

Full-scale implementation of WelFur-Mink in Europe – only certified pelts will be sold from 2020

Steen H. Møller, Britt I.F. Henriksen and Anna F. Marsbøll

Aarhus University, Department of Animal Science, Denmark; steen.h.moller@anis.au.dk

Since 2009, researchers from Aarhus and 5 other European universities have been working on the development of a welfare assessment protocol for mink and foxes after the concept developed in Welfare Quality®. The WelFur-Mink protocol is based on a critical evaluation of validity, reliability and feasibility at measure level. The protocol has been repeatedly tested in 12 European countries and developed to handle all conditions found in each of the three seasons that covers the strict annual cycle of mink production. The assessment results from the 22 welfare indicators are aggregated across the 3 seasons into 12 welfare criteria and 4 welfare principles, from which each farm is classified as either 'best', 'good', 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' current practice. The European Fur Breeders Associations have decided to implement WelFur in Europe on a voluntary basis. As all fur auctions have decided only to sell European pelts that are classified 'Acceptable' or better from 2020, all 4,000 European fur farms are expected to join WelFur. A private audit company started the assessments in January 2017, after all assessors completed a WelFur training course. A tool for taking unbiased and representative samples on a mink farm, and an application for on-farm registration of the assessment and exporting the results have been developed. In order to secure that farmers can react and improve the welfare of the animals, all assessment results are reported back to the farmer after each assessment and advisors from each country are taught how to interpret the WelFur results and how to help farmers improve housing or management when needed. Despite all potential stumbling blocks and obstacles, WelFur seems to be the first example of a full scale implementation of a science based welfare assessment in an entire animal sector.