

## COMMODITY

## FUR FARMS

### DESCRIPTION

Fur farming generally refers to the raising of mink and fox. Other farmed species could include chinchilla and nutria. Farmers are required to obtain a fur farm license each year under the *Fur Farm Act*.

All mink farms in British Columbia are currently located in the Fraser Valley. Virtually all pelts harvested from mink farms are black or dark brown in colour. Pelts from B.C. have a reputation of being high in quality and are sought after by furriers who desire premium product. Mink have been farmed across the country for over 100 years and are therefore often considered to be a domestic animal. The original wild mink that were trapped to stock the first farms in Canada have been selectively bred to the point of bearing little resemblance to their small dark-brown ancestors. As well, genetic mutations have contributed to farmed or ranched mink being available in approximately 20 colours including jet black, progressive shades of brown and blue-grey, and white.

Both fox and mink farms maintain a number of breeder females and a requisite number of males over the winter. Mink are housed in open-sided sheds with wire mesh pens hung inside. Each adult has its own pen. The increase in daylight hours in the spring automatically triggers increased reproductive activity; mating is therefore typically planned for the month of March. Fox are usually bred once a year in February.

During the gestation period, the farmer supplies each female mink with a nest box bedded with soft straw or hay. A floorboard is placed in the wire mesh pen. The young, known as kits, are born from about mid-April to mid-May. Each female will produce from one to sixteen kits, but a litter size of seven or eight is most common. An average of four or five kits for every female is considered good production.

Foxes are provided whelping pens large enough for females to deliver in and for the young to be raised in to weaning age. A warm dry nest to house the vixen and her litter is attached to or incorporated into each whelping pen.

Mink grow very quickly, reaching a weight of about 130 grams within three weeks. They are weaned at about six weeks, vaccinated at ten weeks, and separated from their siblings over the summer. During and subsequent to parturition, noise can adversely affect normal behavior. Stresses around birthing time can even cause females to eat their newborns. Avoidance of noise-generating activities around pens is particularly important during birthing season. By the end of November animals are ready for pelting.

Mink and fox require a high protein diet. In B.C. they are fed by-products from fish and poultry processors, thereby utilizing a great deal of material that would otherwise be disposed of as waste. Mink farmers and ranchers generally mix their own feed which typically consists of commercially-produced grain cereals and by-products comprising chicken and fish. As is true for all livestock, both fox and mink require a good supply of clean, fresh drinking water.

## Farm Practices of Particular Interest

Practices for specific farm activities can be found in the Farm Practice section of this reference guide. Farm practices that are of particular interest to fur producers include the following.

### Animal Care and Handling

Recommended animal husbandry practices for fox and mink are specified in the *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Mink* and the *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Ranged Fox*. These codes were developed by the Canada Mink Breeders Association and the Canadian Fox Breeders Association in collaboration with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC), the CARC Canadian Committee on Animals, and the CARC Expert Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behavior.

See also Farm Practice: [Animal Care and Handling](#)

### Farm Buildings

Maintaining mink and fox requires an assortment of buildings to house animals, to protect equipment and to store feed, fertilizers and pesticides.

See also Farm Practice: [Feeding and Watering Structures](#)

### Manure Management

Fox and mink manure is managed by allowing it to accumulate under pens, after which it is removed for spreading onto cropland and pastureland. Other suitable applications and uses for manure are possible.

See also Farm Practice: [Manure Storage and Use](#)

## Principal and Accessory Buildings

From an operational perspective, principal farm buildings on fur farms are typically considered to be the buildings that house mink or fox. Accessory farm buildings could include structures used for feed mixing; storages for feed products, agricultural wastes, and chemicals; and machine sheds. From a watercourse protection perspective, however, the definition of principal and accessory buildings may differ. For the purposes of determining applicable setbacks from watercourses and property lines, therefore, local government bylaws or the *Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas* should be consulted. Building assessments may need to be conducted on a case-by-case basis if the designation of a building as principal or accessory is unclear.

## Legislation

Agricultural producers are expected to follow all legislation that pertains to their farming operations. The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* stipulates that the farm operation must meet the *Public Health Act*, *Integrated Pest Management Act*, *Environmental Management Act* and the regulations under those Acts. Information on federal and provincial legislation can be found in Appendices B and C.

Acts that pertain to specific farm activities are listed in the Farm Practices section of this reference guide. Local government bylaws may also apply to some farm practices. Acts that are not referenced elsewhere that are of special interest to fur farmers include the following.

### **Provincial Legislation**

The *Fur Farm Act* provides a licensing system for fur farmers and ensures that animal health standards are followed.

The *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* ensures that animals are treated humanely.

### **Local Government Legislation**

Applicable local government legislation may include animal control, meat inspection and noise bylaws.

## **Publications**

Publications that provide information on fur farming include, but are not limited to, the following. Refer to Appendix D for details.

*British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Reference Guide*

*Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Mink*

*Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Ranched Fox*