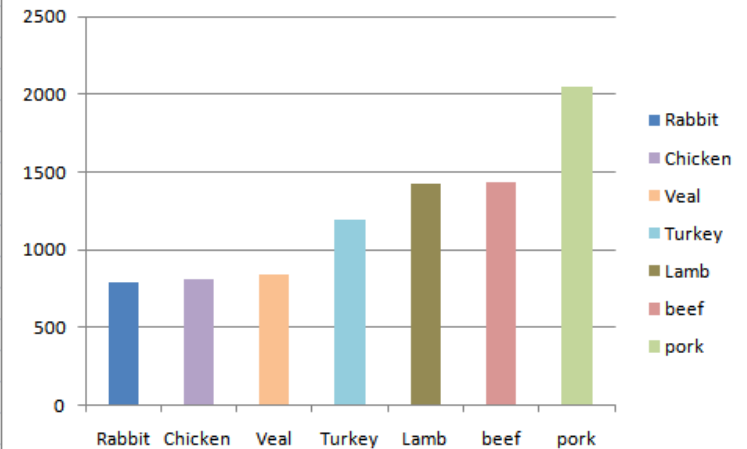
Nutrition Facts

RABBIT

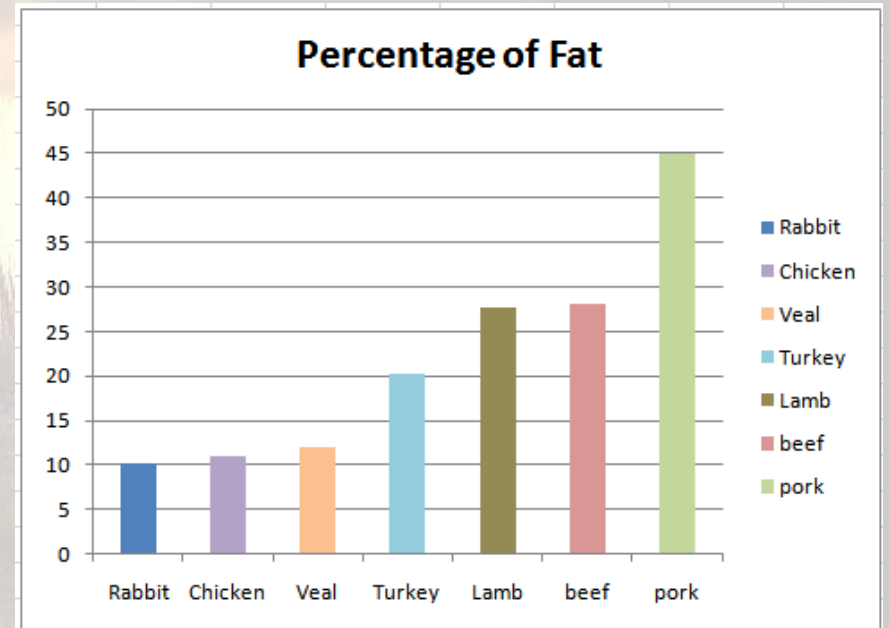
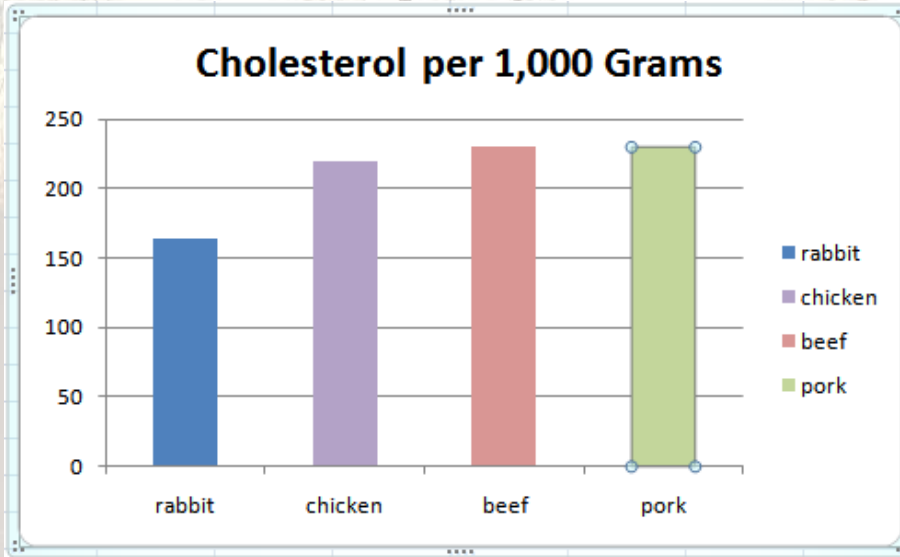
Moisture	65.9%
Protein	18.0%
Sodium	0.08%
Phosphorus	0.66%
Potassium	0.29%
Calcium	1.06%
Magnesium	0.04%
Copper	4ppm
Iron	55ppm
Manganese	4ppm
Zinc	32ppm
Sulfur	0.17%
Ash	3.5% ¹⁰
Fat	12.7%
Fiber	0.3%

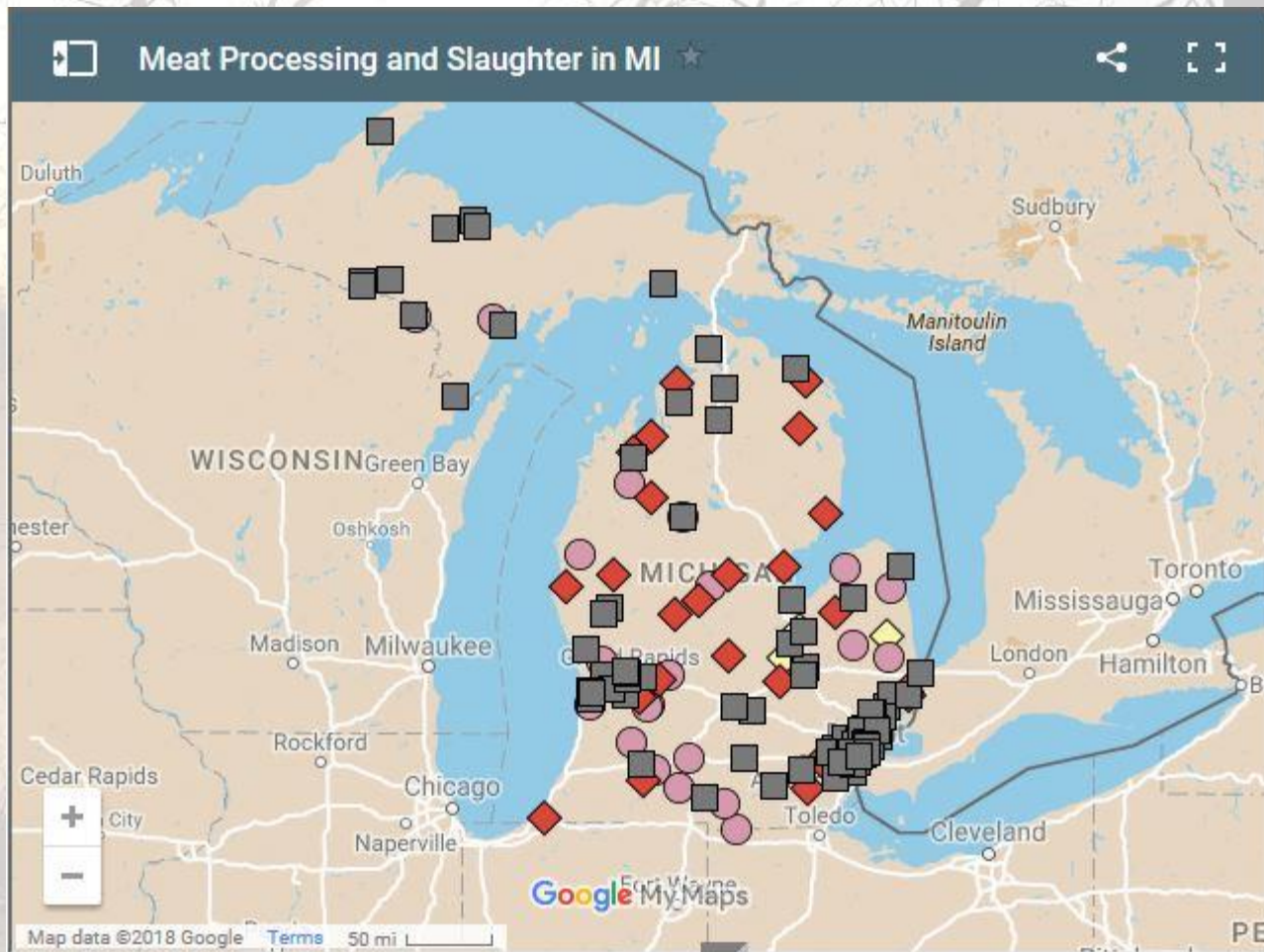
This food is low in Sodium. It is also a good source of Iron and Phosphorus, and a very good source of Protein and Niacin.

Calories Per Pound



Marketing





https://www.canr.msu.edu/meat_marketing_processing/michigan_meat_processing_capacity_assessment_final_report

Marketing

Wool

- Wool / Fiber / Craft Shows
- Facebook / Craigslist / Pinterest
 - Wool Specific Sites
- Word of Mouth



Pelts

- Craft Shows
- Facebook / Craigslist / Pinterest
- Word of Mouth



Marketing

Fertilizer

- Swap Meets / Farm Markets
- Facebook / Craigslist
- Word of Mouth
- Newspaper

Best fertilizer as rabbits are pellet fed, not grain fed, so no volunteers.

Not “hot,” so it won’t burn your plants.



4 feet tall here.
Finished at
almost 7 feet.

Marketing

Worms

- Swap Meets / Farm Markets
- Word of Mouth
- Newspaper
- Bait Stores
- Road side stand



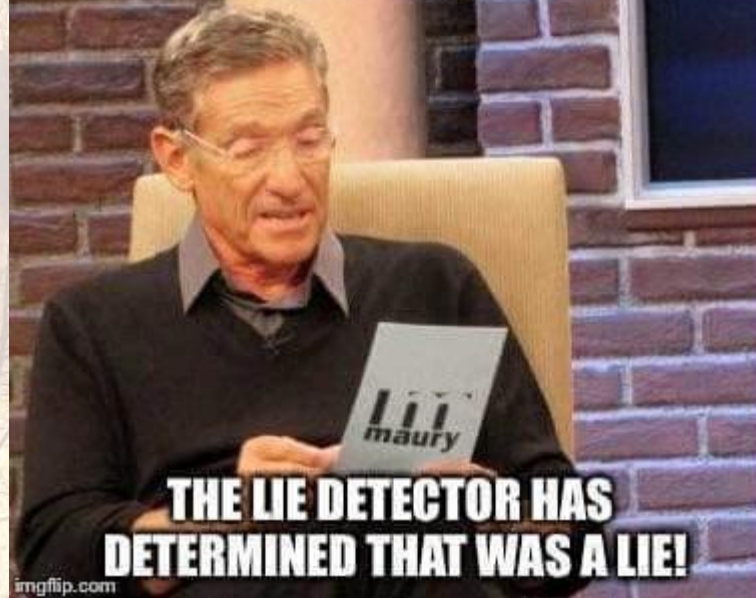
Build worm “boxes” below your cages to feed/grow your worms.

A serene landscape featuring a body of water in the foreground, with reeds and tall grasses along the shore. Bare trees with intricate branch structures are silhouetted against a soft, hazy sky, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The overall atmosphere is calm and quiet.

DISCLAIMER

These are only suggestions from me, a long time breeder and happen to be what my family uses in our program. Only you will learn what works best for you in your program, but this is a good place to start.

**YOU CLAIMED YOU WERE GOING
TO STOP BUYING RABBITS.**



**THE LIE DETECTOR HAS
DETERMINED THAT WAS A LIE!**

imgflip.com

Resources

Michigan State University Extension (2015, November 10) Determining cage size for rabbits. Retrieved from

http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/determining_cage_size_for_rabbits

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Michigan State University Extension (2017) Rabbit Tracks: Breeding Techniques and Management (4H1464). Retrieved from

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Resources

American Rabbit Breeders Association (2016) Standard of Perfection. Bloomington, IL: American Rabbit Breeders Association.

Nelson, Deloris (2004) Nutritional Value of Rabbit Meat. Retrieved from <http://www.azrabbits.com/useful-information/nutrition.html>

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