



# FUR FARMING IN CANADA: TOWARDS A POST-FUR FUTURE

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Fur Farming in Canada: Towards a Post-Fur Future

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### **About The Fur-Bearers**

Established in 1953, The Fur-Bearers is a leading Canadian wildlife protection charity whose mission is to protect fur-bearing animals through conservation, advocacy, research and education.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fur farming is a problem that can no longer be ignored. Fur farms are industrial facilities that hold hundreds to tens of thousands of mink, foxes, and other animals in close confinement for the purpose of selling pelts in the fashion fur trade. In addition to the serious animal welfare issues inherent in fur farming, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted widespread concerns about fur farming's public health risk.

The fur farming industry received international attention throughout the pandemic due to hundreds of SARS-CoV-2 virus outbreaks on mink farms around the world, human-to-animal and animal-to-human transmission of the virus, mutations in the virus as it spread on mink farms, and the corresponding culls of infected mink in numerous countries - including Canada.

The harms and risks that fur farming brings to people, animals, and the environment are well-documented and will be highlighted in this report. Public opinion polls demonstrate that the Canadian public is firmly opposed to the practice of farming animals for their fur, with nearly three quarters of Canadians in support of a national fur farming ban.<sup>1</sup>

According to Canada's Census of Agriculture, the number of fur farms in Canada fell from 347 in 2011 to 97 in 2021.<sup>2</sup> While the reasons for the decline of fur farming are varied, numerous factors indicate a bleak, if not impossible, future for this sector in Canada.

**There needs to be an immediate response from Canadian policymakers to address the problem of fur farming and provide solutions to begin a transition away from fur production.**

This report highlights the problems inherent in fur farming and the possibilities for a post-fur farming era. What could a phase-out and transition away from fur farming look like? What lessons can we learn from other jurisdictions around the world that have banned fur farming? How do we support workers in the fur farm sector to gain meaningful employment in safer, ethical, and sustainable sectors? Could these transitions aid Canada's need for food security and sustainable energy?

*Fur Farming in Canada: Towards a Post-Fur Future* examines the experience of other countries that have banned fur farming to demonstrate what is possible in Canada. The end of fur farming can mean the beginning of new opportunities for those involved in the fur farm sector, provided they are adequately supported in their transitions away from fur production. The creation of financial and occupational programs for fur farmers and workers exiting the sector will provide them with the support they need to seek new careers and opportunities. A prohibition on fur farming in Canada will protect animals, the environment, and all Canadians from the risks and harms that fur farming entails. Numerous countries have already taken action to end fur farming, it's time for Canada to join them.

It's time to act on fur farming.

1 The Fur-Bearers. (2022, February 8). [3/4 of Canadians support a ban on fur farming](#).

2 Statistics Canada. [Table 32-10-0155-01](#) Selected livestock and poultry, Census of Agriculture historical data.



# INTRODUCTION

The captive breeding and domestication of Canada's wildlife for the commercial fur trade began near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The origins of modern-day industrial fur farming took hold in the Maritime provinces, where foxes were bred in captivity and farmed for their fur.<sup>3</sup> Over the course of the next century, fur farming expanded across the country in all provinces, where foxes, mink, and other fur-bearing animals were bred and slaughtered by the millions every year by the fur industry, their pelts sold domestically and in auctions destined for international fashion fur markets. Today, fewer than 100 fur farms remain in Canada, a stark difference from highs in the 1980s, where over 1,200 fur farms were in operation coast to coast.<sup>4</sup>



*A farmed fox on a Quebec fur farm*

The era of fur farming is ending, both domestically and internationally. Countries around the world started to ban the practice at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The United Kingdom paved the way with its ban on fur farming in 2000, and in the decades that followed, numerous countries have outlawed the practice including Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Belgium, and Norway.<sup>5</sup> Over 20 countries have banned fur farming or introduced legislation to do so. In Canada, British Columbia became the first province to ban mink farming in 2021.<sup>6</sup>

As is evidenced by the experience of fur farm transitions in Europe, there is no shortage of innovation and adaptability when it comes to finding solutions to the question of what happens when fur farming ends. Specific case studies will be highlighted in this report to provide concrete examples of fur farmers turning to new opportunities. The report will provide background information about fur farming in Canada and the experience of other countries where fur farms have transitioned to other productive operations. The end of fur farming is inevitable, but the end of livelihoods doesn't have to be, provided programs and policies are in place to support workers and operators. Already in British Columbia, former mink farm workers have been provided supports to gain training to work in the province's greenhouse sector.<sup>7</sup>

In an era of daunting climate challenges, increasing risks to public health, and shifting societal values towards the treatment of animals, fur farming is part of the problem. A strategic transition can be part of the solution.

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3 The Canadian Encyclopedia. (2020, December 3). [Fur Farming](#)

4 Statistics Canada. [Table 32-10-0155-01](#) Selected livestock and poultry, Census of Agriculture historical data

5 Fur Free Alliance. [Fur Farming Bans](#)

6 British Columbia, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. (2021, November 5). [Mink farming phase out planned in B.C.](#)

7 British Columbia, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. (2022, April 20). [Training supports transition for agricultural workers](#)

# BACKGROUND

## Legality and status of fur farming

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### Canada

Fur farming is legal in every province in Canada.<sup>8</sup> In 2021, the Government of British Columbia became the first province to ban mink farming due to its public health risks related to COVID-19,<sup>9</sup> although the province still permits fur farming for other species including chinchillas, foxes, martens, fishers, and nutria.<sup>10</sup> According to the most recent Canadian Census of Agriculture, there were 79 mink farms and 18 fox farms operating in Canada in 2021.<sup>11</sup> Census data does not include information about fur farming operations that farm other species of fur-bearing animals, although mink and foxes are the primary species farmed for their fur in Canada.

Legislation has been introduced federally to prohibit fur farming nationwide. Private Member's Bill C-247, *An Act to prohibit fur farming*, was introduced and passed first reading in the House of Commons in February 2022.<sup>12</sup> Bill C-247 did not reach second reading.

### International

Numerous countries have banned fur farming in recent decades, with a marked increase of fur farming bans since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Latvia, Malta, Ireland, Italy, France, Estonia, and the Netherlands have all announced prohibitions on fur farming since 2020. Other countries that have banned fur farming include the United Kingdom, Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovakia, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Czech Republic. As of this writing, legislation to ban fur farming has been introduced or is being considered in several countries including Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Spain, Ukraine, and Romania.<sup>13</sup>

A European Citizen's Initiative (ECI), *Fur Free Europe*, was launched in 2022. This ECI, which calls for a prohibition on fur farming across the European Union, has received over one million signatures.<sup>14</sup> Meeting the one million signatory threshold gives citizens the right to bring forward the issue to the European Commission and receive a response on possible legislative or policy changes.

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8 Canada's three territories do not have a fur farm sector.

9 British Columbia, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. (2021, November 5). [Mink farming phase out planned in B.C.](#)

10 [Fur Farm Regulation](#), BC Reg 8/2015

11 Statistics Canada. [Table 32-10-0155-01](#). Selected livestock and poultry, Census of Agriculture historical data

12 Bill C-247: [An Act to prohibit fur farming](#). (2022). 1st Reading Feb. 8, 2022, 44th Parliament, 1st session.

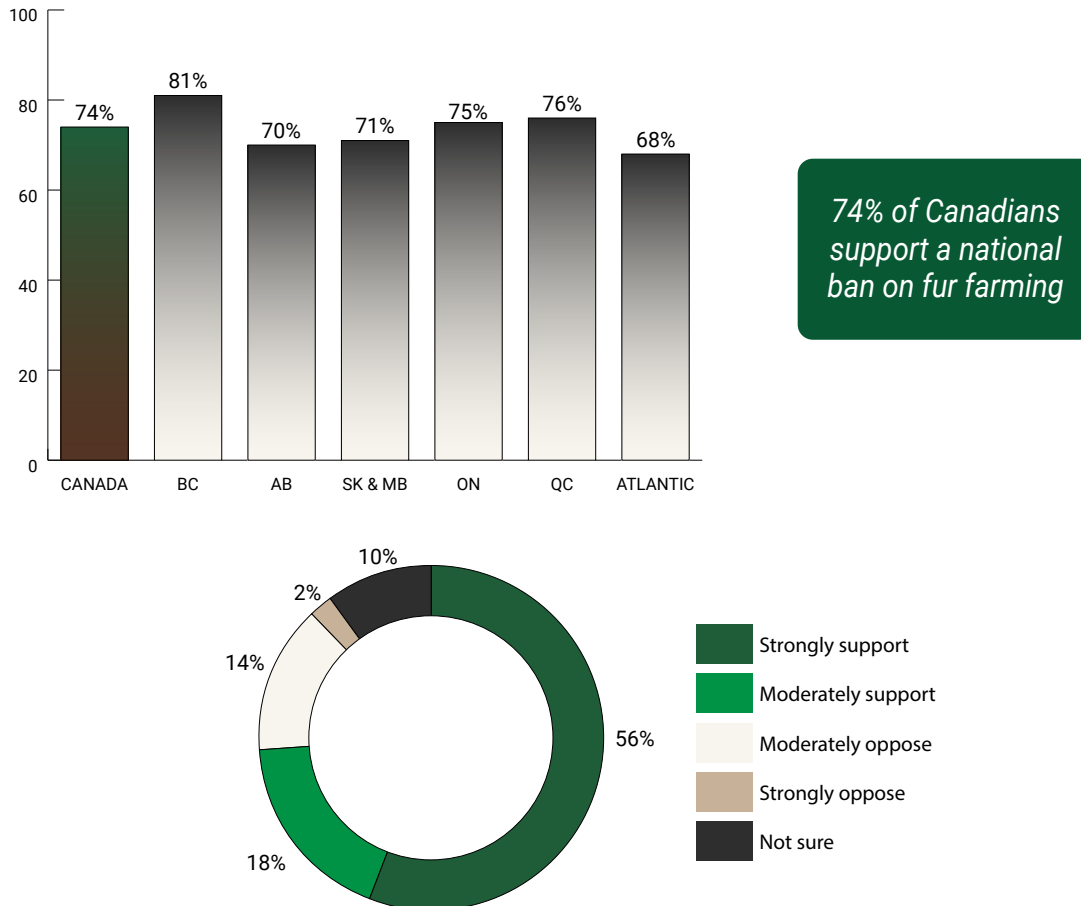
13 Fur Free Alliance. [Fur Farming Bans](#)

14 European Union. [European Citizens' Initiative: Fur Free Europe](#)

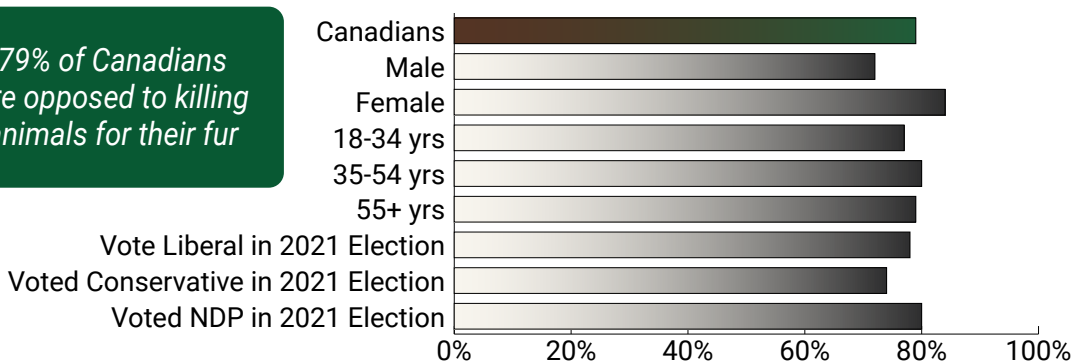
## Public opinion

Public opinion surveys conducted in Canada in recent years show overwhelming opposition to fur farming and support for a national ban. Opposition towards fur farming is high across the political spectrum.

### Canadians' support for a national fur farming ban<sup>15</sup>



### Attitudes towards fur production: Demographic information of Canadians opposed to killing animals for their fur<sup>16</sup>



<sup>15</sup> The Fur-Bearers. (2022, February 8). [3/4 of Canadians support a ban on fur farming](#). Research provided by Research Co. Survey results are based on an online study conducted from February 5 to February 7, 2022, among 1,000 adults in Canada. The data has been statistically weighted according to Canadian census figures for age, gender and region in Canada. The margin of error—which measures sample variability—is +/- 3.1 percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty.

<sup>16</sup> Research Co. (2022, April 8). [Most Canadians Oppose Trophy Hunting, Fur Farming and Rodeos](#)



## Impacts to public health

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the risks of fur farming as mink are susceptible to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.<sup>17</sup> Fur farming received international attention due to the hundreds of COVID-19 outbreaks on fur farms in numerous countries around the world, including Canada.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the fur farming sector has posed a threat to public health for numerous reasons: the rapid transmission of the virus among mink confined in fur farms, animal-to-human and human-to-animal transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the mink-associated variant identified in both mink and humans, and the risk of virus spillover from fur farmed animals to wildlife populations.<sup>19</sup> Mink have also been found to be susceptible to highly pathogenic avian influenza, H5N1. An outbreak of H5N1 occurred among farmed mink on a fur farm in Spain in October 2022.<sup>20</sup>

In 2021, the Government of British Columbia announced a phase-out of mink farming due to its public health risks after three mink farms experienced SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks among mink.<sup>21 22</sup> Research into the situation in British Columbia suggests that the absence of surveillance in the mink farming sector could lead to undetected spread of the virus elsewhere. A 2022 report that examined the province's response to mink farm virus outbreaks in BC writes, "Without ongoing worker and mink herd surveillance, it is possible that mink farm outbreaks and the associated risk of mink-related viral adaptation and transmission back to the community are occurring undetected in other jurisdictions including other provinces."<sup>23</sup>



*Mink in cages on a British Columbia fur farm*

17 World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations & World Organisation for Animal Health. (2021, January 20). [SARS-CoV-2 in animals used for fur farming: GLEWS+ risk assessment](#)

18 Maron, Dina Fine. (2021, February 24). [What the mink COVID-19 outbreaks taught us about pandemics](#). National Geographic.

19 Sharun, K., Tiwari, R., Natesan, S., & Dhama, K. (2020). [SARS-CoV-2 infection in farmed minks, associated zoonotic concerns, and importance of the One Health approach during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic](#). *Veterinary Quarterly*, 41(1), 50-60.

20 Agüero Montserrat, Monne Isabella, Sánchez Azucena, Zecchin Bianca, Fusaro Alice, Ruano María José, del Valle Arrojo Manuel, Fernández-Antonio Ricardo, Souto Antonio Manuel, Tordable Pedro, Cañas Julio, Bonfante Francesco, Giussani Edoardo, Terregino Calogero, Orejas Jesús Javier. [Highly pathogenic avian influenza A\(H5N1\) virus infection in farmed minks, Spain, October 2022](#). *Euro Surveill*. 2023;28(3):pii=2300001.

21 British Columbia, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. (2021, November 5). [Mink farming phase out planned in B.C.](#)

22 Paiero A, Newhouse E, Chan YLE, Clair V, Russell S, Zlonsnik J, Prystajec N, Fraser E. (2022). [SARS-CoV-2 in mink farms in British Columbia, Canada: A report of two outbreaks in 2020–2021](#). *Can Commun Dis Rep* 2022;48(6):274–81.

23 Clair V, Chan YLE, Paiero A, Fraser E, Gunvaldsen R, Newhouse E. (2022). [One Health response to SARS-CoV-2-associated risk from mink farming in British Columbia, Canada, October 2020 to October 2021](#). *Can Commun Dis Rep* 2022;48(6):261–73.



## Impacts to the local environment

The negative environmental impacts of fur farming are far reaching. Compared with other textiles, fur production is extremely inefficient and resource intensive. Every stage of fur production requires significant resources that impact the environment, from the large amounts of feed to the toxic chemicals used for pelt processing. A 2011 report by CE Delft, an independent research organization in the Netherlands, found that of the 17 of the 18 environmental impacts they studied, 1 kg of mink fur consistently scored worse than 1 kg of other textiles such as cotton, wool, and polyester.<sup>24</sup>

In Nova Scotia, the province with the highest number of fur farms in Canada, manure runoff from mink operations has been identified as a threat to soil and water quality, posing serious risks for fish, birds, farmed and wild animals, humans, and the environment.<sup>25</sup> Following complaints of algae blooms in several watersheds located in areas with high concentrations of mink farms, the Nova Scotia government conducted investigations and water quality surveys from 2008 – 2012.<sup>26</sup> The 2012 report prepared for Nova Scotia Environment found that the high levels of pollution observed in nine lakes located within the watersheds were likely the result of mink farming activities.<sup>27 28</sup> More recent research published from 2019-2022 has continued to focus on the impacts of mink farming on Nova Scotia lakes. A series of articles from the Paleoecological Environmental Assessment and Research Laboratory (PEARL) at Queen's University looks at the mink sector's impact on acidification, climate change, and land-use changes in Nova Scotia.<sup>29</sup>



*Mink farm next to a body of water in Nova Scotia*

24 Bijleveld, M., Korteland, M., & Sevenster, M. (2011, January). [The environmental impact of mink fur production](#). CE Delft.

25 Tri County Watershed Protection Association. (2011, April 25). [The impacts of the mink industry on freshwater lakes in Nova Scotia: An overview of concerns](#). David Suzuki Foundation Technical Brief.

24 Lavoie, J. (2014, August 15). [Mink Farm Pollution Key Culprit in Rendering Nova Scotia Lakes Unswimmable: Report](#). The Narwhal.

27 Brylinsky, M. (2012, February). [Results of the 2011 Water Quality Survey of Ten Lakes Located in the Carleton River Watershed Area of Digby and Yarmouth Counties, Nova Scotia](#). Prepared for Nova Scotia Environment.

26 CBC News. (2012, April 2). [Mink farms likely polluted lakes, study finds](#).

29 Paleoecological Environmental Assessment and Research Laboratory (PEARL). [Assessing potential impacts of mink farming on lakes in rural Nova Scotia](#)



## Impacts to animal welfare

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Mink and foxes are wild animals native to Canada, with habitats that span the entire country and range from forests to grasslands. But when bred and confined on fur farms, these animals suffer significant harms due to their extreme confinement in small, wire-bottom pens. They are unable to engage in natural behaviours like hiding, swimming, hunting, running, and socializing. On fur farms, mink are housed in battery cages where the footprint is less than the size of two sheets of paper, while foxes are kept in cages with approximately one square meter of space. Fur farms in Canada range from several hundred to tens of thousands of animals on a single farm, characteristic of industrial, intensive farming operations.

Footage obtained by The Fur-Bearers documents the conditions of fur farms across Canada and is available for viewing on our website.<sup>30</sup> This footage shows animals exhibiting repetitive, stereotypic behaviours (persistent, abnormal movements), self-mutilation, and cannibalism. Animals are regularly found to be living in unsanitary conditions where large mounds of excrement build up under the wire cages. Mink are seen living in their own feces that line the bottom and sides of their cages.

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<sup>30</sup> The Fur-Bearers. [Inside Canada's Fur Farms](#).

*Quebec fox farm*





Industry standards developed by the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) outline recommendations and requirements for fur farming. These codes are voluntary and public enforcement of fur farms is minimal to non-existent. As a result, exposing the conditions of animals on fur farms and animal cruelty cases are often the result of undercover investigators rather than government inspectors.<sup>31</sup>

Despite having industry standards in place, even the basic requirements set out by NFACC are problematic as they lead to severe physical and psychological conditions due to their extreme confinement. For example, for housing a single female mink, the minimum size allowance for a wire pen is 8" (width) x 15" (height), only a few inches larger than a letter size piece of paper.<sup>32</sup> The minimum size allowance for foxes is 36" (width) x 36" (height).<sup>33</sup> Farmed mink and foxes are confined to these cages for their entire lives until they are killed.

The NFACC Codes of Practice requirement for killing mink is to place them into gas chambers filled with carbon monoxide. The Codes of Practice requirement for killing foxes is through anal electrocution. This is done by inserting a probe into a fox's rectum, a bite bar into the fox's mouth, and passing electric current through the animal's body until he or she dies.<sup>34</sup> Industry practice to kill chinchillas is via electrocution or cervical dislocation.<sup>35</sup> Through a judicial review over the issuance of a license to a British Columbia chinchilla fur farm, The Fur-Bearers learned that the method to kill chinchillas on this farm was also via anal electrocution.<sup>36</sup>



*Fox in a pen on a Quebec fur farm*

31 Gignac, J. (2018, May 12) [‘This is not normal’: Ontario mink farm charged with animal cruelty after activists go undercover](#). Toronto Star.

32 National Farm Animal Care Council. (2013). [Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Mink](#)

33 National Farm Animal Care Council. (2013). [Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Mink](#)

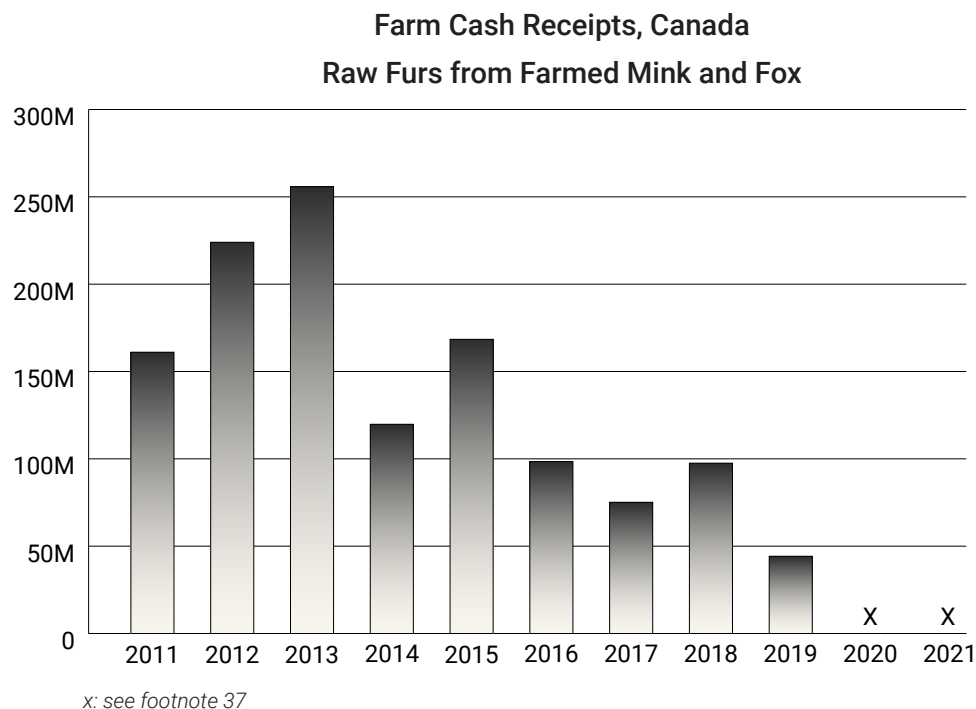
34 National Farm Animal Care Council. (2013). [Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Fox](#)

35 Ontario, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). [Standard Guidelines for the Operation of Chinchilla Ranches](#)

36 The Association for The Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals v. Gunvaldsen, 2022 BCSC 1367. [Website link](#)

## Economic situation

Canada's fur farming sector has seen significant economic declines in the past decade. The latest Statistics Canada data that reports farm cash receipts for the fur farm sector was the 2019 reporting year,<sup>37</sup> where the sector made \$44,224,000 in sales.<sup>38</sup> Farm cash receipts across all agricultural sectors in Canada totalled \$66.3 billion in 2019; resulting in farmed fur products contributing only 0.06% to the agricultural economy that year, a marginal contribution to the overall Canadian economy.



The financial benefit to a small group of private interests comes at a disproportionate financial cost to the public. The fur sector is known to regularly access subsidies and agricultural funding programs from the provincial and federal governments.<sup>39</sup> A commonly accessed funding program is AgriStability, a risk management program that is offered to agricultural producers to help protect from income declines. The costs for AgriStability are shared by the federal and provincial/territorial governments at 60% and 40%, respectively.

Information obtained by The Fur-Bearers through freedom of information legislation for select provinces shows the extent of funding accessed by the fur sector. The following table shows the total amount of AgriStability funding accessed by fur farmers over the defined time period for each province.

Province	Years	Value of AgriStability Contributions
British Columbia	2014-2020	\$6,495,110 <sup>40</sup>
Ontario	2013-2020	\$15,688,504 <sup>41</sup>
Nova Scotia	2013-2018	\$99,380,834 <sup>42</sup>

37 Communication received from Statistics Canada by The Fur-Bearers explains why this data has not been reported in more recent years: "The values associated with 'Raw furs from mink and fox' were derived from the Statistics Canada's Fur Statistics Program, this program encompassed both survey and administrative data collection. Following the 2018 reference year, the annual survey 'Stocks of ranched fur – mink and fox' was cancelled. At that same time, the two main fur auction houses that sold Canadian furs, and that Statistics Canada had longstanding data sharing agreements closed." Email communication received by The Fur-Bearers, December 22, 2022.

38 Statistics Canada. [Table 32-10-0045-01 Farm cash receipts, annual \(x 1,000\)](#)

39 Cuthbertson, R. (2020, May 29). [A booming niche industry goes bust, quietly taking millions in public money with it](#). CBC News.

40 British Columbia, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. (Published 2021, September 21) [Freedom of Information Request AGR-2020-07303](#)

41 The Fur-Bearers. (2022, March 16). [Ontario fur farms receiving millions in government benefits](#)

42 The Fur-Bearers. (2022, October 19). [Nova Scotia mink farms accessed nearly \\$100M from 2013-18](#)

In Nova Scotia, the government subsidizes mink farming through its Mink Industry Enhancement Program.<sup>43</sup> This program pays eligible mink farmers \$25 per breeding female mink. In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the province issued \$921,050 to mink farmers under this program.<sup>44</sup>

## Indigenous Perspectives: Views from British Columbia

In 2021, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) joined the call for a ban on fur farming in British Columbia. In an April 2021 news release, Grand Chief Stewart Philip, President of UBCIC, outlined how fur farming conflicts with Indigenous values:

*"It may be surprising to many that British Columbia has a fur farm industry which revolves around the mass breeding and slaughtering of wild animals for luxury fashion items and has been widely regarded as unethical and unnecessary. UBCIC supports the ethical harvesting of fur for cultural and ceremonial purposes, and for purposes that align with Indigenous ways and respect values of conservation and stewardship. However, UBCIC does not condone the industrial breeding, confinement and slaughtering of minks for international luxury markets especially as, notwithstanding the current public health risks, mink farms have long been implicated in cruel and inhumane fur farming practices that have led to unacceptable animal welfare outcomes. Evidence exists on both local and international scales regarding the unnecessary and deeply troubling suffering minks are subjected to – lifelong confinement in cramped and filthy cages which, during a pandemic, only promotes the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viral infections."<sup>45</sup>*

## Looking forward

The information presented above offers a snapshot of Canada's fur farm industry in 2023: reliant on public funding, economically unsustainable, significant public opposition, environmentally harmful, cruel to animals, and a public health risk. Beyond these factors, there is a simple reality that today's society has largely moved away from the consumption of luxury fur products. This is evidenced by one of Canada's largest and oldest fur auction houses, North American Fur Auctions, filing for bankruptcy protection in 2019,<sup>46</sup> the world's largest fur auction house, Copenhagen Fur, announcing in 2020 it would close,<sup>47</sup> and the ever-growing list of fashion companies going fur-free including Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Versace, Armani, Channel, Moncler, Prada, and over 1500 more.<sup>48</sup> The use of real fur in fashion has largely been made obsolete by new technologies and the development of more advanced textiles.

Canada's fur industry has faced sharp declines in the past decade and with no viable future, there is a need for a response from Canadian policymakers to transition away from fur production. The era of fur is ending and a prohibition on fur farming is required due to the risks and harms it poses. But Canada's remaining fur farms and the workers they employ can be supported to ensure livelihoods aren't lost, and that fur farms can be repurposed into operations that are sustainable, ethical, and benefit their local communities. Examples from other jurisdictions that have banned fur farming can be the starting points guiding Canada's response.

<sup>43</sup> Nova Scotia. [Mink Industry Enhancement Program](#)

<sup>44</sup> The Fur-Bearers. (2022, October 19). [Nova Scotia mink farms accessed nearly \\$100M from 2013-18](#)

<sup>45</sup> Union of BC Indian Chiefs. (2021, April 6). [Moratorium on B.C. Industrial Mink Farming: Ending the Farming of Wild Animals for Luxury Products](#)

<sup>46</sup> Eneas, B. (2019, November 5). [Historic fur auction house granted creditor protection status](#). CBC News.

<sup>47</sup> Murray, A. (2020, November 23). [Fur industry faces uncertain future due to Covid](#). BBC News.

<sup>48</sup> Fur Free Alliance. [Fur Free Retailer](#).



# TOWARDS A POST-FUR FUTURE

Prohibitions on fur farming in other countries are instructive as they offer examples of what successful transitions can look like in practice. The infrastructure on fur farms can be repurposed into other forms of farming or used to shift to new sectors altogether. Transitions should be safe, ethical, and sustainable. This necessarily includes a shift away from animal farming due to the public health risks<sup>49</sup>, animal welfare concerns<sup>50</sup>, and negative environmental impacts<sup>51</sup> inherent in animal agriculture.

A defining feature of fur farms (particularly mink farms) are long, narrow sheds used to house thousands of animals in cages. These sheds can be converted into greenhouses to increase food security, used to harvest solar energy, or repurposed in other innovative ways, as some of the following examples demonstrate.

## Case studies

Until recently, Denmark was the world's largest fur producing country. During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, a mink-related variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (known as Cluster 5) was found in mink and humans. Over 15 million mink were subsequently killed in 2020, and the Danish government announced a temporary ban on mink farming and mink breeding.<sup>52</sup> The Danish experience is particularly illuminating due to the size of the mink industry, the diversity of opportunities that mink farmers sought after the cull and ban, and the compensation offered by the Danish government to support transitions to other sectors.



*Rows of mink sheds in Nova Scotia*

49 United Nations Environment Programme and International Livestock Research Institute. (2020). [Preventing the Next Pandemic: Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission](#).

50 World Animal Protection. (2020, October 3). [Canada gets a failing grade in global test of animal welfare leadership](#)

51 Steinfeld, H., Gerber, P.J., Wassenaar, T., Castel, V., Rosales, M., & Haan, C.D. (2006). [Livestock's long shadow: environmental issues and options](#). Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

52 Kevany, S. (2022, May 13). [Danish farmers turn their backs on mink after Covid mutation cull](#). The Guardian.



**Pancake house and bakery** Two young brothers followed in their family's footsteps and bought land to start a mink farm. After the Danish government announced the ban on mink farming, one of the brothers identified the need for a bakery and café in his community. His entrepreneurial spirit allowed him to pivot from mink farming to the development of a bakery and pancake house on their land, with space for 30 patrons.<sup>53</sup>

**Microbrewery** A 62-year-old mink farmer made the transition to brewing beer after receiving grants from the Danish government to support transitions to new sectors. His 247-acre mink farm will be converted to a microbrewery run by himself, his son, and business partner. They purchased nine mahogany barrels and other equipment to begin the process, and have plans to install solar panels once further compensation is received from the government.<sup>54</sup>

**Fruit and vegetable farm** A couple that farmed mink since the 1980s switched to vegetable and fruit production after the mink cull. The couple repurposed some of their mink sheds to grow strawberries, potatoes, peppers, and other vegetables which they sell on the roadside.<sup>55</sup>

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53 Hansen, G. L. (2021, March 30) [23-årig minkavler bliver selvstændig igen: Nu opfører Jonas sin egen forretning i turistby](#) (EN: 23-year-old mink breeder becomes independent again: Now Jonas is setting up his own business in a tourist town). Helsingør Dagblad.

54 France 24. (2022, December 28). [After Covid cull, Danish mink farmers find new careers](#)

55 Levitt, T. (2022, November 14) [Ghost farms: the mink sheds abandoned to the pandemic](#). The Guardian

*Strawberries growing in a repurposed mink shed. Denmark. Photo: Agata Lenczewska-Madsen for The Guardian*





While Denmark is alone regarding the scale of its mink sector and the number of producers seeking alternative opportunities, lessons can be learned from transitions in other countries as well.

**Solar farm** Although fur farming is not banned in Ukraine, a bill was introduced to ban fur farming in 2019.<sup>56</sup> As a result of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, a fur farmer decided to shift from fur farming to generating electricity. The fur farmer installed solar panels to the tops of his mink sheds, with possible plans to convert a warehouse building into a biogas station.<sup>57</sup>

*Solar panels installed on an empty mink shed. Ukraine. Photo: Ida-Maria Björkqvist / Yle*



These examples provide a diverse range of opportunities that fur farmers have explored after ending their operations. But it is important to draw attention to others affected by fur farm closures, notably fur farm workers. One example of what transitioning away from fur farming can look like for fur farm workers can be seen in British Columbia.

**From mink farming to horticulture** After British Columbia announced a phase out of mink farming in 2021, the BC government offered transition supports for mink farm workers affected by the ban to gain skills in the province's greenhouse sector. These workers were provided with the opportunity to receive 16 weeks of occupational and employability training and hands-on experience to gain the skills needed to seek opportunities in the new industry.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Fur Free Alliance. [Ukraine proposes bill to ban fur farming](#)

<sup>57</sup> Björkqvist, I. (2022, September 1). [Jan Käcko bytte rävarna till solpaneler – pälsfarmen blev Purmo elpark på grund av kriget i Ukraina](#) (EN: Jan Käcko exchanged the foxes for solar panels – the fur farm became the Purmo solar park because of the war in Ukraine). Svenska Yle.

<sup>58</sup> British Columbia, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. (2022, April 20). [Training supports transition for agricultural workers](#)



## Transition supports

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As indicated earlier, Canada's fur farm sector regularly accesses millions of dollars through agricultural support programs and subsidies.

Subsidies and contributions from provincial and federal programs can be redirected towards providing transition supports to fur farmers and workers exiting the sector. In British Columbia, the province stated in a news release that it would work with mink farmers impacted by the mink farming phase-out and support them to transitioning to new opportunities, reiterating their eligibility for government funding programs to assist them in their transition.<sup>59</sup> Existing provincial and federal agricultural funding programs could be used to support transitions, and alternative models also exist in other jurisdictions, particularly in the form of compensation or buyouts.

In Belgium, where the country's fur farming ban came into effect on January 1, 2023, fur farmers were offered degressive compensation to encourage them to close their farms early. The earlier they closed their operations, the greater their compensation would be, each month the compensation amount being reduced by a certain percentage.<sup>60</sup> In Ireland, the three remaining mink farms in operation after the country announced a ban on fur farming received up to €8 million (\$11.5M CAD) in a compensation package for shutting down their farms.<sup>61</sup> The Danish government offered over 18.8 billion Danish kroner (\$3.6B CAD) in compensation to fur farmers wishing to exit mink farming after the temporary ban was announced.<sup>62</sup> 1,246 mink farmers opted to take the compensation to permanently close their operations, while only 13 farmers applied for compensation that would allow them to continue mink farming after the temporary ban was lifted.<sup>63</sup>

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59 British Columbia, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. (2021, November 5). [Mink farming phase out planned in B.C.](#)

60 Chini, M. (2021, April 5) [Only foie gras producer and 11 fur farms in Flanders close doors.](#) The Brussels Times.

61 McGee, H. (2021, October 19). [Mink farms to get €4m to €8m compensation from State.](#) The Irish Times.

62 Barrett, M. (2021, January 26) [Denmark to spend billions on compensation deal for mink farmers.](#) The Local DK.

63 Kevany, S. (2022, May 13) [Danish farmers turn their backs on mink after Covid mutation cull.](#) The Guardian.



The end of fur farming does not mean the end of livelihoods for those involved in the sector, from fur farm workers to fur farm operators. If financial supports are accompanied with program supports such as those offered to British Columbia mink farm workers, the transition away from fur farming can benefit not only individuals and families, but also local communities and the broader Canadian economy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Transitioning away from fur farming requires both legislative and policy changes. A prohibition on fur farming needs to be paired with financial and occupational programs to support those exiting the fur farm sector.

**1.** Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food introduce a prohibition on fur farming in Canada.

**2.** In collaboration with the provinces, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada create an accessible fur farming transition program for fur farm workers and employers voluntarily seeking to exit the sector. This program should include skills and employability training, career planning, and technical, financial, and market support to repurpose fur farming infrastructure into new operations.

**3.** In collaboration with the provinces, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada create a compensation package for fur farmers voluntarily seeking to close their farms. Provide financial assistance for fur farm workers to ensure they are financially supported during a transition to new employment opportunities.