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Development Pathways and Policy Recommendations for the Meat Rabbit Industry in Zigong City from Perspectives of Resource Efficiency and Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract: Zigong's meat rabbit industry holds four "national firsts" in China. While its scale development brings significant economic benefits, it also leads to environmental concerns such as resource consumption, waste management, and carbon emissions. Based on location quotient theory, field investigations, and policy text analysis, this study systematically evaluates the performance of Zigong's meat rabbit industry chain in terms of resource utilization efficiency, environmental carrying capacity, and potential for green transformation. The results show that Zigong has significant agglomeration advantages in meat rabbit production and processing, with a location quotient consistently above 2. However, challenges remain in areas such as external dependence on feed grains, resource utilization of breeding waste, and application of low-carbon processing technologies. From the perspectives of resource recycling, environmental governance, and industrial ecological integration, this paper proposes systematic policy recommendations to promote the green, low-carbon, and circular development of Zigong's meat rabbit industry, providing empirical evidence and pathway references for the sustainable development of animal husbandry.

Keywords: Meat rabbit industry; Resource efficiency; Environmental sustainability; Location quotient; Circular agriculture; Policy recommendations

1 Introduction

Rabbit meat is one of the fastest-growing meat products in China's consumer market, with production costs lower than those in developed countries and a consistent trade surplus. Sichuan Province has been the leading producer of rabbit meat in China since 1996. Zigong City, as a core production area, annually consumes and processes nearly 100 million rabbits, accounting for half of Sichuan's and one-third of the nation's output, earning the title of "China's Meat Rabbit Capital." However, with the expansion of the industry, issues such as resource constraints, environmental pressure, and ecological sustainability have become increasingly prominent. High external dependence on feed grains,

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pressure from breeding waste treatment, and increased energy consumption and carbon emissions in processing have become bottlenecks restricting high-quality development. Against this background, how to balance industrial development with resource and environmental carrying capacity and achieve a green transformation of the meat rabbit industry is of great practical and policy significance. Using location quotient theory, field research, and policy analysis, this study systematically identifies the comparative advantages and weaknesses of Zigong's meat rabbit industry under dual constraints of resources and environment. It proposes targeted policy recommendations, aiming to provide theoretical support and decision-making references for the sustainable development of regional animal husbandry.

2 Competitive Advantages of Zigong's Meat Rabbit Industry

2.1 Leading the Industry in Rabbit Slaughter Output and Meat Production

Official statistics from the China Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Yearbook and Sichuan Statistical Yearbook confirm that Zigong City has maintained its position as Sichuan's top producer in both rabbit slaughter volume and meat output for ten consecutive years. In 2023, Zigong's meat rabbit production reached 45.09 million head, accounting for 14% of the national total and 25% of Sichuan Province's output. With annual consumption exceeding 100 million head - representing 30% of China's and 50% of Sichuan's total consumption - the city ranked first nationally in both production and consumption volume. In 2024, Zigong's meat rabbit production reached 48.5672 million head with 57,100 tons of rabbit meat output, representing year-on-year increases of 3.477 million head and 4,700 tons at growth rates of 7.71% and 8.97% respectively. These figures account for 27.60% of Sichuan Province's total slaughter volume and 23.82% of its meat output (Table 1). Zigong's dominant production capacity has cemented its leadership position in China's meat rabbit industry.

Table 1 Statistical table of the number of in-stock and slaughtered meat rabbits in Zigong city during the period from 2014 to 2023

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Annual Slaughter Volume (in 10,000 heads)	4563.46	4874.8	5085.25	3116.67	3206.32	3416.85	3621.65	4162.67	4421.48	4509.02
Year-end Inventory (in 10,000 heads)	832.18	855.39	875.64	667.96	685.43	717.49	802.94	913.97	941.84	976.73

Note: Data sourced from the Zigong Rural Revitalization Center

2.2 Zigong ranks first in national meat rabbit consumption

Zigong citizens have a long-standing tradition of preparing rabbit-based dishes, with per capita annual consumption reaching 15.7 kg of rabbit meat - 4.9 times Sichuan's average and 49 times the national average, solidifying its reputation as China's undisputed capital of rabbit meat consumption. According to research data from agricultural markets, meat rabbit distribution hubs, and food processing plants, Zigong consumed approximately 100 million rabbits in 2024. However, local production only reached 48 million heads, meeting just 48% of demand. This necessitates annual imports exceeding 50 million heads from other domestic regions. Strong consumer demand has driven up live rabbit prices. According to surveys conducted by the National Rabbit Industry Technology System's economics unit, Zigong consistently maintains China's highest live rabbit prices. In 2024, Zigong's annual average price reached 19

yuan/kg, compared to 17 yuan/kg in Chengdu and 14 yuan/kg in both Shandong and Henan provinces. Historically, Zigong's live rabbit prices command a premium of 2-5 yuan/kg over regional averages both within and outside Sichuan. Leading e-commerce and influencer brands like Zigong's "Tan Ba Ye," "Shuzhong Taozi Jie," "Dao Dao Shuang," and "Chang Ming" all source their rabbit meat products locally, significantly enhancing product value-added. Rabbit meat products require massive quantities of chili peppers, young ginger, and Sichuan peppercorns, with annual demand reaching tens of thousands of metric tons. The development of the meat rabbit processing industry has stimulated cultivation and sales of these agricultural products, driving coordinated growth in the condiment sector.

2.3 Nationally in Brand Value and E-Commerce Sales

"Zigong Cold-Eat Rabbit" is a protected product under China's National Geographical Indication (NGI) system, with its brand value reaching 21 billion yuan in 2023, ranking first among all GI-certified rabbit brands in China. Zigong has taken the lead in formulating both local and industry standards for "Zigong Cold-Eat Rabbit," achieving a 65.2% implementation coverage rate. The city has nurtured seven provincial-level "Specialized, Refined, Distinctive, and Innovative" enterprises (SRDI), while establishing 560,000 square meters of standardized processing facilities across two major food industry parks: the Southwest (Zigong) Food Industrial Park and Rong County Agricultural Byproducts Processing Zone, currently housing 107 operational enterprises. In 2023, the courier delivery volume of Cold-Eat Rabbit and related products reached 13.52 million parcels, ranking first in both Sichuan Province and nationwide, with an output value of 3.35 billion yuan (Table 2). Zigong Cold-Eat Rabbit was honored as a 'Gold Medal Project of Express Delivery Services for Modern Agriculture' by the State Post Bureau. At the same time, its online sales revenue exceeded 8 billion yuan.

Table 2 Ranking List of Brand Value of National Geographical Indication Rabbit

Serial Number	Brand Name	Brand Value (in 100 million yuan)	Place of Origin
1	Zigong Leng Chi Tu	209.83	Sichuan
2	Jiuyishan Rabbit	35.66	Hunan
3	Yimei Longhair Rabbit	29.75	Shandong
4	Yunna Rabbit	25.44	Sichuan
5	Guanghan Chansi Rabbit	23.19	Sichuan
6	Shizhu Longhair Rabbit	20.57	Chongqing
7	Datang Meat Rabbit	18.77	Fujian
8	Dehua Black Rabbit	13.59	Fujian

Note: 2023 National Geographical Indication Rabbit Brand Value Ranking'

2.4 The Meat Rabbit Industry has been Deeply Integrated with Cultural Tourism Development

Taking "Zigong Cold-Eat Rabbit" as an example, this local specialty has become a must-buy souvenir for tourists through cultural tourism promotions, achieving annual sales exceeding 8 billion yuan. Recognized as one of "Sichuan's Top 10 Culinary IPs", its brand value reached 20.983 billion yuan （Brand Observation Research Institute， 2023）, ranking first among China's geographical indication products. It now serves as a glittering urban hallmark in Zigong's tourism-driven development strategy.

3 Policy Framework for Meat Rabbit Industry Development

3.1 Provincial-Level

In 2020, the Sichuan Provincial Rural Work Leading Group issued the "Notice on Printing and Distributing Five Promotion Plans Including the 'Sichuan Medicinal Industry Revitalization Implementation Plan'", which explicitly mandated the upgrading of rabbit production, processing, and operation systems. The plan designated 59 counties across the province as rabbit industry base counties, encompassing the seven counties (districts) involved in this project. In November 2021, Sichuan and Chongqing jointly issued the "Notice on Printing and Distributing the 'Chengdu-Chongqing Modern Efficient and Characteristic Agricultural Belt Construction Plan'", explicitly supporting Zigong's establishment of a Southwest China Poultry and Rabbit Breeding Base. The 2024 Sichuan Meat Rabbit Industry Cluster Construction Plan allocates 200 million yuan in central fiscal funds over period, establishing China's first national-level advantageous and distinctive industrial cluster focused specifically on meat rabbit production.

3.2 Municipal-Level

In 2022, Zigong City issued the "Zigong 14th Five-Year Plan for Advancing Agricultural and Rural Modernization", explicitly designating meat rabbits as a priority livestock sector for development. In 2022, Zigong City established a dedicated task force to advance its 10-billion-yuan meat rabbit whole-industry-chain project, with the municipal government earmarking 50 million yuan in special subsidies to support this initiative. According to the 2024 Sichuan Meat Rabbit Industry Cluster Plan, taking Zigong Muyun Breeding Co., Ltd. as an example, the project involves constructing new rabbit housing, biogas processing facilities, breeding selection programs, and electrical grid infrastructure, with a total investment of 79.5 million yuan. This includes 19.87 million yuan in central government funding, 19.87 million yuan in locally integrated funds, and 56.63 million yuan in corporate self-raised capital.

3.3 County-Level

Rong County and Yantan District have allocated incentive funds of 6 million yuan and 6.72 million yuan, respectively, to support the development of the meat rabbit industry, facilitating the establishment of integrated whole-industry-chain operations. In 2023, Qianwei County utilized 12 million yuan in rural revitalization transition funds to assist village collective economic organizations in constructing 24 standardized meat rabbit farming greenhouses, adding 1 million heads of annual production capacity. Jingyan County, leveraging a 50-million-yuan green breeding and circular agriculture special fund project, has implemented fertilizer return on 100,000 mu (6,667 hectares) of farmland, while providing a 200-yuan/ton subsidy for rabbit farm compost utilization（(Hu Yirong, 2025)）.

3.4 Policy Implementation for Comparative Advantage Enhancement

3.4.1 Large-scale Farming Enhances Efficiency

With ongoing market consolidation and the cumulative effects of supportive policies, small-scale meat rabbit farmers are being gradually phased out, while moderately-sized family farms and collective economic farms continue

to emerge. Enterprise-scale breeding operations are flourishing, and state-owned enterprises have also progressively developed feed processing plants and breeding facilities. Automated, standardized, and industrialized rabbit farms have become the industry mainstream. By the end of 2024, the city had established 26 municipal-level standardized demonstration farms and 6provincial/ministerial-level ones, achieving a large-scale farming penetration rate of 52.8%. From 2020 to 2024, the annual slaughter volume increased from 36.2165 million to 48.567 million heads, a net growth of 12.3505 million heads, representing an average annual growth rate of 7.6%~9.8% percentage points higher than the provincial average.

3.4.2 Industrial Chain Integration Enhances Competitiveness

Transitioning from traditional decentralized small-scale rabbit farming to moderately scaled and standardized operations, this initiative aims to engage more farmers in meat rabbit production while addressing their financial and technological constraints in scaling up. By 2026, the project will cultivate one vertically integrated meat rabbit industry leader, establish a new dedicated rabbit feed processing plant with an annual capacity of 250,000 metric tons, and expand slaughtering capacity by 18 million heads annually through new and upgraded facilities. Additionally, it will add 18,000 metric tons each of value-added processing capacity and cold-chain logistics capacity—representing an 80% increase across all sectors—to achieve "centralized slaughtering, cold-chain distribution, and premium product marketing."

3.4.3 Brand and Market Advantages Become Prominent

Focus on strengthening and expanding geographical indication products like "Zigong Cold-Eat Rabbit" and regional public brands such as "Natural Tribute." Leveraging leading enterprises, we will establish standardized production systems to develop distinctive regional public brands for meat rabbits that highlight "local origin + breed characteristics." We will cultivate and grow local (enterprise) specialty brands, including Rabbit Yi Yi, Ba Hang Rabbit, Tan Ba Ye, Dao Dao Shuang, Ha Ge, and Ha Mei, actively promoting standardization initiatives and green certifications. A quality certification system for rabbit meat products will be implemented to gradually enhance product quality, with the goal of creating 13 meat rabbit brands. Through intensified online and offline marketing efforts, we will strive to build renowned Sichuan-branded rabbit meat products and introduce these specialty items to consumers nationwide.

4 Comparative Advantage Analysis of Zigong's Meat Rabbit Industry

4.1 Research Methodology

The Location Quotient (LQ) theory provides a static-dynamic analytical framework for formulating whole-industry-chain development policies in the meat rabbit sector. Statistically, by calculating regional LQ values (where LQ>1 indicates specialized advantages), it identifies current comparative advantage segments (e.g., breeding or processing). Dynamically, it analyzes LQ evolution patterns by integrating factor endowment shifts, technological progress, and market demand trends to predict industrial upgrading pathways (e.g., transitioning from farming-dominant to high-value-added food processing). Empirical studies demonstrate sustained LQ growth in China's Shandong and Sichuan meat rabbit industries, validating how policy support (e.g., breeding innovation subsidies, cold-chain infrastructure)

dynamically enhances comparative advantages. This confirms the theoretical validity and practical feasibility of LQ-based policy interventions.

4.2 Principles of Advantage-Disadvantage Discrimination and Indicator Construction

P. Haggett first proposed and applied the Location Quotient (LQ) for regional analysis in 1930, specifically defined as the ratio of an industry's share in a regional economy to its share in the national economy. In structural economic research, the academic community widely uses LQ to identify regional competitive industries. A higher LQ value indicates greater comparative advantage and stronger industrial agglomeration.

$$LQ_{ij} = \frac{L_{ij} / \sum_{j=1}^{m} L_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} L_{ij} / \sum_{i=1}^{n} \sum_{j}^{m} L_{ij}}$$

Based on the advantage classification standards in existing literature, it is categorized as follows(Table 3):

Table 3 Advantage standard

LQ Range	Degree of Advantage/Disadvantage
LQij≥2	Significant Advantage
2>LQij≥1.2	General Advantage
1.2>LQij≥1	Unstable Advantage
1>LQij≥0.8	Unstable Disadvantage
LQij<0.8	Disadvantage

Using the location quotient (LQ) method and based on available statistical data, this study selects output value indicators from the three major industries to assess the developmental advantages of the rabbit industry in Zigong City, with a time dimension spanning from 2018 to 2024.

4.3 Static and Dynamic Analysis of the Comparative Advantages in Meat Rabbit Industry Development in Zigong City

(1) Analysis of Agricultural Advantages in Zigong City

According to the formula analysis, the results are shown in Table 4. The output value data of the three major industries (primary, secondary, and tertiary) are sourced from the Sichuan Statistical Yearbook 2024.

Table 4 Calculation results of location quotient for output value of three industries in Zigong City

Output Value of the Three Major Industries	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Primary Industry Output Value	2.05	2.02	2.09	2.10	2.11	2.50	2.50
Secondary Industry Output Value	1.01	1.03	1.03	0.99	0.96	1.10	1.10
Tertiary Industry Output Value	0.86	0.84	0.83	0.86	0.87	1.30	1.40
Critical Value of Location Quotient	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2

The primary industry > secondary industry > tertiary industry, with location quotient (LQ) values of the primary industry consistently exceeding 2. This indicates that Zigong City possesses significant agricultural advantages, which are dynamically strengthening. These findings demonstrate Zigong's strong agricultural foundation and high level of agricultural agglomeration, providing favorable conditions for the development of its meat rabbit industry.

(2) Analysis of Comparative Advantages in Meat Rabbit Slaughter Output in Zigong City

The meat rabbit production capacity demonstrates robust advantages with stabilizing growth momentum. From 2020 to 2024, the slaughter output increased from 36.2165 million to 48.567 million heads, marking a total growth of 12.3505 million heads and achieving an average annual growth rate of 7.6%, ~9.8 percentage points higher than the

provincial average.

The annual growth rate rose from 6.0% in 2020 to a peak of 14.9% in 2021, then declined to 2.0% in 2023 before rebounding to 7.7% in 2024, reflecting an overall trend of stabilization after gradual growth. In contrast, the provincial average and other cities exhibited volatile fluctuations with significant year-to-year variations.

Zigong City holds a prominent position in Sichuan's meat rabbit industry, demonstrating clear comparative advantages in slaughter output. As one of Sichuan's seven major meat rabbit production hubs with annual output exceeding 10 million heads, Zigong has consistently ranked first in the province. From 2020 to 2024, Zigong's share of provincial meat rabbit slaughter increased from 21.9% to 27.6%, maintaining a significant lead of 19.2 percentage points over Neijiang, the second-largest producer in 2024. This five-year growth trend has not only stabilized but also significantly widened the gap with other production areas, further solidifying Zigong's dominant position in Sichuan's meat rabbit industry. However, to meet the local demand of approximately 120 million rabbits in 2024, Zigong still needed to import about 75 million rabbits from other regions, including Shandong, Henan, Leshan and Neijiang to bridge the supply gap.

5 Policy Recommendations

5.1 Planning Guidance

The city will establish a coordinated development framework featuring "two breeding bases, one industrial park, and multiple culinary districts," with focused development on: the Gongjing Qiaotou breeding technology base as the core seed production hub; large-scale breeding operations in Rongxian Xinqiao and Fushun Yongnian; advancement of the Yantan food processing industrial park; and the creation of signature food streets like Dongxingsi and Huashang to showcase specialty rabbit cuisine. This integrated spatial model connects breeding, production, processing and consumption into a complete value chain. Accurately align with market demands, uphold technological innovation, and focus on brand building to establish a comprehensive rabbit meat production system covering breeding, farming management, feed supply, processing, and sales, promoting the industry's development toward scale, standardization, and branding. Establish a 'Rural Revitalization Special Fund for the Rabbit Meat Industry' and implement agricultural insurance for rabbit farming to safeguard the interests of breeders.

5.2 Breeding Stock Cultivation

First, establish a high-quality breeding base for meat rabbits. On one hand, introduce grandparent (GGP) and parent (GP) breeding stock of fast-growing meat rabbit strains such as France's Hycole for expansion to meet current production demands; on the other hand, develop new meat rabbit breeds tailored to Zigong's local fresh consumption and processing needs by leveraging indigenous and introduced varieties. Second, focus on building a multi-tiered breeding system spanning 'GGP (Great Grandparent)—GP (Grandparent)—PS (Parent Stock)—Commercial Stock,' and establish a modern seed industry system integrating 'breeding, multiplication, and promotion.'Third, establish and improve the standard system and quality inspection system for meat rabbit breeding, enhance the quality and health level of breeding rabbits, ensure controllable breeding sources, guarantee quality, and prevent risks, and systematically promote the standardized development of the meat rabbit breeding industry. Strive to achieve a self-sufficiency rate of

over 90% for high-quality breeds within five years, effectively resolving the 'chokepoint' issue in breeding stock supply.

5.3 Cost Reduction and Efficiency Improvement

First, support the construction of one rabbit-specific feed processing plant with an annual capacity of 300,000 tons. Lock in procurement prices and annual supply volumes for core raw materials such as corn, wheat bran, and soybean meal, and establish a price negotiation mechanism based on 'benchmark price + floating adjustment.' This is projected to reduce feed cost volatility by over 30%. Second, vigorously develop and utilize local and regional feed resources—such as tea residue, green peppercorn leaves, and crop straw—exceeding 50,000 tons annually, to replace over 20% of externally sourced raw materials. Third, establish the Zigong Rabbit Feed Industry Alliance, leveraging state-owned feed producers such as Zigong Yiyu Rabbit Technology Co., Ltd., to achieve self-sufficient, cost-effective, and quality-controlled rabbit feed production in Zigong. Through raw material development, technological innovation, and alliance-based operations, we strive to reduce feed production costs by 10% to 15%.

5.4 Strengthen Industrial Ecosystems and Secure Supply Chains

First, implement unified planning and design to systematically divide the area into standardized zones for breeding, spice cultivation, deep processing, cold-chain logistics, and e-commerce trading. By clustering enterprises involved in rabbit farming, processing, logistics, sales, and crop cultivation, the park aims to achieve an annual output value exceeding 5 billion yuan within five years. Second, leverage existing inspection and testing institutions to add specialized testing capabilities for rabbit products, enabling end-to-end quality control from raw materials to finished goods. Establish a quality and safety traceability system based on blockchain technology, assigning a unique identification code to each commercial rabbit to record information on breeding environment, feed inputs, disease prevention, slaughtering, and processing—achieving full lifecycle traceability through a single code. Third, encourage enterprises to adopt modern processing technologies and equipment—such as low-temperature vacuum tumbling and irradiation sterilization—to enhance product quality and production efficiency. Fourth, develop specialized products catering to diverse consumer groups—such as beauty-enhancing, brain-boosting, and immunity-strengthening varieties—to meet multifaceted demands. Extend the industrial chain into high-value sectors by creating value-added products like pre-made dishes and rabbit meat protein powder. Further expand into biopharmaceuticals and pet food sectors through the development of biological agents (e.g., rabbit plasma/serum) and freeze-dried rabbit pet food, thereby unlocking new consumption scenarios and capturing emerging markets.

5.5 Brand Marketing

To capitalize on digital opportunities, Zigong will adopt a dual-track approach that synergizes online engagement with offline governance upgrades. Much like Rongchang's famed braised goose, Zigong cold-eating rabbit embodies authentic regional flavors. The city must now master the internet playbook—emulating the viral success of Zibo barbecue while fortifying operational excellence. At its core, a visitor attraction hinges on three pillars: genuine hospitality, standardized management, and service pragmatism. Secondly, we will redefine brand positioning and reinforce core values. Building on Zigong's status as the "Birthplace of China's Salt-Bang Cuisine," we will position Zigong rabbit meat as the "Benchmark Producer of Premium Rabbit Meat in China," highlighting its distinctive qualities of tenderness, healthfulness, and authentic Sichuan flavor. We will strengthen its core values of "green farming, safety

traceability, and nutritional excellence." Third, we will delve into cultural heritage to build a comprehensive brand narrative system. By tracing the historical connection between Zigong's salt merchant culture and its rabbit cuisine, we will craft the compelling brand story of "From Salt Wells to Eco-Rabbits." Through innovative "Culture + Digital" integration, we will create a virtual IP mascot for the Zigong rabbit to engage consumers via online platforms.

To safeguard the brand integrity of Zigong Cold-Eating Rabbit, we will implement a four-pronged protection strategy: First, a rigorous crackdown on infringements through interdepartmental special campaigns (market regulation + public security) targeting counterfeit products, trademark violations, and false advertising, with strict penalties and public naming of violators, expanding authorized use of the "Zigong Cold-Eating Rabbit" designation across all qualified producers citywide, eliminating local market barriers, establishing a government-led public brand system featuring unified identifiers (e.g., salt well + rabbit motif) and comprehensive standards spanning breeding, processing, and cold chain logistics, forming an industry alliance to create a synergistic brand matrix combining national, regional, and corporate identities, targeting a 30% brand premium and 20% market share growth within three years.

6 Conclusion

Zigong's meat rabbit industry demonstrates significant advantages in scale, clustering, and branding, with a consistently high location quotient indicating strong regional specialization and agglomeration effects. However, the industry still faces challenges such as high external resource dependence, rising environmental governance costs, and insufficient application of green technologies. Future efforts should focus on the following aspects: first, enhancing the development and substitution of local feed resources to reduce external dependence; second, promoting biogas and fertilizer utilization of breeding waste to establish a circular farming system; third, introducing low-carbon processing technologies and clean energy to reduce carbon emissions in processing; fourth, establishing a green brand certification and traceability system to enhance environmental premium capability. The government should use policy instruments such as ecological compensation, green credit, and technology subsidies to guide the industry toward resource-saving and environmentally friendly transformation, establishing Zigong as a national demonstration zone for the green meat rabbit industry and providing a replicable and scalable "Zigong Model" for the sustainable development of animal husbandry in China.

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