

ANIMALS FARMED FOR FUR

Current situation

Fur farming accounts for 85% of all furs in trade. Denmark is the world's largest producer of quality skins with an annual production of around 18 million mink skins⁵³. Other big producers in the EU are, in descending order, Finland, the Netherlands, the Baltic States and Sweden. The largest producers outside the EU are the USA, Canada, Russia, Norway and China. There is also significant production in Iceland and Argentina. In 2008, 57.8% (29.4 million pelts) worldwide mink fur production and 51.8% (2.3 million pelts) worldwide fox fur production came from EU farms⁵⁴. The EU, North America, and Russia are traditionally the main markets for fur goods, although sales are expanding in Japan, Korea and China. China is also a growing manufacturing base for the Far Eastern markets. Despite fluctuating demand which continues to lag behind production, retail fur sales still generate considerable sums. Italy remains the main market for fur products within the EU.

In 2005, global pelt production was about 55 million skins⁵⁵. About 80% of the furs produced come from mink, the rest mainly from foxes, with some from polecat, raccoon dog, coypu (nutria) and chinchilla. Sometimes more than one species are kept on the same farm unit, usually minks and foxes.

The main reason for concern over the farming of fur animals relates to the compatibility of the farming conditions with the animals behavioural and physical needs⁵⁶. Most of the animals concerned do not come from long-domesticated species and largely retain the characteristics of wild animals. Attempts at domestication are made through breeding programmes which select to avoid unwanted behaviours and/or to favour temperamental traits which favour productivity and welfare.

Farmed fur animals are subjected to handling for various reasons during their lives, often being picked up with tongs - an experience which is stressful.

When intensively farmed, fur animals exhibit stereotypic behaviour which, in mink, takes the form of the animal gnawing and sucking its fur and biting its own tail. Early weaning is thought to be a factor.

An observation platform is important to foxes and mink benefit from climbing and play materials. Yet farmed fur species are still typically kept in batteries of wire cages (mostly with wire floors) in long sheds. Large farms hold many thousands of animals, so inspection may be cursory at best. Nest boxes are valuable to all animals but are often only provided to breeding females. Mink, which use water extensively in the wild, generally have no access to it in captivity, other than for drinking. Species which are solitary in the wild, except when breeding, are kept in individual cages but in close proximity to other animals.

⁵³/Kopenhagen Fur

⁵⁴/European Fur Breeders' Association

⁵⁵/EUROPA portal

⁵⁶/The Welfare of Animals kept for Fur Production - Report of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (adopted 12-13 December 2001): http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out67_en.pdf

Proximity between dominant and subordinate vixens is linked to the killing and injury of cubs by their mothers. In Sweden and Finland, it has been estimated that up to 30% of fox cubs die before weaning.

Other concerns include the use of artificial insemination for foxes. This involves processes which are not only stressful but can result in injury.

Legislation

Council of Europe

A 1999 *Recommendation concerning Fur Animals* to the *European Convention on the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes* requires that animals born in the wild should not be kept on fur farms, and that no animal should be farmed for its fur if the animal belonged to a species which cannot adapt to captivity without welfare problems. It states general conditions for the keeping of animals for fur and lists special provisions for mink, polecats, foxes, coypu and chinchilla as well as methods for the humane killing of animals farmed for fur.

European Union

Council Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes implements the *European Convention* and covers animals bred or kept for the production of skin or fur. Under Article 5, the European Commission must put forward any proposal for EU legislation which may be necessary to implement Recommendations made under the *European Convention*. In December 2001, the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare adopted a report on animals farmed for fur, which made recommendations on how their welfare could be improved. One of the report's recommendations was that "efforts should be made for all species to design housing systems which fulfill the needs of the animals." The report however, was not followed by legislative proposals.

Annex F of *Council Directive 93/119/EC of 22 December 1993 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing* lists the permitted methods for killing fur animals on-farm. For mink, gassing using either carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide is commonly used. Foxes are frequently electrocuted. Article 3 requires that animals shall be spared avoidable excitement, pain or suffering during killing. However, insufficient care is often taken in handling the animals. The new Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, to be implemented from the 1 January 2013, will bring about a few improvements, including the need for supervision of killing by a person having a certificate of competence, or technical specific requirements when carbon monoxide is used.

Animals farmed for fur are also covered by the provisions of *Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004* on the protection of animals during transport and related operations .

Regulation (EC) No 1523/2007 was adopted on 11 December 2007. It bans the placing on the market and the import to, or export from, the Community of cat and dog fur, and products containing such fur.

National legislation

National legislation on fur farming varies considerably within the EU. In Austria, the animal welfare law passed in 2004 specifically bans fur farming. Fox and chinchilla farming are banned in the Netherlands, but there are still large numbers of mink farms. In the United Kingdom, a law forbidding fur farms on the grounds of morality was introduced in November 2000 and all remaining mink farms disappeared by 1st January 2003. In Finland, government decrees cover the location of farms and public health aspects. They also specify cage sizes and require provision of bedding, viewing platforms and playthings for mink, fox, and polecat. In Sweden, fur farms are licensed. A 1995 Order introduces new stricter conditions for fox farming which makes this form of husbandry uneconomic, but fur breeders have been given up to 2010 to adapt to these stricter rules. New regulations for chinchilla have also been drawn up but no date has been set up for their implementation. In Denmark, an order from 2006 on the protection of fur animals is regulating fur farming. Denmark is in the process of banning fox farming. A law proposal being passed through the parliament would allow transitional periods from 8 to 15 years.

In Germany, fur farms are licensed. Fur farming has been banned in the federal states of Bavaria, Hessen, Nordrhein-Westfalen and Schleswig-Holstein. In Italy, very strict conditions came into effect on 1 January 2008 and made fur farming uneconomic. There is no specific welfare legislation in France, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland or Belgium, although the last two have licensing and planning requirements. Luxembourg has no fur farms. In Bulgaria fur farming is not allowed.

Action needed

Member States should apply the recommendation concerning fur animals annexed to the Convention of the Council of Europe for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes.