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LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUR FARMING

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Fur farming may be defined as the raising of fur animals under the care and protection of man for the crop of fur produced. The fur animals may be confined in pens or allowed to roam at will over protected areas, as in marshes or on islands. This industry, in all its branches, has grown to a business that can now be considered a permanent addition to agricultural development. The total investment in fur farming in the United States and Alaska is between \$20,000,000 and \$25,000,000. The 5,000 fur farms in which this investment is made do not include the vast areas of privately owned muskrat marshes in many sections of the country, many of which are also operated as fur farms.

It has already been demonstrated that fur animals can be raised in captivity and that the fur produced is superior to that of animals taken in the wild. The annual collection of silver-fox skins offered for sale 15 years ago did not exceed 100 pelts. During the past year (1928-1929) approximately 80,000 silver-fox skins produced on fox farms in the United States and Canada were marketed. Ten years ago practically no attention was given to fur farming by State legislative bodies and game commissions. But when this country became convinced of the necessity for more stringent regulatory measures, fur farming came in for its share, and many fur laws were enacted without full consideration of the economic problems involved, and many of the laws now on the statute books do little to assist the development of the industry. So

far as fur farmers are concerned it is unreasonable to believe that they are not interested in perpetuating the natural resource that is the very backbone of their business. The majority of fur farmers favor the conservation of wild life, but they feel that they are being handicapped by legislation that gives a trapper the right to kill all the fur bearers he can take during open seasons and pay the State a few dollars for the privilege. The fur farmer, on the other hand, is required to obtain a permit to engage in the business, and is compelled to pay from \$1 to \$25 for this privilege, depending upon the State in which he is operating. In addition to this, some States require him to pay a fee for the number of animals trapped in the wild for propagation purposes. This seems to him unreasonable, because fur farmers are interested in propagating the animals for the fur that can be produced, while the trappers are constantly draining the sources of natural supply, without expending any efforts toward producing more animals.

Too often the business of raising fur bearers has been handicapped by stringent legal restrictions that are not based on careful research. For example, the point has been raised in some quarters that persons having fur-animal pens may become poachers and capture young animals in close season simply to kill them for their pelts later in the year within their inclosures, instead of retaining them as breeders. The supposed danger to the wild stock in capturing animals for legitimate breeding operations has frequently outweighed in many minds the palpable impossibility of satisfying the demand for fur unless natural production is supplemented by actually raising fur animals in captivity. The fact is also sometimes overlooked that as fur farming develops and the haunts of wild life are restricted by more intensive use of lands for agricultural and other purposes, the present tireless pursuit of fur bearers in the wild will decrease.

It is generally understood that conservation commissions are primarily interested in the protection and conservation of game and game birds, and are in favor of reducing to a minimum the numbers of the so-called "vermin" fur bearers, including the fox, marten, mink, skunk, raccoon, and opossum, and thereby eliminating the natural enemies of desirable species of game animals and birds. Under this situation, it seems unreasonable for State legislatures

to pass laws preventing fur farmers from capturing and propagating these "undesirable" fur animals to perpetuate a natural resource that is of great value to the country.

It should be mentioned here that the State laws on fur-animal propagation do not pertain directly to silver-fox farming. This is probably due to the fact that foxes have been bred, fed, and handled as are domestic animals, and for a longer period than the other fur bearers.

Fundamentally, the production of all fur animals on farms is closely akin to the breeding of domestic livestock. The problems of the fur farmer are much the same as those that arise in other livestock undertakings. They include a knowledge of species, individual temperament, feeding, breeding, and management practices, and diseases and parasites. In other words, the problems that the fur farmers are facing are largely of a scientific nature, and they are working gradually toward their solution.

Fur farmers recognize the fact that State game commissions are acting in a sovereign capacity in protecting the wild-life resources for the people of the States. They also appreciate that it is necessary to obtain some of these breeding animals by capturing them in the wild. This phase of the industry they understand as being under the supervision of the State game commissions. They are opposed, however, to State control over other features of fur farming and are of the opinion that they should have the same rights to develop their business as those now enjoyed by cattle, swine, sheep, and poultry raisers.

Since license fees from fur farms are used for the protection and propagation of fish and game, it is reasonable that fur farmers should be consulted regarding the framing of laws pertaining to an industry in which they are vitally interested. Those responsible for drafting fur-farming laws should be open-minded, not allowing themselves to be swayed by any one interest at the expense of another. In other words, they should give the same consideration to fur farmers and their needs that they do to trappers and sportsmen.

Fur farming occupies a proper place in the general scheme of conservation. The extent to which it may develop as an industry depends not only on the interest manifested by the fur farmers themselves, but on the support and encouragement given it by conservation commissions and State legislatures.

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