

# MINK FARMING

## *in the United States*



Mink have been farmed for fur in the United States since shortly after the Civil War, or some 130 years. As a result, today's stock are truly domesticated animals, well suited to the farm environment. In part because healthy mink produce the finest fur, they are also among the best cared-for of all farm animals, enjoying nutritious diets, comfortable housing and the best in veterinary care.

In 2001, 324 family fur farms in the U.S. produced 2.57 million mink pelts with a value of \$85.9 million, accounting for 8.3% of world supply. The U.S. ranked third in production, behind Denmark, the Netherlands, and Russia.

Throughout their history, mink farmers have employed selective breeding to develop a wide variety of pelt colors, many of them either rare or unknown in nature. These include white, plus a host of shades of brown and gray, sometimes with tinges of blue or pink, and bearing such exotic names as lavender hope, sapphire, gun metal and mahogany. But the most popular pelts of all are "black".

North American fur farms were the first in the world to breed "black" mink, which are actually an extremely dark brown, quite rare in nature. So loved are black pelts by the fur industry that they are also known as "standard", accounting for 37% of all American pelts produced in 2001. And with breeding stock originally imported from the U.S., black mink are now farmed in countries around the world.

Most American fur farms are family businesses, often operated by two or three generations of the same family. A young farmer will typically take time out to gain a college or university degree in agriculture, biology or business, and then begin participating in the management of the family farm, eventually either

taking over or leaving to start his or her own operation. This new operation, however, may still be under the umbrella of the family farm, with the result that one fur farm may actually comprise two or more operations next door to each other.

Life on a fur farm revolves around the natural reproductive cycle of the animals. Mink typically breed in March, and give birth to their litters of young, or "kits", in May. These litters may range from three to 13, but four to five is average. The kits are weaned at six to eight weeks of age. Farmers vaccinate their kits for botulism, distemper, enteritis, and, if needed, pneumonia. The animals molt in the late summer and early fall, after which they produce their winter fur. They are then harvested in their prime in late November and December.

In the wild, most young mink don't survive through the first year. In contrast, a farmer's care ensures that almost all domesticated mink live until the end of the year, when they are harvested. The best of the herd are selected for breeding in the following spring, ensuring that the farmer's stock keeps improving.

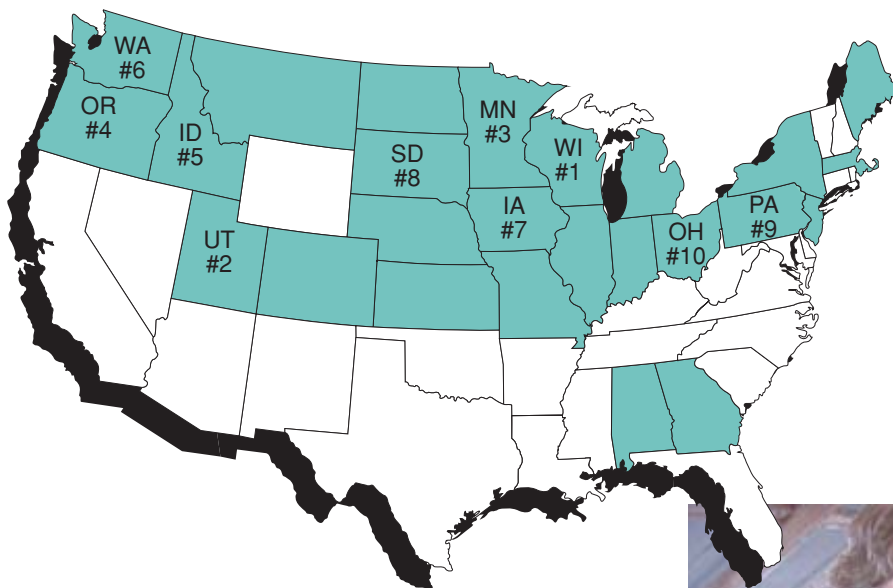
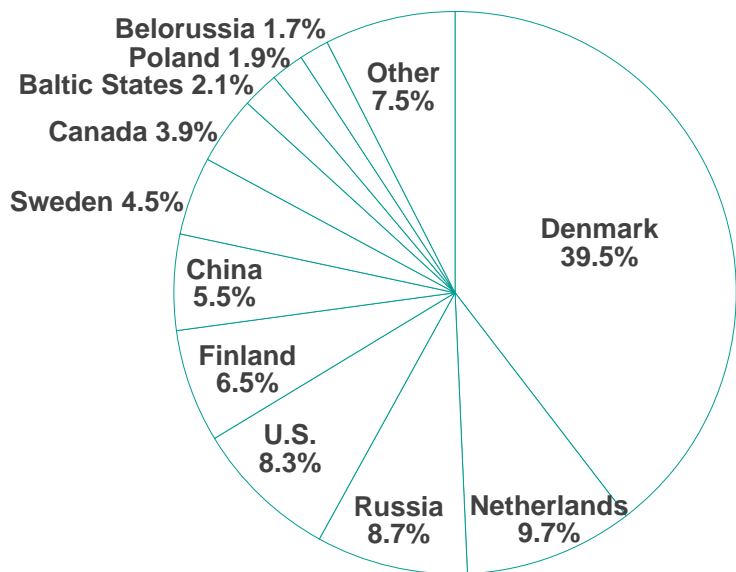
### THE FUR FARMING YEAR

JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.
	BREEDING		
			WHELPING
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.
WHELPING		WEANING & SEPARATING	
			GROWTH & FURRING
SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
GROWTH & FURRING		GRADING	PELTING

## WORLD FARMED MINK PRODUCTION, 2002

(Source: Oslo Fur Auctions)

World production of mink has remained fairly stable over the last 20 years, averaging about 28 million pelts annually. During that time, however, production has become increasingly concentrated in one country, Denmark, while many other countries have seen production slip. Denmark's production rose from 6 million pelts, or 22% of world output, in 1983, to 12.2 million, or 39.5%, in 2002. By contrast, U.S. production declined from 4.4 million (16%) to 2.55 million (8.3%) over the same period.



## RANKING STATES BY MINK PELT PRODUCTION, 2001

(Source: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture)

Since a cold climate is conducive to producing furbearers with thick coats, mink farming in the U.S. is concentrated in northern states and in the high-altitude state of Utah.

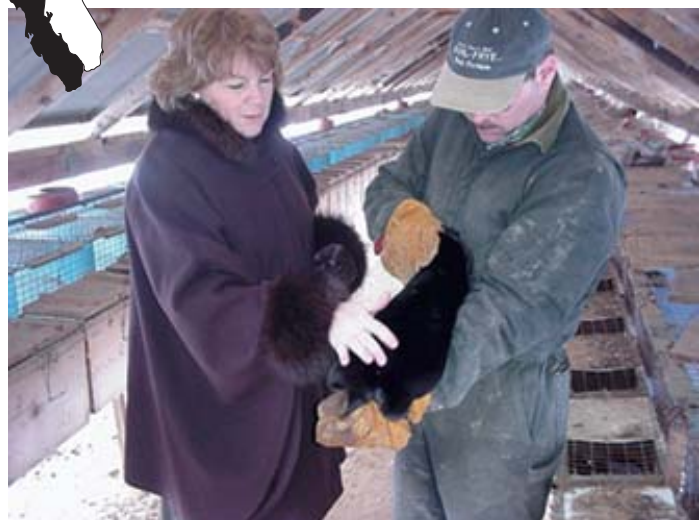
## QUALITY FUR FROM QUALITY CARE

Providing animals with humane care is an ethical obligation of all livestock farmers, while for mink farmers it also makes good business sense, since the healthiest animals produce the finest pelts.

As with all America's livestock producers, fur farmers are regulated by state departments of agriculture. In addition to meeting state requirements, fur farmers have developed a comprehensive set of their own standards, in consultation with veterinarians and animal scientists, to ensure the highest quality of animal husbandry. These standards are administered by Fur Commission USA, which is also responsible for ensuring they are revised and updated whenever required by current knowledge of animal care and farm management techniques.

These standards cover:

- Farm Management
- Accommodations (site, sheds and pens)



- Food (nutrition, preparation, distribution)
- Watering Systems
- Health and Disease Control
- Environmental Quality (sanitation, water quality)
- Transportation of Live Mink
- Euthanasia



## FUR MARKETING IN NORTH AMERICA

In common with the fur industry as a whole, the marketing of mink pelts is an international affair. Working on behalf of American farmers, trade missions promote our product in all the main buying markets, from Europe to the Far East, and through representation at the major international fur fairs in Paris, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Montreal and New York.

Also closely involved in the marketing of American mink are North America's two major auction houses, the Wisconsin-based North American Fur Auctions which holds its sales in Toronto, and American Legend Auctions, until recently known as Seattle Fur Exchange.

Although most American produce is actually sold at these "local" auctions, buyers come from around the world, and the auction houses play a key role both in attracting overseas buyers and in ensuring the pelts are presented correctly and in the most attractive manner possible.

The wide variety of climatic conditions and available feed across the U.S. result in considerable variations in fur characteristics. But manufacturers of fur garments require large numbers, or "bundles", of similar pelts in order to produce uniform garments. In order to facilitate



Buyers come from around the world to bid on top-quality American fur.

the work of the buyers, auction houses encourage farmers to pool their pelts, so that similar goods can be presented in longer "strings".

Along with farmed product, the auction houses also sell the pelts of wild animals caught by professional trappers, including muskrat, raccoon, beaver and even grizzly bear.

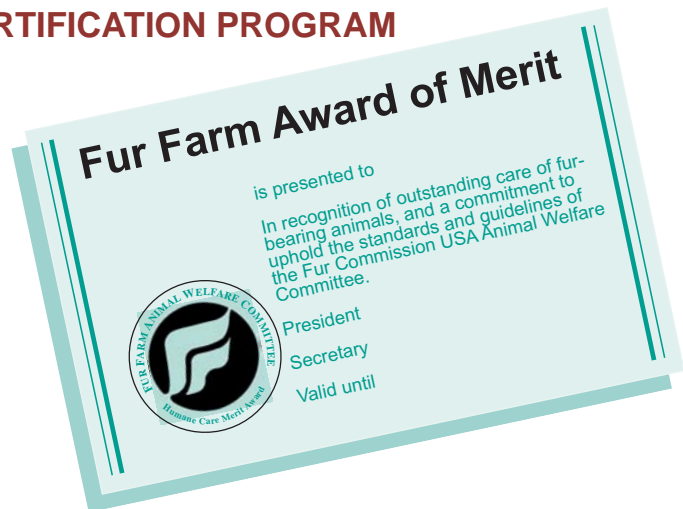
## THE MERIT AWARD CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

The overwhelming majority of mink farms in the U.S. are members of Fur Commission USA, and participate in the Merit Award certification program. This seal of excellence is awarded to members who meet the strict criteria set forth by the FCUSA Animal Welfare Committee in its "Standard Guidelines for the Operation of Mink Farms in the United States."

The Merit Award seal recognizes commitment to humane treatment in all aspects of fur farming, including:

- Vigilant attention to nutritional needs
- Clean, safe and appropriate housing
- Prompt veterinary care
- Consideration for the animals' disposition and reproductive needs
- Elimination of outside stress

Inspections to verify compliance are carried out by independent veterinarians, and those farms which pass are authorized to use the Merit Award certification seal until the next mandatory inspection. On the rare occasion that a farm fails the inspection, the



farmer will be required to make changes or relinquish membership.

Strict adherence to the highest standards of animal welfare has made American mink the world's finest. Producing the world's best does not happen by accident. It is a reward for years of conscientious attention to providing the best possible animal care.