

Animal Wellness Call for U.S. Government Buy-Out of Oregon Mink Farms to Prevent Becoming COVID Super-Spreaders

The declining mink industry mainly serves China, and continued operations are no longer worth the risk to U.S. communities.

WASHINGTON, DC, 2010, October 22, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, Animal Wellness Action, the Animal Wellness Foundation, and the Center for a Humane Economy called on Oregon Governor Kate Brown to coordinate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to coordinate a government buy-out program for the state's mink farms, after COVID-19 outbreaks have infected and killed tens of thousands of mink on similar farms in Utah and Wisconsin. The program would be modeled after buy-out programs in the Netherlands, which have also had major outbreaks of COVID-19 at their farms. Other European countries are shutting down the industry, with some considering similar buy-out programs.



Mink Farms Incubate Cruelty and COVID-19

“

Growing up with a grandfather who operated a mink farm in Idaho, fur was a significant and profitable industry.”

Scott Beckstead

“Growing up with a grandfather who operated a mink farm in Idaho, fur was a significant and profitable industry,” said Scott Beckstead, director of campaigns for the Center for a Humane Economy. “Now, farms go belly up every year because pelt prices have crashed.” Because of decreasing interest in fur from major retailers, designers, and customers, the total value of U.S. mink pelt sales has dropped from \$291 million in 2011 to \$59 million in 2019 – a five-fold decrease in just eight years. According to the

U.S. Department of Agriculture, the total number of pelts produced annually, however, has only dropped nine percent, from 3.1 million in 2012 to 2.7 million in 2019, meaning that mink farmers have had a little drop in production costs but precipitous declines in total revenues.

While Oregon has a dozen or so mink farms with Oregon Department of Agriculture permits, dozens of similar farms in other states are closing every year because the business model for the mink industry no longer works in a world that increasingly shuns fur and that has a range of ready and suitable alternative fabrics. The main buyer for U.S. mink pelts is in China.

“Today, with the knowledge that mink may be the most susceptible non-human mammal to COVID infections, it is very hard to justify keeping this receding industry alive as it becomes a potential super-spreader of the virus,” said Beckstead, perhaps the most common name in the mink industry in Utah and Idaho. “A government shutdown of this industry, albeit with compensation for the farmers, is an urgent matter, and we ask Governor Brown to take action on this front.” Beckstead participated in his grandfather’s annual mink pelting operation throughout his youth.

Mink seem especially susceptible to the virus, with high infection and mortality rates. A number of studies have documented incidents of intraspecies transmission of COVID-19 from infected animals to other animals and humans. Specifically with regard to mink operations, “[g]enetic and epidemiological sleuthing have shown that at least two farm workers have caught the virus from mink—the only patients anywhere known to have become infected by animals.”

Given waning consumer interest in the West for fur, almost all U.S.-produced mink pelts are sold to China. “The United States is becoming a mink factory farm for China,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. “The current circumstance with mink production and trade is a boon for China and a viral time bomb for the United States. China outsources mink production to the United States and farmers assume the financial liability and U.S. communities assume the risks of having super-spreader farms in their communities. I can understand why China loves this, but I cannot for the life of me understand why we allow this kind of asymmetrical arrangement to persist.”

The onset of the COVID-19 virus lies in the all-too-present intersection between the inhumane treatment of certain species and the transmission to humans. The filthy, cramped, and crowded environment on industrial mink farms, and the unyielding stress that the animals endure, almost certainly weaken their immune response and enhance the likelihood of infections. Mink are wild, semi-aquatic animals that typically roam and hunt over land areas as large as 2,500 acres. By contrast, the unnatural, barren conditions that mink are subjected to on these facilities greatly increases their susceptibility to the virus as their stress levels rise, and results in abnormal, psychotic behaviors such as pacing, swaying, self-mutilation, cannibalism, and infanticide.

France and the Netherlands have decided to shutter their mink farms after major outbreaks occurred there. Denmark, Poland, and Spain are considering similar actions. These nations understand zoonotic disease risks associated with mink farming exceed the economic rewards they bring through commerce to China.

The Center for a Humane Economy, AWA, and AWF suggest Oregon moves ahead with a three-step plan.

1. Impose an immediate quarantine of all mink farm operations in Oregon.

Mink farms should be taken out of the stream of commerce as these rampant infection rates continue. There should be no movement of non-essential products or workers to and from mink farms, including the movement of live animals on and off the farms or animal furs destined for the marketplace.

2. A halt to breeding programs to arrest the expansion of host animals.

Mink farms should be directed to stop breeding to reduce the number of animal hosts for the virus.

3. Coordination with USDA officials to implement a longer-term solution.

The state should coordinate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to implement a program that includes a buyout with the goal of phasing out industrial mink farms in the U.S. A buyout is the humane thing to do for the producers, and it is the right economic and public health decision for Oregon.

Animal Wellness Action and its partners are asking state lawmakers to take up the issue as well in 2021.

The animal welfare groups sent a letter today to Governor Brown today asking for immediate action to implement these proposals. They sent a letter earlier in the week to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue.

Marty Irby

Animal Wellness Action

+17024199410

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/529015048>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2020 IPD Group, Inc. All Right Reserved.