



Finnish Fur Breeders' Association – FIFUR
Press release

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FIFUR opposes only H5N1 antibody testing of fur animals and the killing of healthy animals in contravention of the Animal Diseases Act

FIFUR and its certified fur breeders oppose the introduction by the Finnish Food Authority of an exclusive antibody test for fur animals and the compulsory killing of tens of thousands of healthy animals based on antibodies alone. FIFUR calls on the authorities to return to the broader diagnostics required by law and to apply legal measures. In FIFUR's view, the mere testing of antibodies and the strict coercive measures imposed on the basis of them are contrary to the Animal Diseases Act and infringe the basic legal protection of entrepreneurs' property.

The coercive measures imposed by the Finnish Food Authority with incomplete information threaten the protection of entrepreneurs' property and put tens of healthy companies in an unreasonable situation. FIFUR also states that so far, the State has not paid any compensation under the Animal Diseases Act for animals ordered to be killed in H5N1 infected farms.

” Entrepreneurs in FIFUR are now in a very difficult situation due to varying official activities and we are forced to resist clearly excessive coercive measures imposed through inadequate testing,” says **Marja Tiura**, FIFUR's CEO.

FIFUR insists that the testing of fur animals should reintroduce the actual situation of avian influenza and that PCR/antigen tests and healthy animals should be spared coercive measures.

No similar measures have been taken in other EU countries; Finland's infected zone has also been terminated.

FIFUR states that no other fur producing country in the EU or outside the EU carries out H5N1 mass surveys of fur animals by antibody testing or otherwise. In this respect, too, the measures taken by the Finnish authorities are unreasonably excessive, even though the monitoring of influenza viruses is important in itself.

FIFUR also draws attention to the fact that, on 8.11.2023, the Finnish Food Authority has terminated the avian influenza infected zone which was designated in summer 2023. There is no more avian influenza in the wild in Finland and the zone was therefore terminated. Nevertheless, for some reason further extreme coercive measures are imposed on fur farms to kill healthy animals with an unclear and single test model.

Healthy animals are now killed

At the end of September, the Finnish Food Authority has switched to antibody testing only in the avian influenza survey of fur farms. As a result of the Authority's new policy, tens of thousands of healthy fur animals are ordered to be killed, contrary to the purpose of the Animal Diseases Act about proportionate measures and contrary to sufficient medical evidence.

In summary, antibody tests only show whether the animal has antibodies against influenza or avian influenza in the blood. This means that the animal has apparently at some point encountered the influenza virus and developed antibodies (resistance) to it, but the animals are not in any way sick or symptomatic. There is no international data on the duration of antibody detection in animals' blood

counts and the current diagnosis is inadequate. Antibodies may even be passed on from mothers to pups, so that an animal with antibodies may not ever have encountered the avian influenza virus while living.

Furthermore, there is no commercially certified method for testing avian influenza for antibodies. At the same time, the Finnish Food Authority has not responded to FIFUR's numerous requests for information by which FIFUR has asked the Finnish Food Authority to provide the technical methods for its testing of antibodies. The Finnish Food Authority has not responded to requests for information within statutory time limits. Thus, FIFUR does not know exactly how the Finnish Food Authority conducts antibody research as the only player in the world.

The testing method has caused great concern among producers. If producers wish to refuse to test their animals for antibodies, this is also legally possible and FIFUR supports them in such appeals to the Administrative Court. FIFUR will also continue to provide legal support for farms declared infected by different methods.

Confusing and unruly instructions from the authorities

FIFUR also emphasizes that the guidelines issued by the Finnish Food Authority and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health for the fur industry have been confusing and contradictory. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has prepared conflicting and legally invalid draft decrees for the control of avian influenza in fur farms. FIFUR opposes the conflicting guidelines and draft regulations and calls for amendments to them.

The fur industry has always invested in health security

Health security is of paramount importance to the fur industry. The sector has always worked well with various actors and authorities in the fight against animal diseases and in ensuring health security. In 2020-2022, the industry developed and obtained licenses for a coronavirus vaccine for mink together with a team of researchers from the University of Helsinki.

FIFUR states that, until summer 2023, the measures taken by the authorities in relation to scientifically confirmed infections with avian influenza in fur animals *were proportionate*. During the autumn and early winter, the policies have changed continuously and become oversized, threatening business operators.

As stated by FIFUR on 31 Aug 2023 ([press release link](#)), avian influenza infections are not the cause of fur farms and fur animals, and fur production can continue safely in the future. The fight against avian influenza and other zoonotic diseases must be the subject of a broader social debate, and illegal and harsh measures cannot be unjustifiably targeted at just one sector. At the same time, FIFUR states that avian influenza has been around the world since at least 1996, and in Finland, too, antibody testing for avian influenza has never been carried out in the same way as it is now.

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The Finnish Fur Breeders' Association – FIFUR is the parent association of the fur industry and the lobbying and training organization of its members. Professional fur animal husbandry has been practiced in Finland for over a hundred years and the association was founded in 1928. The association's regional associations comprise a total of 539 member companies. The association and the producers own the majority of the Finnish marketing and auction company Saga

Furs Oyj. Finland's fur industry is a pioneer in certification worldwide. The objective of the voluntary quality system, launched in 2005, is to maintain and improve the welfare of animals reared on Finnish fur farms, the quality of production and the professional skills of fur farmers.