FINNISH FUR BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION

Sustainability review 2022

Content

1. The Executive Director's review of the industry

THE POSITIVE EFFECTS of the fur industry reach far into Finnish society. The industry provides work for more than 3,000 people in Finland each year, and our auction company's annual brokerage sales between 2010 and 2021 ranged from 157 to 981 million euros, with the average being around 475 million euros. These are noteworthy numbers, and the industry's positive effect on the employment rate and general appeal of rural areas is also not to be ignored. There are significant business opportunities on offer, and certified Finnish fur farming has a strong approval rate among the general population.

ACCORDING TO A SPRING 2022 SURVEY conducted by Taloustutkimus on behalf of FIFUR, 50% of Finns support domestic, certified fur animal farming. In surveys conducted on our behalf by independent research companies between 2009 and 2022, the portion of people with very positive or fairly positive attitudes toward the fur industry has varied between 46 and 65 percent. The survey questions have remained more or less unchanged every year to ensure comparability.

THE PAST FEW YEARS have been financially and emotionally challenging for the Finnish fur industry and our member entrepreneurs. The coronavirus pandemic followed by Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine chilled the market, and the future is still uncertain. At the same time, production costs for rural businesses have increased dramatically, with energy costs rising in particular. Since minks and Finnraccoons are susceptible to coronavirus infections, producers and farm workers have had to be particularly strict in their work hygiene practices since 2020. To protect their animals, many producers have chosen to isolate themselves and to avoid unnecessary social interaction. Mink and Finnraccoon farms in Finland have actually formally agreed to strict protection measures. In turn, this means that they are subjected to somewhat lighter supervision by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland and the Finnish Food Authority.

FIFUR CONCENTRATED in particular on communicating with producers providing them with advice during the years 2021 and 2022. The challenging market situation has uncovered a need for economic and financial advice, and FIFUR has also been active in distributing preventive coronavirus instructions and providing updates on the pandemic's current status. At the time this report was written in early November 2022, not one single animal has been infected with the coronavirus in Finland's mink and Finnraccoon farms. We can all thank our conscientious producers for this excellent situation. The Finnish Food Authority began testing animal samples at the end of 2020 and continues in accordance with the EU-mandated testing program.

ONE OF OUR GREAT SUCCESSES for 2021–2022 was our joint research project with the University of Helsinki to develop a Covid vaccine for mink. After a demanding manufacturing and licensing process, the Finnish Food Authority issued licenses for the vaccine in two stages in September and December 2021. Finnish mink farmers were thereby the first in the EU to vaccinate their breeding animals against the coronavirus. Since zoonotic diseases can affect the health of humans, animals, and the environment, the vaccine for fur animals is in line with the World Health Organization's (WHO) harmonised One Health approach to safeguarding overall health.

TOGETHER WITH SAGA FURS OYJ, we are preparing for the industry's upcoming strategy period. In addition to the usual four-year strategy period and its goals, we have looked further into the future and contemplated what fur farms should be like in 2035. The industry has a clear will to improve animal welfare and to develop all aspects of farm management and the fur trade in general.

THE FUR INDUSTRY works towards its future, ensuring social, economic and environmental responsibility in its actions and creating jobs and improved well-being not only locally in the countryside but also at the national level.
We hope you enjoy reading our sustainability overview.

Marja Tiura
Executive Director

2. Finnish Fur Breeders' Association – FIFUR

THE FINNISH FUR BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION – FIFUR is the parent association of the national fur industry. The association acts in the interest of its members and provides training services. Professional fur breeding has been a part of the Finnish landscape for over a hundred years, and the association was founded early on in 1928. At the end of 2022, FIFUR's regional associations had a total of 539 member companies. Together, the association and its fur breeders own the majority of Saga Furs Oyj, the Finnish marketing and auction company. The Finnish fur industry is a global pioneer in the certification of fur farms.

FIFUR'S VISION is to make Finland the world's most responsible and profitable fur-breeding country. FIFUR's mission is to support the well-being of the fur industry, its producers, animals and the environment to ensure the continuous development and competitiveness of fur breeding and its acceptance in society. The association fulfills this mission by providing services to its producers and by furthering the interests of the industry in Finland and internationally.

FIFUR'S QUALITY MANAGEMENT has been ISO 9001 certified since 2014. This means that FIFUR uses an ISO 9001 compliant management system that produces information about operations efficiency and performance to support decision making. The system is also used to improve the cost efficiency of operations and to map risks and safeguard stakeholder interests. The quality system is audited periodically, and in 2021 the audit focused on the management of the coronavirus and its various effects in the fur industry.

THE FINNISH FARM CERTIFICATION SYSTEM, FIFUR Finnish Standards, is integral to the success of fur farming in Finland. Almost all of the association's member farms are part of this voluntary quality and environmental system that focuses on responsibility and transparency.

2.1. Key figures for the fur industry from the 2021–2022 fiscal year

€ 272 million	Saga Furs Oyj auction brokerage sales value (per 13.9.2022)
Over 3,000	Annual direct employment effects of the fur industry in person-years
120,000 tons	Amount of fur animal manure upcycled
11,000 tons	Phosphorus produced by the industry

The amount of fur animal manure has decreased in 2021 and 2022 with the general decrease in the number of fur animals, and is now around 120,000 tons. At the same time, Russia's attack on Ukraine led to a dramatic spike in the prices of artificial fertilizers, which in turn increased the demand for fur animal manure as fertilizer. Although fur animal manure only accounts for about 1% of all livestock manure in Finland, its high nutrient content means it accounts for 16% of the total phosphorus content and 5% of total nitrogen. In recent years, FIFUR has conducted several research projects on improving the use of the phosphorus and nitrogen content of manure.

3. Strategy

THE Finnish fur industry's 2023–2026 strategy divides the industry's various activities along four themes: animal welfare, climate, certification, and international activities. FIFUR's strategic policies seek to raise animal welfare to an all new level, to achieve carbon neutrality, and to develop certifications in a way that increases animal welfare, responsibility in operations, and promotes the fur market and the use of fur. FIFUR also hopes to lead the industry globally in the right direction.

SUSTAINABILITY is an integral part of all of the strategy's activities. FIFUR develops and supports Finnish fur breeding traditions, creating new growth opportunities in the industry through various circular economy innovations and interdisciplinary research work.

4. The fur industry in brief

THE MAJORITY of the world's fur production takes place in Europe and North America. The largest fur producing countries outside Europe are China, the United States and Canada, and Europe has several strong producers in addition to Finland. Finland is Europe's largest producer of fox fur, whereas Poland is Europe's leader in mink. As the only country in the European Union with an exemption from the European Commission, Finland is allowed to continue breeding Finnraccoons until at least January 2049 in accordance with the decree on invasive alien species.

OTHER FUR PRODUCING COUNTRIES in Europe currently include Greece, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden. Denmark decided in September 2022 to continue to allow mink production in the country, whereas several countries have recently decided to ban fur production after a transition period, including Latvia and Ireland.

THE VARIOUS ACTORS of the fur industry have a common, international umbrella organization known as the International Fur Federation (IFF). IFF and Fur Europe merged their offices and operations in the beginning of 2021. These joint offices are located in London and Brussels. The organization's aim is to best serve the producers in different countries as well as the fur trade and fur cluster in general. IFF and Fur Europe oversee the international fur trade, its political interests, the maintenance and development of the *WelFur* certificate, and the Furmark program covering the entire production chain.

FURMARK is a program launched in 2021 that offers consumers information about the fur apparel production chain. The program includes several certification systems, including the *WelFur* system used by Finnish farms. The buyer of a fur coat with the Furmark symbol can be sure that the animals have been well taken care of and that the entire chain from the farm to retail is sustainable.

MILAN, NEW YORK AND PARIS are the fashion capitals that define the latest trends in fur and are home to the world's leading fashion houses and designers. Hong Kong, in turn, is a focal point for a large amount of fur buyers.

THE SAGA FURS CREATIVE HUB is a visionary laboratory with over 30 years of history. The Hub looks for intriguing ways to use fur in the fashion industry and innovates new fur technologies. Its Design Center, previously located in Denmark, continues this work in Finland in the same building as the Saga Furs headquarters and auction hall.

THE HUB'S EXPERT TEAM trains and guides designers to help them bring their creative ideas to life and add value to their collections. These annual collections are presented to the fashion industry at seminars and international fairs and in cooperation with our partners.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT is of increasing importance to the fashion industry and an integral part of the Saga Furs Creative Hub's activities. New technologies that further the optimal use and reuse of raw materials enhance the fur industry's responsibility. Saga Furs organizes seminars where visitors can learn more about certification, traceability, and the circular economy.

4.1. Fur's journey from the farm to retail

MOST FINNISH FARMS are located in four provinces in Ostrobothnia, but there are FIFUR member farms in almost all Finnish provinces as far north as Lapland. In 2021, FIFUR member farms produced approximately 900,000 fox pelts, 850,000 mink pelts and 87,000 Finnraccoon pelts.

TO AVOID STRESSFUL TRANSPORTATION, fur animals are put down on farms in accordance with regulations. The animals are then pelted, and each pelt is supplied with a bar code that enables it to be traced back to its farm of origin. This origin information is important, because apparel manufacturers and fashion houses have an increasing number of customers who want to know the exact manufacturing and supply chains and raw materials of their products.

EACH PELT'S ORIGIN DATA can be transferred from this barcode to a Saga Trac tag that retains the data throughout the various steps of the entire production process. Saga Trac is an RFID-based solution that makes it possible for consumers to trace the origin of fur apparel all the way down to the fur farm. This information can be read with a mobile phone by scanning a code attached to the product in question. Transparent production chains are an important part of responsible operations.

PELTS are transported from farms to Saga Furs Oyj's facilities in Vantaa, where they are sorted and sold in fur auctions held four to five times a year. From Vantaa, the furs continue their journey to processing sites around the world.

DURING THE PANDEMIC, Saga Furs Oyj made a successful leap into the world of online auctioning. In the future, the company will be hosting both traditional and online auctions.

FUR APPAREL is produced in several corners of the world, including China, Italy, Turkey, Greece, and North America, and then delivered to stores all over the world. Fur apparel manufacturers in Finland continue the tradition of making fur apparel under their own Fur Trade Federation.

IN TODAY'S FASHION world where "old is the new black", top designers in the US and Europe have brought vintage furs back into the limelight. Designers transform vintage pieces into entirely new designs by combining different types of fur from old items of clothing.

REFURBISHMENT has always been a part of the fur retail market. Recycling is part of today's circular economy and an antidote to fast fashion and faux fur. Consumers are increasingly aware of climate change and the wastage and negative effects of today's fast fashion industry, and many are now looking for new, sustainable products to add to their wardrobes.

REFURBISHED and recycled fur meets the demands of responsible fashion and is also easier on the wallet. This may make it possible for young consumers to buy fur apparel that they might otherwise deem unaffordable, thereby making fur more acceptable among the younger generation. With proper care, cleaning and storage, a fur coat can last for decades, and reshaping it to current styles extends its lifecycle even further.

5. Farm certifications for animal welfare

FIFUR Finnish Standards, the voluntary certification system of the Finnish Fur Breeders' Association, is the most comprehensive certification system in the global fur industry. Under continuous development, the system scrutinizes the quality of operations in a variety of areas. Certification is the industry's way of self-monitoring and complements official supervision. One of its main goals is to maintain and improve the well-being of the animals on Finnish fur farms.

CERTIFICATION is always subject to the current Animal Welfare Act, the Animal Welfare Decree, and the Fur Animal Decree. A farm can attain certification when it meets all legislative requirements in addition to the farm certification criteria. The certificate is valid indefinitely but subject to annual audits.

5.1. Fur farm certifications in Finland – background and current status

FIFUR INTRODUCED its certification system for fur farms in 2005, but a self-monitoring project and quality manual spearheaded by FIFUR's veterinarian were already in place in 1996. They are generally considered to be industry's first steps towards certification. The actual certification criteria were defined jointly by representatives of the fur industry, the Department of Animal Science at the University of Helsinki, ProAgria, the Finnish Animal Protection Association, the Union of Finnish Professional Fishers and a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland.

THE FIRST 30 fur farms were certified in 2006. In addition to the requirements of current legislation, the certification includes criteria set by the industry itself. These are updated constantly on the basis of stakeholder requirements and the feedback received in actual daily work. Criteria that extend beyond the legislative requirements are related to animal health (plasmacytosis testing, vaccinations), feed management, breeding of fur animals, and the animal trade, among other subjects. For most criteria, compliance necessitates continuous

documentation by the producer, which helps to reinforce good practices and to identify and rectify shortcomings.

IN 2021, the certification system already encompassed 552 companies, which translates to 95% of all member farms. Almost 100% of fox farming (blue and silver foxes) and 100% of Finnraccoon farming takes place on certified farms. For mink, the certification rate is currently 95%.

5.2. Certification criteria and general certification requirements

THE FUR FARM CERTIFICATION SYSTEM includes 36 farm certification criteria and involves the inspection of more than 80 issues. Periods 1 and 2 have 11 criteria each, and Period 3 has 12 criteria. In addition, 2 criteria common to all three periods are evaluated in each audit.

THE farm certification criteria are divided into the following subsets:

1. **Animal health and welfare**
2. **Production conditions**
3. **Feed management**
4. **Selective breeding**
5. **Environmental management**
6. **Farm hygiene**
7. **Training and preparation for exceptional circumstances**

THE WELFUR SYSTEM is an important part of the FIFUR Finnish Standards certification. It is based on the *Welfare Quality®* protocol, an independent, scientific method for evaluating the well-being of farm animals. Each audit involves an inspection of one third of the farm certification criteria and a simultaneous *WelFur* assessment according to the period during which the inspection occurs. If any shortcomings are found, the farm is given a short time period to take appropriate measures, which the auditor then inspects. The more serious the fault, the shorter the alloted time period. If the required actions have not been taken by the deadline, the farm's certification is revoked or set to Dormant.

THE CRITERIA and their subsections are divided into the three different seasons of one calendar year. These periods are determined by species-specific *WelFur* protocols that evaluate animal well-being in the different production seasons.

FIFUR'S GENERAL certification requirements include an annual audit of each certified farm. Audits in consecutive years take place in different production seasons at different times of the year. The first period is in January-February, the second in May-July and the third in October-November. The auditor conducts both the farm certification audit and the *WelFur* assessment during the same work day.

ONCE THE FARM has been evaluated over three different *WelFur* periods, it is given an overall *WelFur* rating specific to each animal species and production site. In other words, the same farm is evaluated three times, once for each period of the *WelFur* protocol. These evaluations are then used to calculate an animal-species specific overall *WelFur* rating for the farm. If the same company has separate production locations, each separate location is given its own *WelFur* rating. FIFUR's certificate requires that an audit covers all production locations and fur animal species registered under the same business ID. In other words, a company cannot retain different quality levels at its production sites but instead must meet the certification requirements at all its locations.

ALL FARM CERTIFICATION CRITERIA are audited over the course of three years. There are several annual audits, and they are scheduled at different times of the year. This way, the farm is observed during different production seasons, which provides a more accurate picture of the farm's total operations. During the first audit period of the year, the farm only has breeding animals. In the second period the females have offspring, whose growth is then assessed in the third period.

FOR A FARM to retain its certification, it needs to achieve an acceptable total rating from its *WelFur* assessments. A farm that fails its *WelFur* assessments is not eligible for a *FIFUR Finnish Standards* certificate either. The goal is to have the *WelFur* ratings of certified farms increase as the welfare of each animal species is evaluated repeatedly. Ratings growth would substantiate that certified farms are mindful of animal welfare and take measures proven to improve it.

ALL CERTIFIED FARMS have been audited annually from 2018 onwards. The audits are conducted by the research group Kannuksen tutkimustila Luova Oy, which works as a subcontractor for the international auditing company, Baltic Control. FIFUR owns 38% of Luova's share capital, the rest being owned by the Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK), and The Federation of Education in Central Ostrobothnia (Kpedu). FIFUR's ownership does not affect the impartiality of audits.

FROM OCTOBER 2020 to the summer of 2022, farm certification audits were conducted remotely by telephone. This exception was due to the fact that minks are susceptible to coronavirus infection, which meant that the Finnish Food Authority had instructed all farms to minimise all incoming and outgoing traffic. *WelFur* evaluations were also conducted remotely in accordance with the joint decision of Fur Europe and the participant countries of the *WelFur* system.

FOR REFERENCE, the complete *WelFur* protocols for fox, mink and Finnraccoon are available in English on the following pages:

Fox protocol
▶ *www.fureurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/WelFur_fox_protocol_web_edition.pdf*

Mink protocol
▶ *www.fureurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Mink_protocol_final_web_edition_light.pdf*

Finnraccoon protocol
▶ *www.sustainablefur.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WelFur-Finnraccoon-Protocol.pdf*

FINNRACCOON breeding in Finland is subject to a permit tied to an exception granted by the European Commission. The farm-specific requirements set by the Commission are included in the current farm certification criteria and in the farm-specific permits issued by the Regional Administrative Agency of Southern Finland. Licensed farms certified by FIFUR are the only sites in EU allowed to breed Finnraccoon.

THE EXEMPTION to the regulations on invasive alien species includes only the certification criteria for Finnish farms (so-called IAS criteria), which are audited at each assessment together with other farm certification criteria belonging to the same period. Compliance with the permit terms of Finnraccoon farming is also monitored by the authorities (the Regional Administrative Agency, AVI). The European Commission's own evaluation teams can also visit Finnraccoon farms for inspection purposes.

IN JUNE 2021, the Regional Administration Office of Southern Finland updated the national breeding permit for Finnraccoon in accordance with EU regulations on invasive alien species. The original permit was issued on January 31, 2019, and the update included corrections and clarifications requested by FIFUR to the permit terms as well as an update to current farm information. The permit is valid until 31 January 2049.

5.3. Decision-making in farm certification

THE CONTENT of the certification system is supervised and developed by the animal welfare and certification committee appointed by the FIFUR board. The committee meets about 5–6 times a year and includes FIFUR officials, a veterinarian, fur breeders and Luova Oy representatives.

THE ASSIGNED AUDITOR reports each farm visit in writing to FIFUR and has the authority to make farm-specific routine decisions. Farm-specific decisions made by the animal welfare and certification committee are primarily based on the auditor's observations on the farm. Any shortcomings discovered by officials also factor into the decision on eventual certification. Any observed lack of compliance with legislation or official regulations is considered a lack of compliance with certification requirements. If the producer is suspected of an animal protection violation related to the keeping of fur animals, the farm's certificate is set to Dormant for the duration of the legal proceedings. Violation of the Animal Protection Act is confirmed by an animal protection decision issued to the farm or by a legally binding decision of the district court.

IF NECESSARY, the committee can change the certificate status to Dormant. The eventual annulment and/or termination of a certificate are within the powers of the FIFUR board.

Year	Dormant*	Annulled	Reactivated
2021	13	24	13
2020	10	1	4
2019	15	10	16
2018	12	1	9
2017	4	11	9
2016	15	5	5
2015	1	1	0
yht.	70	53	56

Table 1. Dormant and revoked certificates per calendar year
**) The "Dormant" column contains the number of facilities whose certificate status has been changed to Dormant that year.*

5.4. Development of the FIFUR Finnish Standards system

DEVELOPMENT of the system is led by animal welfare and certification committee, which has been appointed by FIFUR's board. Central areas of development involve the welfare of animals and the environment as well as the welfare of fur breeders and fur farm employees.

THE CRITERIA are updated regularly to improve work methods at fur farms. Changes to criteria are made by a decision of the board, based on proposals prepared by the committee.

RESEARCH on fur animals focuses on animal welfare and the environmental effects of fur farming. These are both areas of interest to the certification program.

ONE OF THE LATEST ADDITIONS to the program is the body mass index (BMI) for blue foxes. The BMI measures the fatness of blue foxes by relating each animal's weight to its body length. There is an upper limit set for the body mass index of the animals which are to be pelted, and this limit is evaluated annually. Breeding animals have both an upper and lower limit. The limit's aim is to steer blue fox production towards the optimal range of the body mass index where the needs of the animals' biological annual cycle are secured without inducing obesity.

5.5. Laws and regulations

LAWS AND THE REGULATIONS supplementing them set the basic requirements for the rearing of fur animals. Compliance with legislation is monitored by the authorities.

5.5.1. Wellbeing of fur animals

REGULATIONS on animal welfare impose requirements on those who keep fur animals. These requirements cover the sheltering, care, treatment, handling, and transport of animals. Current animal protection legislation is available in the "F" register of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (in Finnish):
▶ *mmm.fi/lainsaadanto/elaimet-elintarvikkeet-ja-terveys/lainsaadanto/f-rekisteri*

THE BROCHURE *"Compilation on fur animal - animal protection legislation"* prepared by the Finnish Food Authority covers the regulations on the keeping and welfare of fur animals (in Finnish):
▶ *www.ruokavirasto.fi/globalassets/tietoa-meista/asiointi/oppaat-ja-lomakkeet/viljelijat/elainten-pito/elainten-suojelu-ja-kuljetus/turkiselain-elain-suojelulainsaadantoa-koottuna.pdf*

AN OVERALL REFORM of the Animal Protection Act has been pending for over ten years. FIFUR believes that it is important that the Animal Welfare Act and the regulations on the protection of fur animals be completed during the term of the current government. FIFUR has provided the required statements for the legislative draft, and work on the legislation has continued in 2022. Because investments reach far into the future, everyone in primary production needs legislation that is stable and predictable. At the end of the review period in autumn 2022, the Animal Welfare Act was still being debated in parliament. Once the law is approved, the Government will issue a fur animal decree that has been prepared in parallel with the law. FIFUR has provided statements to help in the preparation of this decree as well.

5.5.2. Feeds and by-products

CURRENT LEGISLATION on feeds and by-products is compiled in the "H" directory of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (in Finnish):
▶ *http://mmm.fi/lainsaadanto/elaimet-elintarvikkeet-ja-terveys/lainsaadanto/h-rekisteri*

5.5.3. Wellbeing of the environment

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION aims to promote a healthy environment and ecologically sustainable development. Legislation and instructions are available on the Ministry of the Environment's website (in Finnish):
▶ *https://ym.fi/ymparistonsuojelun-lainsaadanto-ja-ohjeet*

5.5.3.1. Environmental permits for fur farms

THE ACTIVITIES related to the environmental protection of individual farms are specified in the environmental permits granted to them. Environmental permits are issued by the municipal authority for smaller farms and the Regional Administrative Agency (AVI) for larger farms.

AN ENVIRONMENTAL PERMIT describes and provides instructions for fur farm operations, including:

- **the scope of operations, animal facilities and production**
- **the farm's location and surroundings**
- **the storage and utilization of manure, urine and waste water**
- **handling of carcasses of animals that have died on their own** (e.g. licensed incinerator and the processing of generated ash)
- **other waste and its handling**
- **fuel storage**
- **traffic resulting from operations** (e.g. feed transport)
- **measures to decrease the environmental load** (e.g. raised manure trays, watertight manure trays and closed containers for liquids, sufficiently long eaves and gutters, watertight trays of feed silos, waste water treatment of maintenance buildings, waste storage and recycling, etc.)

THE MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT has issued guidelines *(Appendix 6)* for the processing of environmental permits for fur farms. Finalized in 2018, these guidelines steer the environmental permit decision-making process to ensure consistency in permit practices.

6. Continuous communication with stakeholders

THE FUR INDUSTRY is open and active in its communications in various channels in accordance with its strategy and communication policy. The association publishes its Turkistalous (Fur industry) magazine through Aikakausmedia ry, and also has several websites *(fifur.fi, turkiskasvattajat.fi, theothersideofthecoin.fi,)* and an active presence on social media to provide a truthful and well-rounded view of the fur industry. The main themes of communication are in line with the themes of the strategy.

PUBLIC DEBATE on the fur industry and the welfare, health and breeding of animals is part of the business environment. It is always important to discuss animal welfare with various stakeholders, even if their opinions are not always in favor of maintaining and developing the fur industry. These discussions can provide the industry with important information needed for the planning and execution of future development projects. As part of FIFUR's ISO 9001 certificate, we regularly survey our stakeholders on their experiences with our operations. We also enlist an independent research company to conduct an annual survey with the general public to hear their views on certified fur farming in Finland. In 2022, 50% of Finns supported domestic, certified fur farming.

A focus on producer communications due to Covid

DURING THE YEARS 2021 and 2022, FIFUR concentrated in particular on communicating with producers and providing advice. Instant messaging channels were used to send corona protection instructions and information on the prevailing situation up to several time a week. The director of research at FIFUR and a veterinarian prepared several extensive sets of instructions on how to keep corona out of mink farms. The advisory services provided to producers are an essential part of FIFUR's sustainability work. By the end of November 2022, there are no confirmed cases of coronavirus infection in mink and Finnracoon farms in Finland, which gives producers some peace of mind. The difficult market situation also created an increased need for internal communications to supply producers with enhanced financial and funding advice. First, the economic effects of the corona pandemic complicated matters for the international fur trade. Then, the Russian attack on Ukraine and the closure of the Russian market in 2022 exacerbated the situation further. To support producers, FIFUR organized longer financial advice projects and individual training sessions both remotely and in person. Remote *"Producer question hours"* with simultaneous interpretation were introduced in 2022.

FIFUR plays an important role in looking after the interests of the producers, and in keeping decision-makers and the authorities up-to-date on issues related to the industry. Representatives from FIFUR actively met with decision-makers from different fields in 2021-2022, either in online meetings or face-to-face when the corona situation allowed.

THE OSTROCLUSTER project for the Swedish Ostrobothnia Fur Animal Farmers Association (Svenska Österbottens Pälsdjursodlarförening SÖP rf) was completed in the review period at the end of 2021. Funded by the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Ostrobothnia, this project looked into developing a fur cluster in Ostrobothnia and to provide tools to do so. The review applied the so-called LARS method, which evaluates the mutual cooperation of the various actors in relation to expectations and actual experiences. Steven Frostdahl from SÖP served as the project manager alongside his own duties. In May 2022, FIFUR organized a follow-up seminar on the project.

7. Social responsibility

FIFUR PROVIDES training, events, support and services to its members to help continue the tradition of responsible fur farming in Finland. The well-being of the animals starts with the well-being of the producer. If a producer is incapacitated by illness or financial problems, this of course has repercussions on their work.

ONE of the association's more important tasks is to take care of its members and help them manage their workload. A good example of our services is our confidential network of support people, which is free of charge. Producers in financial difficulties have their own assigned support person who can help with bank negotiations, etc.

PRODUCERS often trust the officials, veterinarians, and the entire field staff of FIFUR and go to them with a wide range of issues about the farm, not just questions about caring for the animals. When it comes to acquiring the various permits, the association offers help to producers to ensure that all permitting issues are handled correctly. Regional field advisors also provide fur breeders with information on current issues and organize training.

FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS to promote the psychological well-being of producers could not be organized because of corona-related restrictions and other protective guidelines, particularly in 2021. To try to mitigate the stress caused by all this uncertainty, FIFUR prepared a number of guidelines on protecting people from corona and passed on the current information about the situation as well as instructions provided by the authorities. Several info sessions were held for producers on subjects such as corona prevention and the corona vaccine project for mink launched by FIFUR in 2020. The vaccine project is described in more detail in the research section.

DENMARK'S HASTY and politically controversial decision to end mink breeding caused quite understandable concern among Finnish producers and led to the mass slaughter of around 17 million Danish mink in November 2020. Since spring 2020, FIFUR has cooperated closely with the authorities and research institutes on coronavirus related issues to ensure that decision-making in Finland is based on research and avoids overreactions.

THE FUR INDUSTRY has plenty of job opportunities that do not require fluency in Finnish or Swedish. The industry employs many immigrants, which contributes to their assimilation and integration into Finnish society. In 2022, the industry also employed Ukrainian refugees from the war.

7.1. Local responsibility

THE FINNISH FUR INDUSTRY is concentrated in four Ostrobothnian regions with good operating conditions and surroundings for rearing fur animals. A total of 95 percent of Finnish farms are located in a core production area consisting of Southern, Central, and Northern Ostrobothnia and Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia. There are also a handful of fur farms in southern, eastern and northern Finland.

THE TOTAL NUMBER of fur farms has gradually decreased over the decades, and production has shifted into larger entities. The trend is the same as in other livestock sectors where farms have decreased in number but grown in size and in terms of the number of animals. The number of fur farms in Finland was highest in the 1980s, totaling more than 5,000. At the time, fur production was merely a part-time occupation for a significant amount of producers. In today's industry where success requires dedication, responsibility and professionalism, the vast majority of fur producers in Finland are full-time entrepreneurs.

THIS INCREASINGLY professional approach has also given rise to a network of specialized service providers. For example, feed is produced in large quantities in regional plants, which benefit from economies of scale and short transport distances. Pelting centers and their machinery in turn lighten the workload of the otherwise labor-intensive pelting phase.

7.2. The FIFUR Group as an employer

THE FINNISH FUR BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION FIFUR employs about 9 people annually. 66% of the association's employees are women, 34% are men. Fevia Fin Lab Oy Ab, an accredited laboratory and pharmaceutical wholesaler wholly owned by the association, employs 9 people annually. 89% of Fevia Lab's employees are women, 11% are men. FIFUR and Fevia Lab offer their employees excellent benefits, such as comprehensive occupational health services and an exercise and wellness package.

THE AUCTION company's key figures are available in Saga Furs Oyj's annual reports.

8. Financial responsibility

8.1. Export

THE FUR PRODUCTION INDUSTRY plays a significant economic role in Finland. Almost all of the industry's production is exported, and pricing is entirely market dependent as fur producers do not receive government production subsidies. Saga Furs Oyj's brokerage sales totaled 272 million euros during the 2021–2022 period. The industry's cyclical nature is apparent in the auction company's brokerage sales, which have varied from 157 to 981 million euros per year between 2012 and 2022. Total sales for the entire 10 year period are 4.75 billion euros.

8.2. Taxes

IN 2021, the fur industry generated 196 to 303 euros in taxes per inhabitant in the five largest producer counties, with Uusikaarlepyy leading the table with 303 euros. The share of fur farming in the municipality's tax revenue was 6.5% in Evijärvi, 7.2% in Halsua, 5.7% in Kaustinen, and 8.2% in Lappajärvi and Uusikaarlepyy.

THANKS to these revenues, many rural municipalities are able to finance much needed basic services such as daycare, schools, and elder care *(Appendix 1)*. The fur industry's taxes and payments to society totaled 87 million euros in 2021. Municipal taxes totaled 22 million euros.

8.3. The economic significance of the industry in Finland

THE FUR PRODUCTION INDUSTRY has a significant economic role to play. Despite the lengthy economic recession of the 2010s, the fur industry has generated export and tax revenues and provided jobs.

AS MENTIONED earlier, Finland's fur exports have fluctuated considerably in value in recent years. The value of brokerage sales varied between 400 and 500 million euros on average in the 2010s. The most important export destinations are in Asia.

Financial advice for producers

AS NOTED in the section on communication, producers needed financial and funding advice due to the economic difficulties caused by corona. Association representatives and regional fur economy advisers have worked out practical financing solutions and provided producers with advice. Remote training sessions have been provided in Finnish and Swedish. Representatives of FIFUR and Saga Furs have also supported producers in negotiations with banks and other financiers. The association is also running the Turvaverkko (Safety Network) project, which is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland. This project aims to improve the financial risk management of fur farms in an industry prone to market fluctuations.

8.4. Economic fluctuations are part of the fur industry

MAJOR ECONOMIC fluctuations are part of the fur industry. Fox and mink pelt prices vary significantly from cycle to cycle. Looking at the data collected over more than 30 years, there is at least one regularly occurring feature: the steeper the decline, the faster the rise.

IN THE EARLY 1980S, the demand for fox was high and production increased tenfold in just a few years. Prices dropped during the latter half of the decade due to oversupply and a global recession. In the autumn of 1989, the auction company sold all furs at the price the market was willing to pay. Production dropped to a third of the volume of peak years. The market then began to show signs of recovery.

WHEN THE WORLD ECONOMY showed signs of a slow recovery in the early 1990s, the production of fox pelts began to increase. China also began to develop as a fox pelt exporting country alongside Russia, which dominated the market at the time. When the ruble collapsed at the end of the decade, the price of fox pelts plunged sharply downwards.

THE MARKET recovered quickly in the early 2000s. The increase in the production of fox pelts increased international competition, which caused the price to drop again. Chinese production could not meet the growing demand, and the price began a long and steep rise in autumn 2009, reaching its all time high in 2013. The price then took a more dramatic dive than ever before due to overproduction in Finland and China and China's economic difficulties.

PRODUCERS have decreased their production from the record numbers of preceding years, but they still believe that tides will eventually turn in their favour. However, the unstable market situation, the pandemic, and the war in Ukraine make it difficult to plan for the future.

9. Circular economy in the fur industry

FUR IS A RECYCLABLE and durable natural material that can be used by several generations over decades if properly stored - either as is or refashioned according to the latest trends. Fur production as a whole is a prime example of a circular economy.

THE MAIN GOAL of breeding fur animals is to attain high-quality fur pelts. But, what is left over from the process also has value. To avoid anything going to waste, nearly 100% of the fur animal is put to use. During pelting, the fat is scraped from the pelt and body. This is then used to make industrial grease and biofuel. This animal fat produces sulfur-free biodiesel. The remainder is turned into meat protein and bone meal, which is used as a calcium and protein supplement in feed for fur animals.

THE NUTRIENT-RICH FEED designed for fur animals is created from the by-products from food processing. Approximately 40 percent of the feed comes from by-products from meat processing, with another approximately 20 percent originating from by-products of fish processing. By-products that are unsuitable for human consumption can still be used as animal feed. This makes meat waste a valuable commodity that a meat processor can sell to the feed industry instead of merely throwing away. This saves costs and keeps the nutrients in circulation.

ONCE FEED becomes manure, it can be used as a fertilizer. Every year, fur animals produce about 120,000 tons of nutrient-rich manure containing a lot of phosphorus and nitrogen. Although fields in areas with livestock often have too much phosphorus and nitrogen, many farming areas lack these necessary nutrients. The fur industry is constantly researching how the phosphorus in manure from fur animals could be processed more cost-effectively for transport to phosphorus-poor areas. Fur animal manure has a much higher phosphorus content than that of other farm animals. Most of the manure is used as compost in arable farming.

PHOSPHORUS is a diminishing natural resource that the European Union has added to its list of 20 critical raw materials. Both the EU and the Finnish fur industry have invested in nutrient recycling, and several research and development projects are underway to improve the utilization of manure. All manure and urine is collected on farms and processed for further use.

RUSSIA'S ATTACK on Ukraine has raised concerns about the supply of the most important nutrients needed in arable farming, namely phosphorus, potassium, and especially nitrogen. In addition to phosphorus, fur animal manure also contains substantial amounts of nitrogen. Unfortunately, nitrogen tends to vanish into thin air, so to speak, in the form of nitrogen dioxide and ammonia in all livestock production. Nitrogen dioxide is a greenhouse gas, and ammonia causes acidification of the environment. Working with international fur operators, FIFUR has built a life cycle analysis tool to allow the environmental impact of the fur indus-

try to be determined and changes to be made. This tool includes climate effects and the factors affecting them. An advisory package was created in 2022 for the producers in the Paw Print project on the simple actions they can take on their fur farms to reduce their environmental load. This work continues.

FORAGE fish caught as food for fur animals removes significant amounts of phosphorus and nitrogen from the Baltic Sea. A study by Agrifood Research Finland *(MTT, Appendix 2)* estimated that the amount of nutrients removed adds up to 155 tons of phosphorus and 1,080 tons of nitrogen per year. For comparison, the nutrient load on the Baltic Sea from wastewater treatment plants in the capital city region was 26 tons of phosphorus (29 tons in 2020) and 1067 tons of nitrogen (1134 tons in 2020) in 2021 *(Appendix 3)*.

RECYCLED fur farming nutrients and waste is used to produce energy. Manure can be processed by composting it in a biogas plant, among other processes, and then further refined into fertilizer. This retains the nutrients for further use and simultaneously generates renewable energy in the form of biogas. Biogas is used in the production of electricity, heat and transport fuel *(Appendix 4)*. In Ostrobothnia, a local energy company converts agricultural waste into biogas for use in heating and to fuel gas-powered cars. The Finnish Food Authority has included the growth medium created from fur animal manure in its list of organic fertilizers. This product provides enough nutrients for an entire growing season. It does a good job on binding water, which makes it a good choice for urban vegetable plots and for balconies and roof terraces.

FUR farms have huge potential for solar energy production as the roofs of shadehouses are excellent locations for solar panels. At its best, the environmentally-friendly electricity produced by solar energy increases industry competitiveness, which makes it an essential part of sustainable development in the fur industry. However, electricity produced by the sun presents challenges in storing it for use. At the farm level, electricity consumption is highest in the winter months, when solar energy is hard to come by. When the regulation on the sale of small-scale solar energy production was revised at the beginning of 2022, the prediction was that the production of such electricity would become much more common on fur farms. With the prevailing prices for electricity and with the electricity companies adopting the so-called hourly payment model, the sale of electricity to the public grid has been flexible and profitable for small producers. The farm can also use the electricity itself. Electricity storage technology is also improving, which may further increase the production of solar electricity.

9.1. Ensuring national emergency supply

FINLAND must build up its national emergency supplies and better enable local energy production and the circular use of nutrients. FIFUR is committed to playing its part in ensuring national emergency supplies.

WITH INTERNATIONAL crises making fertilizer production in Europe more difficult, nutrients from manure should be made more available locally by enabling these nutrient reserves to be reinvested through national-wide solutions. This would all support national emergency supplies. According to the Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), there is enough manure in Finland for all the phosphorus requirements of the country's professional plant cultivation and a significant proportion of the nitrogen requirements. It merely needs to be used more efficiently *(Appendix 5)*.

IT SHOULD BE possible to set up biogas facilities on farms with livestock, as long as the farm has a valid environmental permit. This would allow biogas facilities to become standard practice for handling manure on a farm.

SOLAR ENERGY COLLECTORS could be installed on fur farm shadehouses for producing electricity either while fur is being produced or as re-purposed structures after production has ceased. The total combined useful surface area of shadehouses across Finland is about 200 hectares (2,000,000 m^2) when collectors are installed on one side. This doubles to about 4,000,000 m^2 when collectors are installed on both sides. Assuming 100 W/m^2 is produced, the solar electricity potential is 200 MW, which corresponds to forty 5 MW wind turbines. This all means the fur industry can offer alternatives for energy self-sufficiency.

FIFUR is actively investigating opportunities for producers to leverage solar energy. One model would be to rent the roofs of shadehouses on fur farms to companies that use solar energy to produce electricity. After all, the building permits and installation equipment are already available.

10. Animal health and Fureva

10.1. Animal health

THE OVERALL HEALTH of the animals on our farms and the diseases detected have remained at the same level as previous years. The coronavirus pandemic greatly increased the risk of disease, but no infections have been detected among fur animals so far due to producers taking good disease control measures.

VETERINARY WORK focused heavily on prevention in 2021. The biggest risk to the health of fur animals in recent years has been the coronavirus as mink and Finnraccoon can catch SARS-Cov-2. Producers have received guidance on how to prevent the virus from spreading to farms during the various phases and procedures of production. The Finnish Food Authority, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, and the University of Helsinki collaborated on creating these guidelines.

IN 2021, the Finnish Food Authority continued the previous year's monitoring of mink and Finnraccoon farms for the coronavirus. The Finnish Food Authority had examined more than 16,000 corona virus samples by the end of November 2022. All the samples tested negative. These coronavirus monitoring efforts will continue as mandated by the EU Commission.

FOR ALL SPECIES of fur animals, the number of offspring in 2021 was higher than the previous year. The unstable market caused by the pandemic contributed to more farms than usual taking a year-long break from production in 2021. Others transferred their animals to the production facilities of other companies for care. Since the market remained unpredictable in 2022, producers reduced the number of animals in production across all species.

FIFUR currently employs two veterinarians who assist breeders in animal health-related issues and their prevention. During the operational year, these veterinarians investigated the causes of the diseases that animals are catching and also worked on ensuring the supply of the veterinary medicine for fur animals despite the logistic hindrances of the pandemic.

ANTIMICROBIAL DRUGS used on fur animals are always as narrow-spectrum as possible. Medication is based on breakpoints to ensure that the treatment is effective. Most of the antimicrobials used on farms can be administered in the feed. Most medicated feeds are mixed at feed centres, which have the relevant equipment to ensure that the medicated feed is uniform.

ANTIMICROBIAL use is monitored and recorded annually. The goal is to reduce the use of antimicrobials through preventive health care and vaccinations.

THE ANIMAL DISEASES IN FINLAND 2021 publication from the Finnish Food Authority contains information on the status of animal disease in Finland *(Appendix 7)*.

10.2. Fureva healthcare system

FUREVA IS A HEALTHCARE SYSTEM tailored specifically for fur farms and managed and funded by FIFUR. Fureva healthcare visits focus on the health and well-being of the animals and on improving the productivity of the farm by improving the health and well-being of the animals. In essence, these regular healthcare visits check all the animals on the farm and the structures in the immediate environment. The visits review the records of the animals on the farm and provide guidance on keeping these records when necessary. After the visit, a healthcare plan for the next period is written down for the producer. Compliance with this plan is then checked in future farm visits. More than 100 producers are part of the Fureva healthcare system.

TO JOIN THE FUREVA SYSTEM, a fur breeder and a veterinarian need to sign a health care agreement. This agreement is then registered with the data controller, where both parties can access the data. Within the framework of this healthcare system, there are 1 to 4 healthcare visits of fur farms over the course of a year, with the average being two visits. In 2021, on-site visits could not be made due to the coronavirus pandemic but will resume in autumn 2022.

THE RESULTS of *WelFur* evaluations can be leveraged in future to develop the healthcare system both at the farm level and more comprehensively in the health and well-being of fur animals. When a producer receives guidance from veterinarians as well, that guidance carries more weight and is more effective. The information collected during a *WelFur* evaluation serves as a basis for providing farm-specific advice to promote animal welfare. FIFUR staff and regional fur industry advisors are also available to provide such counseling. During this review period, FIFUR has further increased its counseling resources. To ensure impartiality, counseling can never be provided by the same person who conducted a farm's *WelFur* evaluation. *WelFur* advisors are specifically trained to handle advisory work. in The *WelFur* evaluation reports for each farm are species-specific, and the advisors help producers identify steps that can further improve each animal's welfare.

LAUNCHED IN 2015, the Fureva system is being constantly developed and improved. The goal is to have the majority of producers in the system and to increase the number of veterinarians who perform farm visits.

11. Research and development

FIFUR INVESTS heavily in research. The research database of the association contains a couple of thousand studies on fur animals and on responsible breeding extending back decades. The aim is to use the existing information and research to develop the fur industry, and to improve its competitiveness and increase its success. FIFUR uses and shares information, looks for networks, enters into partnerships and initiates and coordinates research projects to acquire new, reliable and scientifically researched information to serve the industry.

FIFUR has included the following research goals in its new fur trade strategy:

1. **Improving the energy self-sufficiency of fur farms**
2. **Developing the processing of manure to use nutrients more efficiently**
3. **Developing feed practices that improve animal welfare and support carbon neutrality**
4. **Doing more environmental footprint caluclations for farms**

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT TOPIC in 2021 was research for a Covid vaccine for minks. The vaccine project, which began in December 2020, together with a research group at the University of Helsinki, continued throughout 2021. An application for a temporary use permit for the vaccine was submitted in the spring of 2021, with several different vaccine versions and dosages being tested in the summer of 2021. After the summer, the focus moved on to producing the actual vaccine. Meanwhile, the vaccine antigen was produced all year long. FIFUR and the fur industry provided all the financing for the vaccine project.

THE FINNISH FOOD AUTHORITY granted use permits for the first production run of vaccines in two phases, and the vaccination of breeding mink in Finland was given the green light just before Christmas 2021. In January and February 2022, FIFUR member farms became the first producers in Europe to vaccinate their breeding mink females.

A FEW OTHER RESEARCH projects kicked off in 2021, namely the *Fox Breeder (Ketunkasvattaja - KAKE)* project funded by the Rural Development Fund and the *Pawprint (Tassunjälki)* project. FIFUR and TTS *(Työtehoseura)* collaborated on the KAKE project. This project look into best practices for blue fox production and attempts to reduce the workload on producers and to improve productivity and efficiency. The project also looks to investigate how different work practices impact animal welfare.

THE PAWPRINT PROJECT looks to build and enhance networks to recycle nutrients from manure and to further the creation of a new business that promotes the recycling of nutrients from fur animal manure. The project also seeks to determine the farm-specific environmental footprints of the 30 fur farms taking part in the project. A practical result produced by the *Pawprint* was the guideline: *Ympäristövinkkejä turkistiloille (Environmental Tips for Fur Farms)*. This guidance includes information on how practices on farms impact the environment and instructions on how to reduce these environmental impacts. The Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Enviroment (ELY) in Southern Ostrobothnia funded the project under its 2020-2022 Nutrient Recycling Pilot Program.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PROJECTS for the fur industry completed recently are as follows: development projects for *WelFur* protocols for minks, blue foxes and Finnraccoon, research/development projects on foot health, body mass index, and fur biting as part of the health of blue foxes, and studies on the rearing and amino acid requirements of foxes and minks. In addition, there were environmental development projects on improving the circulation of nutrients and reducing the load on the environment and the climate, and *WebSampo* projects aiming to improve blue fox breeding programmes. Two other critical advisory projects were the Covid-19 crisis advisory project funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland and the *Turvaverkko (Safety Network)*, which focused on providing fur farms with financial advice.

11.1. Coronavirus measures in the fur industry

FIFUR began to hold regular weekly meetings with the Finnish Food Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in April 2020 after the first corona cases were detected on Dutch fur farms. At the time this report was written, these regular meetings have been organized for more than two years. The veterinarians for the regional administrations where the fur industry operatews joined these meetings. In addition, representatives from health care districts and chief physicians from municipalities with a significant fur industry presence occasionally joined in. These meetings always review the results of follow-up studies from the previous week and other current coronavirus issues. At the end of 2020/beginning of 2021, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, the Finnish Food Authority, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, and the Regional State Administrative Agency provided feedback that was used to draw a diagramme on how all parties should act at different levels of risk. This diagramme was updated in January 2022.

Discussions with chief physicians from health care districts and municipalities

CORONAVIRUS TESTING AND QUARANTINE procedures for employees on fur farms and seasonal workers in particular are a key part of preventive measures against the coronavirus. FIFUR collaborated in the autumn of 2020 with the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare to create guidelines on testing seasonal workers entering the country, quarantine practices and testing while people are under quarantine. These guidelines were updated in the autumn of 2021 before the pelting season started. FIFUR joined a number of stand-up medical care district meetings on corona. We also met with chief physicians from medical care districts and municipalities to discuss how to make sure that fur farm employees and producers have access to coronavirus testing per the guidelines of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Finnish Food Authority. Unfortunately, there were a number of instances where municipalities did not have enough information on the right of fur producers to get corona tests.

International meetings

FIFUR also joined a number of meetings on corona organized by the International Fur Federation (IFF) and Fur Europe. There were many cases where Finland was a step ahead of other attendees. In addition, the models and guidelines that have proven to be successful in Finland were widely used in other European countries as well. Attendees also shared a lot of information about the virus itself in these meetings, including on how it spreads, the symptoms that appear in animals, and what control measures worked elsewhere and which ones didn't. This was all very valuable information when the Finnish prevention program was created.

Contingency group

AT THE REQUEST OF THE AUTHORITIES, FIFUR and Furfix, a subsidiary of Saga Furs, mobilised a 20 person contingency group in November/December 2021. The group was prepared to move anywhere in Finland within 48 hours. The group was equipped with protective hoods, overalls, boots, mink gloves and the required tools for putting down mink. The primary task of the group was to put down the animals on fur farms that tested positive for corona. When required by circumstances, the contingency group would have operated under the authority of the Finnish Food Authority with the authorities buying the service from Furfix Oy, which would manage the team's activities. When the policy of categorically terminating minks was ended in the autumn of 2021, the contingency group became unnecessary. However, the group still exists with the promise that the equipment acquired for it will be rented to the Finnish Food Authority if a bird flue epidemic breaks out.

11.1.1. Instructions for producers and stakeholders

EXTENSIVE written instructions were created during the project for the various actors in the fur industry to prevent coronavirus infections. The instructions listed below were created during the project:

THE CORONA GUIDELINES FOR FUR FARMS during the pelting season covers all the stages during pelting, including instructions on how to prevent the spread of the coronavirus both from producers to animals and from animals to producers. These instructions also include quarantine and coronavirus testing guidance for seasonal workers. These guidelines were drawn up jointly by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, the Finnish Food Authority, and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. The instructions were created in the autumn of 2020 before the pelting season began. It was updated in the autumn of 2021 before the start of that pelting season.

THE CORONA GUIDELINES FOR PELTING facilities during the pelting season are very similar to the previous instructions, but focus on the activities at a pelting center. These instructions go through all the processing steps at pelting centers. These guidelines were drawn up jointly by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. The instructions were created in the autumn of 2020 before the pelting season began. It was updated in the autumn of 2021 before the start of that pelting season. A one-day training event on these instructions was organised in the autumns of 2020 and 2021 for all the pelting centers in Finland.

THE CORONA GUIDELINES FOR BREEDING animals focused on preventing the spread of the coronavirus in the breeding animal industry and also on preventing spread on a farm. These instructions for animal transfers were drawn up after the pelting season in December 2020 before the mating season. They were updated in December 2021 before the beginning of the spring 2022 mating season.

THE CORONA GUIDELINES FOR FEED kitchens and processing facilities cover feed preparation at feed kitchens, including staff protection and how to minimize the risks of coronavirus during raw ingredients processing and feed distribution. The goal is to protect both feed preparation and transport staff and the staff and animals at fur farms.

THE CORONA GUIDELINES FOR THE BREEDING season include instructions on all the phases during the breeding season at a fur farm and provide guidance on how to complete this work as safely as possible without the risk of exposure to corona. Because the phases in the breeding seasons of minks and Finnraccoons are different, the different species are covered separately. The instructions cover the breeding season, gestation and nursing. These guidelines were compiled before the 2021 mating season and updated before the 2022 mating season.

THE CORONA GUIDELINES FOR HUNTERS and breeders of fur animals were created when it became clear that white-tailed deer are also vulnerable to the coronavirus. The instructions aim to prevent producers who hunt from serving as a transmission vector for the coronavirus between mink and white-tailed deer.

11.1.2. Corona status reviews

Daily risk analyses

AS WAS DEMONSTRATED by the rapid progression of corona epidemics at fur farms in Denmark and Holland, extremely rapid responses with preventive measures are required to keep the situation under control. This also requires a correct understanding of the on-going status of the coronavirus. For this purpose, the cases of corona reported by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in the last

24 hours were reviewed daily for each fur farm municipality (communities where there are at least 4 fur farms). A municipality-specific corona risk factor was then calculated based on this review. This daily risk analysis also reviewed the corona vaccination status of the municipalities by frequency and age group.

Weekly analyses

IN ADDITION to the daily risk analysis, FIFUR continues to issue a situation report once a week. The daily results are added to the weekly report, which reviews the corona status across Europe with a particular focus on countries that are important sources of seasonal labor for the fur industry (Ukraine and Estonia). The monitored indicators are the number of cases and a varying amount of metrics such as the number of corona patients receiving medical care and in intensive care, mortality rates, and the relative share of positive results among those tested. This weekly report also follows vaccination rates in Finland, Europe and the rest of the world, with a focus on Finland, Ukraine, and Estonia. This weekly report also always covers the different virus variants and the changes in their proportions.

11.1.3. Corona advice and communications

ADVISORY SERVICES and communications concerning corona and its current status have been an important part of this project. Advice has been provided to producers and stakeholders and also to authorities who work with the fur industry but do not have a general familiarity with the industry.

Corona advice and communications for stakeholders

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS within the fur industry include entities such as pelting and feed centers, processing facilities for the raw ingredients for feed, the Saga Furs auction company, and transport companies operating in the field. We collaborated with the authorities to create the guidelines for these groups and organised shared training sessions to distribute information. The instructions have also been sent directly to individual stakeholder companies. In addition, a number of sessions have been held with individual companies to provide advice on how to manage corona.

Covid-related communication to producers

FIFUR AND SAGA FURS have numerous communication channels available to contact fur breeders. The available channels include the FIFUR website, particularly the member section for producers, our Turkistalous magazine, producer event and training opportunities, letters for producers, WhatsApp groups and the WhatsApp and Telegram groups used by producers.

WHATSAPP was the most actively used mass communication channel during the coronavirus pandemic, especially the official Whatsapp channels of FIFUR and Saga Furs. The producers' own unofficial groups on Whatsapp and Telegram were also popular. Short updates on the situation and instructions were sent out via the WhatsApp groups 1 to 3 times a week on average as the corona situation changed in the various regions of Finland. These short corona messages and instructions are usually based on the daily corona analyses. As the situation rapidly deteriorated in individual municipalities, the producers in those areas were warned and instructions were provided to minimize the risk of corona on their farms. Finnish and Swedish speakers were all sent messages in their preferred language.

Letters for producers

LETTERS for producers were typically sent by e-mail, but they were also shared on Whatsapp and Telegram. Producer letters usually included more detailed and longer guidelines and information on changes in corona regulations and instructions as well as recommendations. On average, producer letters on corona issues were sent to producers every two weeks. Finnish and Swedish speaking producers always received the letter in their own language.

Producer events

ALL IN-PERSON PRODUCER EVENTS were moved online during the corona pandemic. This change allowed us to organise events more often and at shorter notice. In addition, the event recordings were provided afterwards so that people unable to attend were able to view them at their convenience. In general, 100-300 producers joined in these remote events.

Training events for producers

WE ORGANISED A TRAINING EVENT for fur breeders in December 2021. This session covered the latest new information about the corona virus, the new Omicron variant, preventive measures and mink corona virus vaccinations. Attendees from nearly 150 mink farms joined the event.

Farm-specific coronavirus advice

WE PROVIDED a lot of farm-specific advice on corona during the project. We mainly gave this advice over the phone where we covered a wide variety of issues concerning producers. These issues included quarantines for seasonal workers, coronavirus testing, family members with corona, personal protection at work on the farm, and concerns related to the coronavirus itself. Advice for specific farms was given when a producer asked for it and by contacting producers known to have a particularly high risk of getting infected themselves or having their animals infected. Examples of such instances included when a producer or an employee tested positive on a coronavirus test and when that test became known to a Regional State Administrative Agency or municipal veterinarian. The Regional State Administrative Agency veterinarian was always contacted immediately in these cases to assist both the producer and the veterinarian.

Coronavirus working group and crisis operations

FIFUR also assembled a coronavirus working group in addition to the contingency group. The corona group was empowered to take action in earlier stages such as when there was a suspected corona outbreak on the farm, but there was no positive coronavirus test result yet. The coronavirus working group consisted mainly of FIFUR and Saga Furs employees and fur industry advisors. Whenever a producer or an employee registered as testing positive for coronavirus, the task force informed pelting centers, pelt collectors, feed distributors, and others, and checked other possible nearby fur farms.

THE GOAL was to minimize the spread of the eventual infection. The preventive measures were taken in close cooperation with the Regional State Administrative Agency veterinarian. In 2020- 2021, there were about a dozen cases where a producer, an employee, or a family member working on a farm was diagnosed as having corona or having been exposed to corona. Five of these cases led to animal testing on the farm, but the test results proved negative in all cases. The situation began to deteriorate in December 2021 when the Omicron variant propagated rapidly. Suspected cases of the disease on fur farms peaked in January and early February 2022. The test results were negative in all these cases as well.

11.2. 2017–2020 Baltic Sea Commitment to the Baltic Sea Action Group

THE FINNISH FUR BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION made a four-point Baltic Sea Commitment, covering the years 2017–2020, to the Baltic Sea Action Group that promotes the well-being of the Baltic Sea. This commitment aimed to develop methods for processing phosphorus-rich manure from fur animals and to initiate research projects in collaboration with different research institutes.

THE COMMITMENT'S FIRST POINT concentrated on harmonizing the actions of composting cooperatives in the industry. The aim was to create an operating protocol for manure cooperatives using the best available practices to improve the reuse of nutrients, particularly phosphorus. The protocol was finalized in October 2020 and distributed to all manure cooperatives. There were plans to organize a training event for manure cooperatives, but this had to be canceled due to a swift rise in coronavirus infection numbers.

THE COMMITMENT'S SECOND POINT covered producer training with a focus on reducing the environmental impact of nutrients from fur production and on increasing awareness for protecting the Baltic Sea, waterways in general, and the climate. The association organised environmental days for the fur industry on May 17, 2018 in Kalajoki. More than 50 people attended the event. This training opportunity went through how fur farms can lessen their environmental load and what effects decisions made by producers have on the Baltic Sea. The event was in Finnish with simultaneous interpretation in Swedish. The association drew up guidelines for runoff water for producers and distributed them to fur farms after the period of the commitment expired. Physical meetings could not be held in 2020–2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

THE COMMITMENT'S THIRD POINT called for the development of commercial products using manure from fur animals and its nutrients. A growth medium made from a mixture of fur animal manure, biochar, and peat was developed during the project, accompanied by a biodegradable box for home gardeners. The product is marketed by Bihii Oy (www.bihii.fi), which was founded as part of the project. The project ended on 31 December 2018.

THE COMMITMENT'S FOURTH POINT aimed to determine if the zeolite used in fur animal feed increases the binding of nitrogen and reduces nitrogen emissions. The Fur Power (Turkisteho) project considered the opportunities to create solutions for using manure regionally. These solutions would be a reasonable approach for reorganising fur animal manure processing chains from both the environmental (climate and eutrophication and acidification effects) and profitability perspective. The project's concluding seminar was held on October 11, 2019. The presentations and a video recording of the concluding seminar are available here: *https://fifur.fi/ajankohtaista/artikkeli/tehoa-turkiselainten-lannan-hyodyntamiseen-fifurin-luken-ja-syken.* The project ended on 31 December 2019.

12. Official supervision

12.3 Supervision by animal protection authorities

IN FINLAND, the Animal Welfare Act, the Animal Welfare Decree, and the Termination Decree regulate the keeping, care, treatment and process of fur animals and other animals on farms in Finland.

The Protection of Fur Animals Decree (Fur Decree) from the government further supplements this legislation by defining the animal protection requirements for keeping fur animals.

THE WELLBEING of fur farm animals is inspected on site by municipal and regional veterinarians who specialize in supervision. Animal protection related visits can also be conducted by the police or the municipal health inspector.

12.2. Supervision of business operations

FUR FARMERS are entrepreneurs, and their activities are regulated under the same framework as other businesses. The Finnish Tax Administration and occupational safety and health inspectors are among those who supervise these activities.

12.3 Supervision of compliance with the Environmental Protection Act

THE FARMING of fur animals requires an environmental permit. Depending on the permit type, the authority is either a municipal or a regional (AVI) environmental protection official. Environmental authorities conduct inspections of fur farms to verify compliance with the requirements of the environmental permit. A fur farm permit also includes certain reporting obligations, which the authorities also monitor. If the requirements of an issued environmental permit are not met, the supervisory authority takes measures according to the severity of the shortcomings.

CHAPTER 3 of the Environmental Protection Act "Authorities and their duties" defines which entities supervise the Environmental Protection Act and what their related duties are. According to this act, the supervisory authorities are the ELY centers (Centers for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment) and the municipal environmental authorities (YSL § 22). The scope of their authority coincides with the competence of the licensing authority. Each regional ELY Center prepares a supervision plan for activities in its area that are subject to licensing. This supervision plan presents the objectives and methods of supervision and the available resources.

FACILITIES subject to environmental permits are divided into four control classes. Animal housing facilities are usually in classes III–IV. The frequency of periodic inspections depends on the control class.

12.4 Building control

CONSTRUCTION of fur farms requires a construction and environmental permit, just like for other construction work, in accordance with the Land Use and Building Act. Construction and environmental permits are required not only for new construction but also for expansions and modifications. Permits are requested in writing from the municipality's building control.

AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL, a board appointed by the municipality or another institution handles the official duties of building inspection. Construction advice and supervision is provided by the municipality's building inspector.

12.5. Supervision of fire and rescue operations on a fur farm

ALL CERTIFIED FARMS must have a written emergency plan. Emergency plans exist to make people and animals on the farm safer, to reduce financial loses by preventing accidents and to rationalise measures when dangerous situations occur.

THE EMERGENCY PLAN includes information on the fur farm buildings, the number of animals, the available fire extinguishing equipment and the rescue routes, among other things. The farm updates the plan annually, and the rescue authority inspects it in connection with the farm's fire inspection. Supervision is the responsibility of the local rescue authority.

FOR FARM CERTIFICATION, the minimum requirement is to fill in and update the provided emergency plan form. An emergency plan as defined in Section 15 of the Rescue Act (379/2011) must be drawn up for animal shelters requiring an environmental permit in accordance with section 1 of the Environmental Protection Regulation (713/2014) requiring animal shelters whose activities are subject to an environmental permit and whose animal shelter is: a fur farm intended for at least 2,800 breeding mink females or 1,400 breeding fox or Finnraccoon females, or another fur farm with a total number of livestock units calculated using the livestock unit coefficients in Table 1 of Annex 3 to the Environmental Protection Act of at least 560.

FROM 2023 ONWARDS, an emergency plan will be required for fur farm certification regardless of farm size.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Turkisalan taloudellinen merkitys, PTT, 2016
▶ *https://fifur.fi/sites/default/files/ptt_2016.pdf*

Appendix 2: Suomessa tuotetun minkin- ja ketunnahan elinkaariarviointi, MTT, 2011
▶ *http://www.mtt.fi/mttraportti/pdf/mttraportti29.pdf*

Appendix 3: Jätevedenpuhdistus pääkaupunkiseudulla, HSY, 2021
▶ *https://julkaisu.hsy.fi/jatevedenpuhdistus-paakaupunkiseudulla-2021.html*

Appendix 4: Ympäristövinkkejä turkistiloille, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Experimental Program for Nutrient Recycling), Southern Ostrobothnia ELY Center, Natural Resources Institute Finland, SYKE, Kannuksen tutkimustila Luova Oy, FIFUR, 2022. The publication is available on the FIFUR member website.

Appendix 5: Kierrätyslannoitteet tekevät tuloaan
▶ *https://www.luke.fi/blogi/kierratyslannoitteet-tekevat-tuloaan/*

Appendix 6: Turkistarhauksen ympäristönsuojeluohje, Ministry of the Environment, 2018
▶ *http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161033*

Appendix 7: Eläintaudit Suomessa 2021, Finnish Food Authority, 4/2022
▶ *https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/globalassets/tietoa-meista/julkaisut/julkaisusarjat/julkaisuja/elaimet/ruokaviraston_julkaisuja_4_2022_elaintaudit_suomessa_2021.pdf*

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