

COMMODITY

FUR FARMS

Description

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

Today all the mink farms in BC are in the Fraser Valley. There are about 15 farms in existence that produce about 250,000 mink pelts per year. Nearly all these pelts are black or dark brown. Mink pelts from BC are of very high quality and sought after by furriers who desire the best. Mink have been farmed in Canada for some 100 years and may now be considered a domestic animal. The original wild mink that were caught to stock the first farms have been selectively bred until they bear little resemblance to their small, dark brown ancestors. As well, genetic mutations have occurred and farm (or ranch) mink now come in about 20 colours ranging from jet black through shades of progressively lighter browns into shade of blue gray and finally to white.

Both fox and mink farms maintain a number of breeder females over the winter, as well as the appropriate number of males. They are housed in open sided sheds, with wire mesh pens hung inside; each adult has its own pen. With the increase in daylight hours in the spring, the mink reproductive activity is triggered and they are mated during 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, and a floorboard is put in the wire mesh pen. The young, called kits, are born from about April 20 to May 15. Each female will have from 1 to 16 kits, but 7 or 8 kits are common. (An average of 4 or 5 for every female kept is considered good production.)

Whelping pens for foxes are provided and are large enough for females to deliver and rear their young to weaning age. A warm dry nest to house the vixen and her litter is attached to, or incorporated into each whelping pen.

The mink grow very quickly and by 21 days average about 130 grams. They are weaned at about 6 weeks, vaccinated at 10 weeks, and separated from their siblings over the summer. During that time, noise will affect their normal parturition behaviour (such as eating their newborns). Consequently it is recommended to avoid noise around the pens. By the end of November they are ready for pelting

Mink and fox require a high protein diet. In BC they are fed by-products from the fish and poultry processors, utilizing a great deal of material that would otherwise be waste. Each farmer generally mixes his own feed, and as well as chicken and fish by-product, adds grain, often in the form of a commercially produced cereal. Like 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:

Animal Care and Handling

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

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

Farm Buildings

Maintaining mink and fox require buildings to house animals, protect equipment and to store feed, fertilizers and pesticides.

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

Manure Management

Fox and mink manure is accumulated under the pens and is removed for spreading onto crop or pastureland or removed for other acceptable uses.

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

Legislation

Agricultural producers are expected to follow all legislation that pertains to their farming operation. The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* stipulates that the farm operation must meet the *Health Act*, *Pesticide Control Act*, *Waste 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

[Fur Farm Act](#) – Provides a licensing system for fur farmers and ensures animal health standards

[Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act](#) – Ensures that animals are treated humanely

Local Government

Applicable *Animal Control Bylaws* 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