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Case *Saga Furs*
Nordic fur trade
– marketed as responsible business

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animalia

Animalia – founded in 1961 – is a prominent animal advocacy organization in Finland. The objective of Animalia is to promote animal welfare and animal rights. Animalia opposes any treatment of animals that inhibits their natural behaviour or causes them pain or distress and it works to reduce the consumption of products of animal origin.

Animalia concentrates primarily on solving problems related to animal experimentation, farm animals and fur farming. Animalia campaigns and lobbies for better legislation in collaboration with various organisations and authorities, and works to increase the general public's and decision-makers' awareness of the issues faced by animals.



NOAH | for animal rights

NOAH is Norway's largest animal rights organisation. Founded in 1989, NOAH's aim is to promote respect and consideration for all animals. NOAH campaigns against the exploitation and mistreatment of animals within a wide range of issues - including fur farming, industrial animal husbandry, animal experiments, animals in entertainment, commercial seal hunting and whaling.

NOAH liaises with and participates in various officially appointed consultative groups and committees related to animal welfare, it influences public opinion and politicians, and encourages industry to make animal-friendly choices.

The background of the page is a misty, atmospheric photograph of a forest. In the foreground, there is a body of water reflecting the surrounding trees and the hazy sky. The trees are mostly evergreens, and the overall scene is soft and ethereal due to the fog or mist. The text is overlaid on this background.

Summary

The fur farms producing Saga fur are regular fur farms that share the considerable animal welfare problems inherent in fur production. Saga fur is neither “ethical” nor “animal welfare friendly” but the product of conventional fur farming practices which have been banned on ethical and welfare grounds in several countries.

Saga Furs claims to be proud that their fur comes from countries enforcing fur-animal welfare legislation, “from closely monitored farms in the EU or Norway”.¹ But high levels of animal welfare legislation regarding fur animals have in fact led to phasing out fur farming in several countries. Some countries previously producing Saga fur, such as Denmark and Sweden, are now phasing out fox farming because of the ethical and animal welfare problems involved.

In both official inspections and investigations done by animal interest groups and the media serious welfare problems have come to light on fur farms in Saga countries. These farms with welfare problems have included certified farms and farms belonging to key figures in the Finnish and Norwegian fur industries.

Saga’s work is closely linked to the worldwide increase in fur farming and fur consumption. Saga has been very active in countries such as China that have limited animal welfare legislation. Saga’s work can be regarded as a marketing campaign combating increasing ethical awareness and stimulating the demand for fur globally.

Northern European countries, the main sources of Saga fur, are affluent countries where fur farming is only a minor industry. Fur farming often forms only a part of a farmer’s business. In the past and even today in countries like Norway, the fur industry has also received substantial government subsidies.²

The production of fur is associated with considerable environmental costs. A large proportion of both the fashion industry and the general public in Saga countries are opposed to fur farming and the fate of fur farming is a matter of political debate. Although the fur industry lobbies European politicians and provides financial support to allies, the political pressure on fur farming is growing.

Animals pay too high a price for this saga, the myth of a traditional Nordic livelihood. The grim reality is something entirely different: the modern mass production and killing of animals.

Introduction

Saga Furs is a fur brand and a fur auction house specialising in selling fur from the Nordic countries and is owned by the Finnish fur industry. Saga fur is marketed as responsibly produced and ethical.³ This report reveals another side of the story behind Saga products.

For decades, fur farming and its practices have been actively criticized in the Nordic countries – Saga’s home countries. While public opposition to fur production has grown rapidly in many other European countries, Finland and Norway remain amongst the few last strongholds of the fur industry in Western Europe and they are the main Saga countries. However, in these countries too, the fur industry is facing increasing criticism.

At the same time, the playground of the Nordic fur industry has become more international – and the work of Saga has played an important part. Nordic fur farming not only affects political decisions and public attitudes towards fur farming in the Nordic countries anymore; Saga Furs is a global business promoting the use of fur.

Animalia and NOAH, local NGOs working with animal welfare issues, have realized that Nordic fur farming has a better image abroad than in the Nordic countries themselves. Saga Furs has worked for decades to build an ethical and responsible image of Nordic fur and fur farming. This branding work has been partially successful. In the Scandinavian languages, the word “saga” refers to historical tales based on oral tradition which are more or less fictional. In contemporary language, they refer to non-realistic or epic works of fiction. Like most other sagas, the image of ethical fur farming created by Saga Furs is a pure myth.

Whilst this report was already under preparation, in 2011, Finnish Fur Sales bought Saga Furs and the company has now been subsumed under that brand name.⁴ Finnish Fur Sales was originally founded by The Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association which now owns the largest share of Saga. Finland is, thus, both the owner and the main producer of furs sold through Saga. However, Norway also sells all of its fox furs and 25 % of its mink furs through Saga.⁵

During the writing of this report, new steps have been taken worldwide to advance the protection of fur animals; West Hollywood became the first city in the United States to ban the

sale of fur clothing;⁶ Dutch designers proposed that Amsterdam Fashion Week follow the example set by Oslo Fashion Week and become fur-free,⁷ both Hungary and Poland have been discussing proposals for banning fur farming⁸ and one of the biggest fur producing countries in the world – the Netherlands – decided to ban fur farming.⁹ Currently the Dutch ban on mink farming is on hold after the Dutch Federation of Mink farmers (NFE) pressed charges against the Dutch State over compensation measures. The European pro fur lobby has intensified its activities around Europe and at the EU level, following these developments.

The European fur industry – including Saga and the major countries producing Saga fur – are trying to resist the global trend of improving the protection of animals resulting in an increasing number of countries limiting the production of and trade in fur. Finnish Fur Sales – now Saga Furs – has previously attempted to contest the partial fur bans in both Denmark and the Netherlands.¹⁰ Saga Furs is fighting against the tide of European concern for animal welfare while simultaneously claiming that animal welfare forms the backbone of its own ethical quality.

Keeping fur animals in small cages can never be deemed ethical or humane and the Nordic countries and Saga are not exempt from this. In countries where animal welfare legislation reforms have led to more stringent regulations, fur farming has been prohibited or it has been limited. In Finland and Norway, however, fur farming continues to cause considerable animal suffering. Saga fur is produced on fur farms that highlight all the basic problems of fur farming. In this report, these problems are explained by reference to animal welfare scientific reports, the results of animal welfare inspections, legislative norms and photographs.

We hope that this report will show that the claim of “ethical fur farming” is an empty promise and that Nordic fur farming represented by Saga is another example of the fact that fur farming can be neither ethical nor humane. Fur farming is our countries’ national shame, just as bullfighting is for Spain.

NOAH – for animal rights

Animalia – advocacy for animals



Mink in the wild. Photo: JIhopgood/Flickr

1. What is Saga?

Saga Furs is a fur marketing organisation focusing on fur from the Nordic countries. The Nordic countries consist of Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland. However, the main focus of this report is on Finland and Norway. In 2011 the Finnish company Finnish Fur Sales bought the Saga trademarks and the Saga Design Center from the Saga co-operative.¹¹ Nonetheless, a considerable part of Norwegian fur is still sold through Saga. According to Saga, “The Saga Group intends to remain the industry model when it comes to pioneering best practices in responsible fur”.¹² Furthermore, they say that Saga’s “investment in finding the very best farming conditions has raised global ethics”.¹³

History of Saga

In 1954, fur breeders from Finland, Norway and Denmark decided to form a common sales and marketing platform.¹⁴ Later, Swedish fur breeders joined forces with them. Denmark and Sweden have now withdrawn from Saga, Denmark in 2004 and Sweden officially in 2006.¹⁵ In 2011, Norway also decided to withdraw from their ownership status in Saga stating that the political situation in Norway needed their full attention.¹⁶ In June 2011, Finnish Fur Sales bought the Saga trademarks and the Design Centre in Denmark from Saga Furs of Scandinavia and changed its name to Saga Furs.¹⁷

Currently, Saga Furs can be called a product development and marketing organisation and an auction house owned by the Finnish fur industry.¹⁸ Saga’s main markets are the Far East, Russia, USA and Europe and the company has a network of representatives in all these major markets.¹⁹

Saga Furs is also a quality assurance scheme for fur. According to their corporate responsibility report, the Saga brand “is proof of the external quality of furs and of their responsible production in Europe”.²⁰ Saga claims to offer “the world’s broadest selection of superior furs from strictly regulated European farms”.²¹

Saga Furs has aimed at and partly succeeded in connecting attributes such as luxurious, reliable and even ethical to European and particularly Nordic fur production and especially to the brand itself.

What does Saga do?

Saga was originally created with the sole purpose of marketing mink. In 1980, fox fur was added to the brand and in 2004 raccoon dog became the third species in Saga’s fur range.²²

Saga has rebranded raccoon dogs as “Finn raccoon” and thus avoids associations with domestic dogs.²³ Raccoon dog is, however, the proper name for the species *Nyctereutes procyonoides* in both English and Finnish (*supikoira*).²⁴

Saga is a registered trademark and Saga mink, fox and raccoon dog furs are sold exclusively at Saga Furs Auctions in Vantaa (Helsinki), Finland.²⁵ In 2014 Saga Furs began co-operating with the American Legend Cooperative based in Seattle, WA and Fur Harvesters Auction based in North Bay, Canada. Between them, these three companies jointly supplied the Helsinki auction with about 6 million mink furs, 1 million foxes as well as Canadian wild fur skins in just one auction.^{26/27}

In Finland and Norway Saga furs are not a special kind of fur: the fur skin production of both countries is routinely sold as Saga. Saga’s subsidiaries also provide services like pelting and fur trading.²⁸

Part of Saga Furs’ work is to encourage the use of fur. In addition to engaging in marketing aimed directly at consumers, Saga promotes the use of fur in fashion schools as well as amongst designers and clothing companies. Saga has also researched new ways of developing the use of fur by creating new kinds of fur products such as indoor garments, accessories and even furniture.²⁹ One essential and long standing aspect of Saga’s fur promotion and marketing work has been the promotion of fur products in Asia, especially in the Chinese market (see chapter 7).

In recent years, Saga has placed a strong emphasis on CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) in its marketing. In addition to the image of high quality they have previously worked to create, Saga now aims to establish the brand as a guarantee of high ethical standards.³⁰

This marketing shift can be considered as a response to the main threats to the present-day fur industry: the



Fox in cage at Finnish fur farm. Photo: Animalia

“The Saga Furs label provides true peace of mind.”

- Saga Furs¹

advancement of animal welfare legislation around the world, increasing knowledge about the behavioural and physiological needs of animals, growing global interest in the protection of animals and increased opposition to the methods used in modern fur farming. The fur industry also hopes that by claiming to guarantee the welfare of animals it can increase the price of the skins.³¹

In its early years, Saga primarily aimed at improving the image and quality of Nordic fur which was not very highly regarded in Central Europe.³² When the fur trade began to struggle with general image problems in the 1980s and 1990s, the fur industry started to develop new ways of using fur and to create products that looked different from traditional full-length fur coats as well as products that looked less like real fur in order to broaden the consumer appeal of fur.³³

As a result of increasing environmental awareness, the fur industry also jumped on the green bandwagon and began to advertise fur as an environmentally friendly product.³⁴ Authorities responsible for regulating advertising have banned the use of these kinds of arguments on various occasions, as early as 1993 in Finland and more recently in 2012 in Great Britain.³⁵

Since the 1980s, the issue of animal ethics has been

a major area of interest for consumers. This has resulted in the current situation where ethical issues and animal welfare lie at the core of the fur industry’s marketing strategies, including Saga.³⁶

Where Saga furs come from

Saga fur has always originated from ordinary European fur farms. More specifically, Saga was created to market Nordic fur. According to Saga, all their fur comes from strictly regulated farms in the EU and Norway which means that they are subject to local legislation.³⁷

Saga Furs Oyj sells the skins of about 9 million fur animals annually.³⁸ Almost all Saga raccoon dog pelts, nearly 90 % of fox pelts and about a quarter of mink pelts come from Finland. The rest of the fox pelts come from Norway and various EU Member States and the rest of the mink originates from different Western European countries, including Norway.³⁹ In total Finland produces 1.9 million mink skins, 1.8 million fox skins and 130 000 raccoon dog skins annually.⁴⁰ Norway produced about 165 000 fox skins and 850 000 mink skins in 2014.⁴¹ All of the Norwegian fox and 25 % of the mink pelts are



Finland is a wealthy welfare state that borders mainly Russia but also Sweden and Norway. This fairly large country with only 5.4 million inhabitants is known for, amongst other things, the Nokia brand and for the high quality of its education system. Finland is part of the EU and the Eurozone.



A Finnish fox farm. Photo: Animalia

sold as Saga fur.⁴²

Saga Furs often mentions the European origin of their fur with pride, as a guarantee of their ethical quality and the welfare of animals on fur farms.⁴³ However, the farming systems and conditions on farms in Europe are, generally speaking, the same as in other parts of the world.

In reality, there is no common European or EU legislation on fur farming. No specific EU regulation or directive on fur farming has ever been created. However, there is a “Recommendation Concerning Fur Animals” produced by the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes which has been ratified by EU Member States and by various other European countries.⁴⁴ This recommendation also forms the basis for Norwegian regulations for fur farming.⁴⁵

However, there are more general EU directives, which also apply to fur farming. The Directive on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing establishes common minimum rules for the protection of animals at the time of killing and, for example, lists the permitted methods for killing fur animals on-farm.⁴⁶ The European Commission has also stated, that the directive concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes also applies to fur farming, but it does not include specific rules on fur farming.⁴⁷

According to Saga Furs, they require that Saga fur producers “at least follow the recommendations of the Council of Europe in regard to the welfare of fur animals”.⁴⁸ This is a

noteworthy statement because Finland does not follow all the parts of these recommendations (although they claim to do so).⁴⁹

For example, the Council of Europe’s recommendations state that: “Every animal shall have available to it an area where it can hide itself appropriately from people or from animals in other cages or pens”. However, in Finland and in many other countries, foxes and raccoon dogs do not have nesting boxes or other equivalent hiding places (except when they have cubs). This same recommendation is also included in the European Fur Breeder’s Association’s (EFBA) own code of practice.⁵⁰ In the recommendations of the Council of Europe, there are also guidelines for minimum space for chinchillas which have not been incorporated into the legislation of several countries, including Finland.

Saga Furs’ “General Terms and Conditions”⁵¹ for fur farmers states: “The Company requires that all fur farms conform to the Recommendations of the Council of Europe’s Standing Committee on Fur Farming or corresponding national or local regulations/standards”. They also note that “terms and conditions vary from country to country” and ask customers to contact Saga’s marketing department to get “more detailed information about the terms & conditions in your country”. It seems that in practice, individual European countries’ animal welfare legislation is considered sufficient even when it does not strictly follow the recommendations of the Council of Europe.



Norway, bordering on Sweden, Finland and Russia and with an extensive coastline is a non-EU country with a population of some 5 million people. It enjoys a healthy economy thanks mostly to its oil resources and is part of the European Economic Area (EEA). Norway is rated as the second richest country in the world.¹¹



Is fur farming a Nordic tradition?

Saga furs used to state that they considered “the fur-breeding heritage of the Nordic region as its cornerstone”.⁵² But despite the long history of hunting and trapping fur animals, fur farming is not a traditional means of livelihood in the Nordic countries where it has only been practised professionally for less than 100 years, imported from North America where it originated.⁵³

In the early decades of the industry, animals were kept in quite large enclosures where they were able to dig. Later, wooden floors were used. Finally, small cages with metal wire mesh floors were introduced and also criticized from the start. Since then, “modernized” cage systems have caused controversy – even amongst the fur breeders themselves. The industry has chosen the most economical systems: where the greatest number of animals can be bred at minimal cost. In old fur industry magazines, cages many times larger than the cages

used nowadays are referred to as very small.⁵⁴

For example, in 1932, a Finnish fur farmer interviewed in a Finnish fur farmers’ magazine strongly attacked the use of cages with metal wire mesh floors. After having tried them, he commented that foxes did not thrive in the cages, the cubs suffered, the animals were not able to move properly and the cubs were passive. The only use he saw for the metal wire mesh floors was in the cages of sick animals.⁵⁵

Fur farming and fur breeding are modern inventions that share a similar history with other forms of the factory farming of animals. In North America, minks have been farmed since the late 1880s and in Finland and Norway from the 1930s onwards. Foxes have been farmed in the Nordic countries since the 1910s. In Finland, the farming of raccoon dogs was attempted for the first time in the 1940s. However, it properly started as late as the 1970s,⁵⁶ and capture of wild animals was not forbidden by law until 1991.⁵⁷

“I know for a fact that foxes do not move or play nearly as much on a wire mesh floor as they do on a wooden floor, and foxes need exercise more than anything else (...) We experimented with a wire mesh floor once (...) and it was very clear to us that they suffered.”

- Fox farmer in Fur Farmers’ magazine 8/1932^{III}



Raccoon dog in cage on Finnish farm.
Photo: Animalia

2. A closer look at welfare certification

Saga Furs' promotional material highlights the different certification systems which are used for fur. These systems claim to make a difference for animal welfare. But the real value of these certifications may just be in the promotion itself.

Certification

Saga Furs "strongly encourages its customer-suppliers to join ProFur's certification system".⁵⁸ ProFur is the new name used for the Finnish Fur Breeders' Association (STKL).⁵⁹ The Finnish Fur Breeders' Association with its stakeholders established the certification system in 2005. In their corporate responsibility report Saga Furs talks about full integration of this certification system and the Saga trademark.⁶⁰ It has been openly stated that certification is one of the key ways for the fur industry to fight the negative image created by the work of animal rights organizations.⁶¹

Originally the farm certification system was voluntary but farmers were paid a bonus to join.⁶² At the moment, 99 per cent of Finnish fox production and about 90 per cent of mink production comes from certified farms.⁶³

Once a farmer has obtained a certificate, it is valid for three years.⁶⁴ If all the requirements for the certificate are not met the farmer is given a certain amount of time to meet them.⁶⁵ However, the farmer can continue to work to satisfy the certification requirements even after the deadline has passed as long as he has a plan as to how he is going to proceed.⁶⁶

Saga Furs has started to expand the certification system to other countries producing Saga fur. After the media and animal interest groups' exposure of injured animals in 2008–2010 in Norway, the Fur Breeders Association (FBA) announced that a certification system, FarmSert, would be made compulsory.⁶⁷ The FBA required its members to commit to the certification system by the end of 2011. Only FBA members will then be able to sell their fur as Saga fur.⁶⁸ To

obtain certification, the farmer must submit a statement that the farm is in compliance with the official regulations and apply for inspection. The inspector and the farmer agree on a date for the inspection. After the inspection, the farmer is supposed to make any necessary improvements and can then obtain FBA certification.⁶⁹ A Norwegian governmental report from 2014 states that all Norwegian fur farms are certified via FarmSert.⁷⁰

Saga's long-term aim has been to introduce the Saga certification system, based on the Finnish system, to all main Saga fur-producing countries.⁷¹ This will make it even more difficult to ascertain whether the certified farms are genuinely following the standards set by the system. According to Saga Furs, the idea behind the Farm Certification Programme is that the "system raises standards above those contained in existing legislation".⁷² This may refer to requirements of the certification programme that do not directly concern animal welfare as the programme is not only about animal welfare but also includes environmental aspects of fur farming, the management of the farm and so forth.⁷³ The Finnish Fur Breeders' Association has been reluctant to make its certification rules public, claiming that it is an internal inspection system and should remain so.⁷⁴

Even though the requirements for certification are sometimes made public it is hard to keep up with them since the rules are constantly changing. In 2011, the Finnish certification criteria did not include any requirements that exceeded the level of animal welfare required by Finnish legislation in a meaningful way. For example, the certification rules expect the animals to be killed on the same farm where they were raised – but, since this has always been the practice in Finland, it added nothing.⁷⁵

In Finland, the certification system has been criticised

"Compliance with legislation cannot be equated
with animal welfare (...)"

- Finnish Veterinary Association, on the Finnish certification system^{IV}

"Buying Origin Assured furs removes a lot of questions for a customer. It allows he to buy fur with confidence [sic]."

- Oscar de la Renta^v

for not requiring any real improvements in animal welfare. The Finnish Veterinary Association has released a statement saying that, regarding animal welfare, the certification standards should aim higher than simply fulfilling the minimum standards of Finnish animal welfare legislation. The Finnish Veterinary Association stated that the current animal welfare legislation is minimum-level legislation and that following it does not guarantee the welfare of animals. Therefore, the certification criteria should not refer to animals enjoying good welfare (hyvinvoiva eläin). According to their statement, fur marketing should not give the misleading impression that certification would guarantee a better level of animal welfare than the minimum required by legislation or that the certification would guarantee the welfare of the animals.⁷⁶

Since 2012, the Norwegian Certification rules have been publicly available and do not exceed the official animal welfare regulations regarding the keeping of fur animals in any meaningful way.⁷⁷ A Norwegian governmental report from 2014 states that regardless of certification, the market works against animal welfare specifically in one area: Bigger skins reach better prices than smaller ones, meaning that blue foxes especially are susceptible to overfeeding and related welfare problems.⁷⁸

Saga Traceability System STS

Saga Furs also market the Saga Traceability System, STS, which is supposed to ensure that consumers can trace every pelt back to its farm of origin by using a barcode.⁷⁹ According to Saga, "STS provides added value to our partners in the production chain and the consumer by confirming the Saga Group's statements

about animal welfare, ethical practices and responsible fur".⁸⁰ In practice, it seems that, at least for a private customer, it is difficult to find a salesperson able to explain how to identify the farm of origin of any particular Saga product.⁸¹

The Norwegian governmental report on fur farming from 2014 states that: "It should be possible to trace the fur farmers, but the buyers usually do not know which fur farmers the skins come from".⁸²

Origin Assured

Saga Furs is not alone in trying to brand fur products as an 'ethical choice'. Launched in 2006, Origin Assured is a joint initiative of the North American and Nordic fur industries started by Saga (Finnish Fur Sales), three other auction houses and the International Fur Trade Federation (IFTF). The Origin Assured label has been integrated into the Saga brand.⁸³ According to the annual report of Finnish Fur Sales, OA (Origin Assured) is part of the company's reputation management and its strategy to protect itself against damage to its image.⁸⁴

Origin Assured also includes fur produced in countries such as Namibia and Romania as well as fur from species such as seals.⁸⁵ Origin Assured fur must derive from certain approved species but this list is vast.⁸⁶

Origin Assured only guarantees that a fur product is sold through specific auction houses and that the fur has been produced in a country which has some kind of animal welfare regulations or standards for fur production.⁸⁷ There are no requirements as to the content of such regulations and no

Mink in cage on Norwegian farm.
Photo: Peter Dean/NOAH



additional demands are made with regard to animal welfare or the overall conditions on farms.⁸⁸

The evaluation made by the Norwegian Consumer Ombudsman in 2009 illustrated the limited value of OA. The Ombudsman evaluated the following advertising claim from fur company Pelsinform (Norway): “When you see the OA™ label, you can rest assured that the fur item comes from a country where national standards and regulations for fur farming are being followed.” The claim was deemed “unreasonable” and “illegal” as the Ombudsman concluded that OA does not ensure farming in accordance with regulations, only that relevant regulations and control do exist.⁸⁹

WelFur

The fur industry is also now attempting to bolster its image with a project called WelFur. The name of the leaflet outlining this project speaks volumes: ‘WelFur – Our future, our reputation’.⁹⁰ The project was funded and initiated by the European Fur Breeder’s Association (EFBA) but from 2014 has been overseen by FurEurope. It is carried out in conjunction with universities and research institutes from key European fur farming countries. EFBA referred to “WelFur” as a great priority and one of their major points of action.⁹¹

The notion of WelFur is inspired by the Welfare Quality® project initiated by the European Commission in 2004. This project created a system of evaluation of the quality of welfare for cattle, pigs, broiler chickens and laying hens. However, whereas Welfare Quality criteria “have to be agreed

by stakeholders in order to ensure that wider ethical and societal issues have been dealt with”,⁹² WelFur as a system to evaluate the welfare of fur animals is a initiative of the fur industry alone.⁹³

A Finnish university leads the fox project and a Danish university the mink project. Protocols for mink and fox have been created, but they are not public yet.⁹⁴

There is an inherent conflict of interest, however, by the fact that the biggest fur producing countries for each species have responsibility for the project. Instead of choosing the countries with the most advanced welfare regulations for the species involved, WelFur has looked to the scale of production. Being industry-funded and led by countries with major industry interests, WelFur seems more like a project aimed at validating fur farming as a means of livelihood than at developing better welfare for fur animals.

Consequently WelFur does not address the welfare problems associated with the confined cage environment as highlighted by the European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare.⁹⁵ FurEurope states that the standard European cage size defines “the space and the height limits for satisfactory welfare level in WelFur”⁹⁶

In the 2010 annual report of the Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association, both WelFur, certification and the advisory services on animal welfare offered to fur farmers are presented as methods of tackling the political pressure on fur farming.⁹⁷ When concern for the welfare of animals is not an end in itself but a means to an economic and political end it should be treated with scepticism.

“As also shown in the name of the label scheme, it concerns the origin - and not that standards and regulations are actually met.”

- Norwegian Consumer Ombudsman, on the use of Origin Assured label⁹¹



3. Legislation on fur farming

Norway and Finland are key Saga countries with differing animal welfare legislation. Finland is an EU Member State, Norway is not. In both countries legislation concerning fur animals has been built around the recommendations of the European Council, but there are also major differences between these two Saga countries.

Legislation in Saga countries

In Finland the regulations allow a cage size of 0.8 m² for an adult fox, and in Norway 1.2 m² (for a fox under 20 kg) from 2015.⁹⁸ 0.8 m² is also the minimum cage size for a fox set down in the European Council recommendations⁹⁹ and implemented as such in many European countries. In Finland, the width of the cage must be at least 75 cm, the length 100 cm and the height 70 cm according to regulations that entered into force in 2011.¹⁰⁰

For one adult mink, a nursing mink with kits, or two weaned mink kits, the minimum cage size according to regulations is 0.255m² (without a nesting box) in Finland and 0.27 m² in Norway (for animals under 4.2 kg). It is claimed that

In both countries, foxes must have access to a permanent elevated level, often a wire mesh shelf. According to the Council of Europe's "Recommendation concerning fur animals", every animal shall have an area where it can hide itself appropriately from people or from other animals all year round.¹⁰⁴ Yet in Norway, foxes were only given all year round hiding places from 2015 following the new regulations (2011)¹⁰⁵ and in Finland this recommendation is not followed; only foxes with cubs are given nesting boxes.¹⁰⁶ There are no specific regulations regarding raccoon dogs in Finnish law but the regulations for foxes are applied "when suitable". Therefore, raccoon dogs do not have year-round nesting boxes either.¹⁰⁷

In some countries producing Saga furs, only certain species can be farmed for fur. Interestingly, several countries

"The demands of the fur farming regulations do not to a sufficient extent secure acceptable animal welfare."

- Veterinary Institute of Norway^{VI}

in Norway breeding animals from Nov/Dec and until March usually have 0.47 m², but this is not specified in legislation.¹⁰¹ In Finland, the width of the cage must be at least 30 cm, the length without the nesting box 70 cm and the height 45 cm. In Norway, a height of 45 cm is specified in legislation.¹⁰²

In both countries, fur animals are also supposed to have an object or material to keep them occupied and stimulated. For foxes and raccoon dogs, for example, a piece of wood is considered suitable. For minks, straw is suggested for the same purpose. In Norway, "straw alone is not sufficient as an activity object" but on the other hand, straw is only mandatory "if appropriate".¹⁰³

that have ratified the Council of Europe's "Recommendation concerning fur animals" have banned fox farming, as the recommendations highlight major deficiencies in the systems of husbandry in fox farming.¹⁰⁸ Some European countries have banned or phased out fur farming all together.¹⁰⁹ In Norway, the species that are permitted to be farmed for fur since the regulations from 2011 came into force, are mink and silver and blue fox.¹¹⁰ In Finland it is possible to farm all common fur animal species, including raccoon dog.

Hence, countries producing Saga furs, and Finland and Norway in particular, cannot be seen as leaders in the field of European animal welfare legislation.



**Foxes on Finnish farm: The regulations allow to weaned fox cubs to live on 1.2 m² on both Finnish and Norwegian farms^{VIII}
 The opportunities for natural behavior, movement, and play are highly restricted for these cubs.
 Photo: Animalia**

Fur animal decree reform in Finland

The Finnish parliament turned down the citizens' initiative to ban fur farming in June 2013. However, the Agriculture and Forestry Committee of the Finnish Parliament expressed some concern for the welfare of animals in fur farms. According to the Committee animals used for breeding, which live in cages for the longest, warrant special attention, as their living environment lacks stimulation and multi-purpose space. The Committee also expressed concern for growth disorders in foxes.

A so called working group for fur animal welfare was preparing the fur animal decree from March 2013 until the end of the year 2014 under the control of Finnish Ministry of Agriculture. A draft version of the revised decree was discussed at the beginning of 2015. The draft contained no substantial changes to the existing fur farming practices in Finland.

In September 2015 the Ministry of Agriculture announced that the new government will not issue the new decree as it has been written in the program of the government that no new obligations that would cause costs to the agricultural sector will be laid down during the government term.¹¹¹

The draft of the fur decree promised the following changes - which are now not to be implemented:

- The section on enrichment material was specified so that the animals should have access to at least two different materials, as opposed to 'some material'.
- Minks were to have a shelf or a tube for laying down.
- The required minimum area available to a male fox used for breeding was to be increased from 0.8 square metres to 1.2 square metres.

- A "hiding place" was proposed for the foxes but it was not specified what this meant.

- Sections on keeping nutria and chinchilla, from the European Council's recommendations on keeping fur animals, were to be added to the decree. Previously these have not been included even though Finland claims to follow the recommendations of the European Council. Currently neither of these species is being farmed in Finland.

These proposed changes could not be described as substantial, but even these small improvements have now been cancelled.

During the meetings of the working group fur animals' access to drinking water was discussed extensively and disagreement between industry and animal welfare interests became apparent. Both the fur animal researcher and the practising veterinarian of the group considered an uninterrupted water supply to be an essential requirement for the animals. Currently the law requires daily supply of water but the chair of the working group stated that snow or ice may also be acceptable, and the issue caused great debate. Now the situation remains unchanged.¹¹²

Saga countries in comparison with China

China is a member of the International Fur Trade Federation (IFTF).¹¹³ According to the IFTF, "(f)ur farming is well regulated and operates within the highest standards of care".¹¹⁴ After Europe, China has been the world's second largest fur producer in both fox and mink fur as well as in total fur production.¹¹⁵ Finland has been the world's largest producer of fox pelts and



Chinese mink farm. Photo: Frank Nervik/Piraya Film AS

Denmark of mink pelts with China coming second in both categories. But figures about Chinese production have varied a lot and according to the latest report released by the China Leather Industry Association the production of mink, fox and raccoon has grown substantially. They say that in 2014 China produced 60 million mink pelts, 13 million fox pelts and 14 million raccoon pelts.¹¹⁶

Until now Chinese fur farms have been mainly relatively small operations and there have been only a couple of large farms with over 10 000 animals.¹¹⁷ But the situation is rapidly changing. In Finland, the biggest farms have more than 50 000 animals.¹¹⁸

The poor conditions of Chinese fur farms and

their example.

In 2005, the State Forestry Administration of China issued a “Interim provision on technical management of breeding, keeping and housing of fur animal species”. This regulation was phased in over a two-year time frame. It stresses, for example, that good animal husbandry involves the creation of favourable environments for the animals. Farms are also instructed to provide feed that is freshly formulated, nutritious, balanced and hygienic. Farms are advised to keep transportation of animals to a minimum. Standards also cover safe, “humane” and environmentally friendly slaughter and pelt processing. The regulations forbid the slaughter of any animals by non-approved methods.¹²⁰

“I don’t think that China needs any legislation concerning fur animals (...) in China we trust the Finnish ability and know-how of how to farm foxes.”

- Chinese fur farmer, in McKenna (1998)^{ix}

examples of extremely violent killing methods, in particular, have drawn international attention since 2005 when videos filmed in Chinese fur farms and fur markets spread through the Internet. But despite the fact the animal welfare situation on Chinese fur farms as well as proper animal welfare legislation are still lacking, the life of animals on fur farms and their welfare problems are similar in China and other fur farming countries, including countries producing Saga furs.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the Chinese fur industry develops in partnership with other fur farming countries in the world and often follows

The enforcement of regulations is not easy or efficient in a country like China, but increasing ethical awareness on the part of consumers and quality problems with Chinese fur products has forced the Chinese fur farming industry to move towards the level of common international practice.¹²¹

According to reports on the Chinese fur industry, fox and raccoon dog on Chinese fur farms may be kept in cages measuring around 90(L) x 70(W) x 60(H) cm, the equivalent of 0.63m² with each cage housing one or two animals. This means that cages in China have a third less floor space and



Norwegian mink farm. Photo: Peter Dean/NOAH

14 % (10cm) less cage height than in the Council of Europe recommendations.¹²²

It has also been reported that cages in China do not have any enrichment toys or nesting boxes, except when the animals have cubs.¹²³ In Finland foxes and raccoon dogs do not have nesting boxes either, except when they are giving birth and rearing cubs. As has been stated, the only toy that animals on Finnish fur farms have is usually a piece of wood for foxes and straw for minks. Norwegian regulations do not specify what enrichment is needed.¹²⁴ Even the certification standards do not require year-round nesting boxes or additional stimulation material on Finnish fur farms.¹²⁵

These examples demonstrate that even on a detailed level, Chinese and Saga fur farms are not necessarily very different regarding the basic conditions for animals. It should also be remembered that the difference of a couple of centimetres cage size does not constitute a meaningful welfare improvement in a barren environment, a fact that even fur farmers themselves have used as an argument against increasing cage size.¹²⁶

Saga countries in comparison with the United States and Canada

In the United States, there is no federal legislation governing how fur animals are to be housed or killed. Furthermore, the states where fur farming is practised have been passive in regulating fur farming. In Canada, regulation is somewhat more advanced but in general the housing systems and other practices on fur farms around the world are fairly similar.¹²⁷

The Standard Guidelines for the Operation of Mink Farms in the United States¹²⁸ require breeder pens (cages) to be 4300 cubic inches/0.07 m³ and furring pens of 3800 cubic

inches/0.06 m³ for the first 2 minks and 900 cubic inches/0.015 m³ for each additional mink. For the breeding cage this would mean that American cages are about a third smaller than Finnish cages.

On the other hand, the lack of fur animal welfare legislation in North America reveals the hypocrisy of the fur industry. The American fur industry actively cooperates with the European fur industry (e.g. Origin Assured) while at the same time China is criticised for its lack of animal welfare legislation even though both countries have mainly voluntary non-binding guidelines.

4. Welfare of fur animals in Saga countries

Animal welfare science is a rapidly developing scientific field and the understanding of the concept “animal welfare” is constantly evolving. Three criteria are often viewed together to evaluate the welfare of an animal; the condition of the animal’s body, the state of its psychological well-being and the extent to which it can live according to its nature.¹²⁹ In this chapter, fur animals’ needs and their psychological, behavioural and physical reactions to the cage environment are explored.

Red foxes’ behavioural needs

The silver foxes on fur farms are descended from wild red foxes. The natural territory of the red fox is from 0.5 to 10 km². An adult fox wanders approximately 6-10 km every day, spends 55 % of the day and night hunting and seeking food and 10 % on non-food related active behaviours, such as exploring, playing etc.¹³⁰

The den typically has 3-9 entrances¹³¹ and it may stretch across several hundred square meters.¹³² An average fox family has two large and several small dens. The more diverse the area, the more attractive it is for the fox: forest, meadow, soil, sand hills, water, rocks - foxes live with great variety in their surroundings.

Red foxes often form life-long pairs. Family groups are also a common form of social organization.¹³³ Foxes in a pair or in a family group show disturbed behaviour when they lose a mate or a group member.¹³⁴

Arctic foxes’ behavioural needs

Blue foxes on fur farms are descended from the wild arctic fox which lives on the arctic tundra with a natural territory of 3-120 km², with a mean of 20-30 km².¹³⁵ Arctic foxes live in life-long pairs and larger family groups. The cubs do not necessarily move very far away from their birthplace; instead, they build new dens next to it which may result in voluminous and complex

“generational homes”.¹³⁶ The den of an arctic fox has an average of 18 entrances and a diameter of 16 m for one den-unit, whilst an entire tunnel complex may extend to over 650m².¹³⁷ Both female and male foxes take care of the cubs, sometimes with the help of adult female foxes without cubs of their own.¹³⁸ Arctic foxes sometimes undertake seasonal migrations and are capable of migrations of more than 100km.¹³⁹

Raccoon dogs’ behavioural needs

Like the fox, the raccoon dog is a part of the Canidae family. Native to North-Eastern Asia, it is also common in Eastern Europe and Finland. The raccoon dog is a nocturnal omnivore and often classified as monogamous. A pair will spend much time together during breeding and in the autumn and both male and female will stay at the den and participate in rearing the cubs.¹⁴⁰

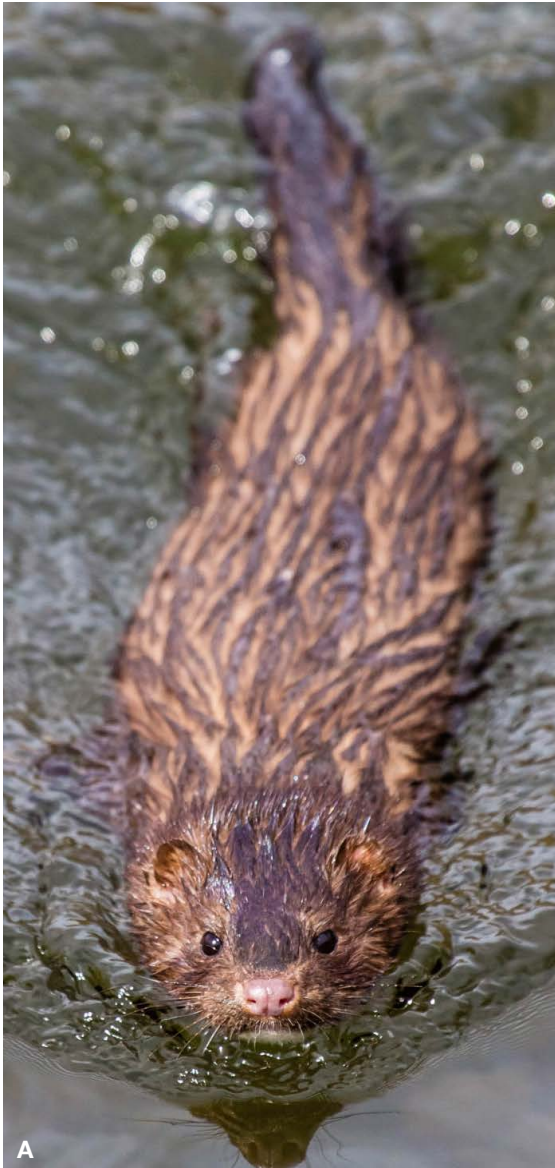
The raccoon dog prefers to live close to rivers with dense vegetation. In Finland, they also live in pine forests.¹⁴¹ The home range of an adult averages 9.5 km² where they roam to search opportunistically for food.¹⁴² During winter the raccoon dog’s activity decreases. In Finland, hibernation is common.¹⁴³

Minks’ behavioural needs

In the wild, the mink lives in a territory of 1-6 km in length that stretches along a lake, riverbank or seashore. Mink is a semi-

“The typical fox cage does not provide for important needs of foxes. (...)The typical mink cage with a nest box and wire mesh floor impairs mink welfare.”

- European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare



A



B



C



D

Minks need water to swim and perform important behavioural activities. Foxes need space for running, playing and natural social interaction. None of these behavioural needs are satisfied in the cage environment. Photo: Andrew Reding/Flickr (A), Melissa Groo (B), Animalia (C & D).

aquatic species and a skilled swimmer that can dive to depths of up to 7 meters. They have semi-webbed feet, blood vessels that adapt to the cold and a fur structure that prevents heat loss when the fur is wet. Activity in water is a central part of mink behaviour.¹⁴⁴ A mink has 5-24 dens that are used actively for rest, sleep and storing food. The dens are usually less than 10 m away from water. Adult minks keep mostly to themselves and avoid the sight and smell of other minks. They patrol their territory regularly and mark the borders thoroughly with their scent. The kits find their own territory as soon as they are 3-4 months of age but females may stay until they are 11 months old. The kits go hunting together with the female. The mother's guidance is important as they need to prepare to live a solitary life.¹⁴⁵

Life-cycle on the fur farm

Fur animals mate in March (often by artificial insemination for foxes) and the pups are born in April or May. The female and cubs live in a breeding cage but the cubs are often separated from her when they are around 8 weeks old and moved to different types of cages.¹⁴⁶ The cages for a litter of one or two cubs are around 1 m² for foxes and raccoon dogs and 1/3 m² for minks.¹⁴⁷ The cubs live in these cages until they are 6-7 months old when they are normally killed and skinned.¹⁴⁸ The breeding animals of all species live in similar cages for many years before they are killed and experience behavioural and welfare problems for a longer time.

In Finland, Norway and other European countries,

before killing due to welfare concerns both with CO₂ and electrocution.¹⁵⁸ This has not been acted upon.¹⁵⁹

Animal welfare problems on fur farms

The results of international scientific research on animal welfare have confirmed that the standard cages on fur farms, like the cages on Saga fur farms, are not in accordance with the essential needs of animals commonly kept for fur. This is also acknowledged in the Council of Europe's Standing Committee's Recommendation concerning fur animals. Even the European Fur Breeders' Association's code of practice states: "Since all biological needs of foxes are not met in the systems of husbandry at present in commercial use, such systems shall be replaced as soon as possible by new systems which are better adapted to the biological characteristics".¹⁶⁰

According to the scientific literature, basic needs that are not met include social behaviour, hunting behaviour, activity needs, explorative behaviour, digging behaviour and water-related activity for mink.¹⁶¹ Behavioural problems that have been documented in fur animals in the scientific literature include stereotype behaviour¹⁶², fear,¹⁶³ stress-related diseases such as stomach ulcers,¹⁶⁴ fur biting,¹⁶⁵ infanticide and self-mutilation.¹⁶⁶

In several European countries, research has led to a critical focus on fur farms and resulted in national bans. In the United Kingdom, the British Farm Animal Welfare Council stated in 1989: "We have decided against drawing up a Welfare Code for mink and fox farming to avoid giving it the stamp of approval which a Government-backed Welfare Code would imply."¹⁶⁷

"The group looks with concern on the problem regarding large and overweight blue foxes, and the animal welfare consequences implied."

- Norwegian governmental report on fur farming (2014)^x

foxes (and raccoon dogs) are generally electrocuted through the mouth and anus.¹⁴⁹ Electrocution as a method of killing is prohibited in some countries and the American Veterinary Medical Association advises against it, according to The Norwegian Committee for Food Safety (VKM).¹⁵⁰ In 2008, VKM admitted that the method leads to serious welfare consequences if the fox is not rendered unconscious immediately and that the handling stress and discomfort experienced prior to killing is significant.¹⁵¹

Minks are usually killed by nose-to-feet electrocution or with CO or CO₂ gas.¹⁵² In EU countries and in Norway it is now illegal to break minks' necks at the time of killing.¹⁵³ CO₂ is highly aversive to minks, causes animals to experience a feeling of suffocation that may cause panic, and a pungent sensation due to the irritation of the eyes and nose.¹⁵⁴ Because of this a gas concentration of 100 % is recommended¹⁵⁵. On Norwegian and Finnish farms, there is no requirement to ensure that a 100 % concentration is used.¹⁵⁶ The VKM states that CO₂ does "raise welfare concerns" and is a "disputed method" which European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) advises against. VKM also states that exhaust fumes are commonly used as the CO source, which means it may still contain irritants and the minks did not react differently to exhaust fumes than to CO₂.¹⁵⁷

The VKM suggested anesthetizing the animals

In 2001, the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) published a comprehensive report summarizing research within this area.¹⁶⁸ The farming conditions evaluated were the standard conditions in fur producing EU countries, as in the recommendations of the Council of Europe on Housing and Management of Fur Animal Species (1991, 1998). For foxes, the data used were mainly from Norway and Finland.¹⁶⁹

The SCAHAW report is clear regarding the unsuitability of the standard fur farming cage in meeting the animals' behavioural needs. For fox cages it states: "The typical fox cage does not provide for important needs of foxes. In particular, it imposes monotony of the physical environment, restricts physical exercise and species-specific behaviour such as digging."¹⁷⁰ For mink cages it states: "The typical mink cage with a nest box and wire mesh floor impairs mink welfare because it does not provide for important needs. Particular problems are limited locomotion and stimulatory possibilities, lack of opportunity to climb, go into tunnels or swim, and inability to avoid social contact."¹⁷¹ The SCAHAW report further points out that abnormal behaviour is not unusual in farmed fur animals, and quantifies stereotypical movement patterns in mink as "widespread".¹⁷²

The SCAHAW report also addresses the physical consequences of behavioural problems, diseases, mortality and



Fur animals live on wire mesh their entire life (mink on Norwegian farm). Blue foxes are frequently severely overweight, which makes it even more uncomfortable to move in the wire mesh cage (fox on Finnish farm). Photo: Peter Dean/NOAH (A), Animalia (B)

ailments due to breeding; examples being infanticide, dental problems, gastric ulcers, deafness and blindness. Additional health concerns have come to light through a Norwegian governmental report in 2014; namely increased group housing of minks leading to more aggression and wounds and the overfeeding and weight problems of blue foxes following desired increase in skin size.¹⁷³

When it comes to raccoon dogs' welfare, the SCAHAW report states that the "scientific data of welfare of raccoon dogs are very scarce".¹⁷⁴ EC recommendations stipulate "until there is sufficient information on the welfare of raccoon dogs, keeping of this species on fur farms should be discouraged." (Adopted on 12-13 Dec. 2001).¹⁷⁵ Raccoon dogs live on fur farms under the same conditions as foxes and the SCAHAW report identifies possible welfare problems as "wire floors, barren environments, weaning age, disease conditions, foot problems, lack of mate choice and monogamy".¹⁷⁶ Species-specific behavioural patterns like hibernation and parenting by both male and female are not possible, which can reduce welfare.¹⁷⁷

The Finnish farming of raccoon dogs started with raccoon dogs caught in the wild, and animals captured in the wild were used until the practice was forbidden by law in 1991.¹⁷⁸ Saga Furs has claimed that "(t)oday's mink, fox and finnraccoons are domesticated animals that are completely adapted to a sheltered life on the farm".¹⁷⁹ This characterisation of these species differs considerably from that of the Council of Europe's recommendations for fur animals: "animals kept for the production of fur belong to species which have only been farmed more recently and which have had less opportunity to adapt to farm conditions".¹⁸⁰

According to the same recommendation, "in the light of established experience and scientific knowledge about the biological needs of each of the various species of fur animals, including those satisfied by showing certain behaviours, systems of husbandry at present in commercial use often fail to meet all the needs the fulfilment of which is essential for the animals' welfare".¹⁸¹

Both the SCAHAW report and the Council of Europe's Recommendation suggest that the limited domestication process that fur animals have undergone has not altered their essential behavioural needs. SCAHAW points out a dilemma concerning "domestication": "selecting for a high motivation to explore or a high motivation to interact socially with humans could actually be counterproductive for welfare in a barren, physically restrictive, environment. For example, silver foxes selected for high approach behaviour to humans also show high levels of frustrated behaviour (e.g. whining etc.) when denied contact."¹⁸²

On the issue of domestication and fearfulness it should be noted that animals passively sitting or lying in the cage are not necessarily "calm" or "thriving".¹⁸³ Ethologists view the lack of normal behaviour just as important as performed behaviour in evaluating animal welfare.¹⁸⁴

Views of animal welfare professionals in Saga countries

In the major Saga countries, fur animal research is often closely associated with the fur industry, including funding ties,¹⁸⁵ and

often tends to downplay the welfare problems of fur animals.

For example, a fur farm research group at UMB (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, now NMBU) prepared a Norwegian welfare report in 2008 which concluded that the welfare of fur animals “kept in a standard production environment in adherence to the present regulations is adequate”¹⁸⁶ (“present regulations” refers to the former regulations before 2011). The research on which this report is based does not differ substantially from the research base of the SCAHAW report, but the UMB report evaluates only a few criteria and several important aspects of fur animals’ biology and behaviour are not discussed. Claims are made concerning behaviour which cannot be supported in the literature, for example that research does “not offer any support for the claim that farmed minks with no access to swimming water have reduced welfare”.¹⁸⁷ This claim is made despite the report itself referring to research showing strong preferences in caged minks for swimming water and a high willingness to obtain access to water.

in fur animals can be satisfied in cages” and recommended that the system of fur farming be “phased out”.¹⁹⁶ The National Committee for Ethics in Research on Science and Technology advocated phasing the industry out in 2008¹⁹⁷ and in 2009 the Norwegian Veterinary Association (DNV) stated: “Today’s fur farming is based on keeping active predators in small wire mesh cages. Fur farms are run in a way that prevents the animals from being able to satisfy their basic natural behavioural needs (...) DNV believes that the time has come to consider banning fur farming in Norway.”¹⁹⁸

In 2015, following a governmental report on fur farming in Norway, several scientific bodies gave their opinions on fur farming at a hearing - and remained critical of fur farming.¹⁹⁹ The Norwegian Veterinary Association (DNV) stated that it “regards today’s fur farming as clearly incompatible with the demands in the Animal Welfare Act §§ 22-24 (...) The animal welfare in fur farming has shown little improvement over the last 15 years, despite the use of disproportionately large official resources

“The DNV regards today’s fur farming as clearly incompatible with the demands in the Animal Welfare Act §§ 22-24 (...) The animal welfare in fur farming has shown little improvement over the last 15 years, despite the use of disproportionately large official resources both on research and inspection (...)”

- Norwegian Veterinary Association (DNV)

Another example, also from UMB, is a fur industry financed report on the domestication of fox and mink. The report, issued in 2012, showed that 60 % of both species exhibited fear of humans - i.e. foxes did not dare to take food with a human standing in front of the cage even after 24 hours without food.¹⁸⁸ However, this information was downplayed by the fur industry.¹⁸⁹

Strong links to the fur industry seem to limit scientific discussion. In an interview from 2003, a researcher at UMB confirms this by stating that “if we worked with questions that were too radical we would not get funding”.¹⁹⁰ A Norwegian governmental report from 2014 points out that the extensive financial involvement from the fur industry in animal welfare research presents a problem.¹⁹¹

Despite the industry-supported research in Saga countries, there is also substantial opposition from professional institutions. In Sweden, a former Saga country, the Swedish Veterinary Association stated that foxes are not able to behave naturally (...) Certain foxes are exposed to chronic stress (...) Minks show, to a far too high degree, stereotype behaviours.¹⁹² In 2013 the Swedish Veterinary Association said that mink farming can’t be ethically justified in current farming conditions.¹⁹³ In Denmark, also a former Saga-country, The Danish Ethics Council for Animals stated as early as 1991: “In the Council’s opinion, foxes in general are not doing well in captivity”.¹⁹⁴

In Finland, the chairman of the Finnish Veterinary Association has stated that the current Finnish Animal Welfare Act should be revised quickly as the minimum requirements are not sufficient and do not guarantee the welfare of the animals and that, in revising the Act, the question of whether fur farming and the welfare of animals can be combined should be considered critically.¹⁹⁵

In Norway, the Council for Animal Ethics stated in 1994 that it was “unrealistic to imagine that all basic behavioural needs

both on research and inspection, compared with other animal husbandry.”²⁰⁰ The Veterinary Institute stated that it “stands by its opinion that the demands of the fur farming regulations do not to a sufficient extent secure acceptable animal welfare.”²⁰¹ The Norwegian Food Safety Authority with official responsibility for animal welfare also responded to the hearing, and stated: “The Food Safety Authority evaluates today’s farming of fur animals as challenging regarding animal welfare”. The agency stated that it does not regard it as realistic to implement measures that “considerably improve animal welfare and at the same time secure the economic viability of fur farming”.²⁰²



Mink protruding its nose through the wire mesh on Norwegian fur farm. Photo: Peter Dean/NOAH

“In my opinion, the welfare of the animals on fur farms is lacking. (...) At a zoo a fox is required to have an enclosure of 600 square meters with the opportunity to dig, and minks must have the opportunity to swim. In farming the space requirements for the same animals are a few square meters.”

- Sanna Hellström, former chairperson of Finnish Veterinary Association and current director of Korkeasaari Zoo^{XI}

The film “Inside Fur” (2014)^{xii} by Piraya Film / NRK revealed severely inhumane treatment of foxes during insemination, on a Norwegian farm. A blue fox was shown being hung by the neck with a neck tong, while another tong was used to further tighten the grip around the animal’s neck which appeared to cause it to suffocate. The film featured a respected mink farmer calling the weaning period the “cannibalism period” due to the fact that the kits fight and inflict serious wounds on one another. The picture shows mink on a Norwegian farm with bite wounds (investigation from 2009). Photo: Frank Nervik/Piraya Film (A); Network for Animal Freedom (B)



5. Animal welfare inspections and investigations

Although animal welfare standards are deficient in countries producing Saga fur, violations of the law on fur farms have proved to be not uncommon in these countries. Official inspections reveal a history of non-compliance with the law. In addition, between 2008 and 2015 animal interest groups have published large amounts of material obtained by undercover investigations of fur farms in all the original Saga countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In all of these countries, investigations have revealed serious health and welfare problems on a large proportion of farms, including the following: severe untreated infections of the animals' eyes, noses and ears; gingival abnormalities, including masses entirely engulfing the teeth or severely irritated gingiva; open wounds, gashes and injuries; loss of tails and/or limbs; malformed limbs; cannibalism of dead siblings or offspring; rotting corpses left in cages with living animals; lame animals; stereotypical behaviour and other behavioural abnormalities indicative of psychological damage; dilapidated cages with sharp wire and mesh protruding into animals' living space; empty, unclean and/or broken water bowls.

Inspections on Finnish fur farms

Since 2000, EU animal welfare inspections have been compulsory on Finnish fur farms.²⁰³ Annually about 5-10 % of Finnish fur farms should be inspected.²⁰⁴ Between 2001 and 2008, the percentage of farms breaking the law dropped from over 40 % to under 20 % of the inspected farms.²⁰⁵ However, between 2009 and 2010 there was a huge change in the results of EU inspections. In 2010, for the first time, the EU inspections were carried out by specialized county veterinarians in a more uniform manner instead of the old practice of local municipality veterinarians doing the inspections.

Local veterinarians were criticized for having personal and economic ties to the owners of the inspected farms.²⁰⁶ In 2009, only 6 % of inspected farms were found to be breaking some part of the animal welfare law. In 2010, more than 60 % of fur farms inspected in Finland were found to be contravening the law.²⁰⁷ In 2011, the percentage remained high: deficiencies were found on 53 % of farms.²⁰⁸ The situation was still the same in 2012: deficiencies were found on 54 % of farms.²⁰⁹

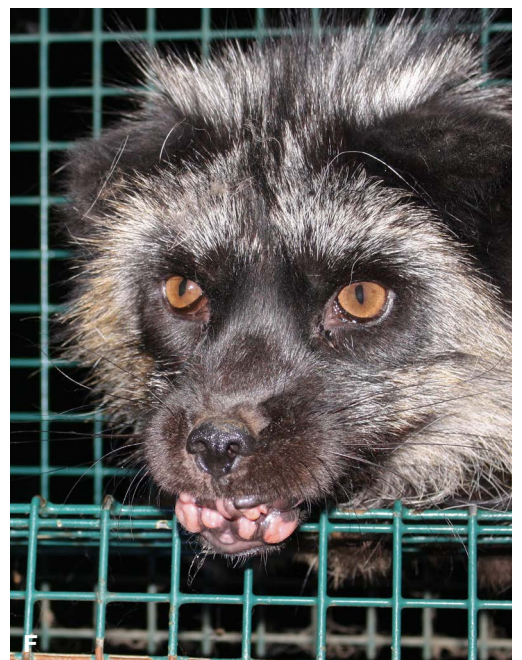
The problems found on the farms were largely similar to those found in previous years but they were reported in a much larger percentage of farms. Common breaches included a lack of suitable stimuli such as occupational material, cages that were too small or had too many animals in them and lack of elevated platforms (shelves) for foxes. A new problem found by the inspectors was cage doors with wire clips on which animals could injure themselves.²¹⁰

In 2014 the situation of the inspections dropped to a catastrophic level: only four of nearly one thousand fur farms were inspected at the official EU inspection. One of these farms was found to have broken the law.²¹¹

Undercover investigations carried out by animal interest groups have resulted in additional official inspections. In 2010, officials inspected all 30 farms filmed by NGOs because the evidence produced showed there was reason to suspect that animal protection laws had been broken. On five farms, violations were found even though the farmers knew in advance that the farms were going to be inspected. These five farms were reported to the police.²¹²

“There is no other industry that we have subjected to more inspections. If this is not enough, we ask ourselves what is to be done.”

- Ole Fjetland, assisting director of inspections of the FSA, Norway, on the animal welfare breaches on fur farms, 2014^{xiii}



Inspections on Norwegian fur farms

Before 2009, the number of official inspections on fur farms was significantly lower than today and in principle there were no regulations that applied specifically to fur farms.²¹³

In 2008, investigations by animal interest groups of several farms resulted in massive media coverage. The Food Safety Authority (FSA) inspected one of the farms and reported “an observation of many animals with very serious, untreated injuries. Several had open and partially rotten wounds on their ears and paws.”²¹⁴

At the beginning of 2009, the FSA started an inspection campaign, covering 244 of ca. 330 farms. All inspections were carried out on dates agreed with the farmer. 24 % of mink farmers inspected received a warning that they would need to change the way the farm was run. With regard to fox farmers, “greater departure from regulations” was discovered and 58 % “received a warning”. Problems included missing nest boxes, shelves and stimulation material and 14 % had cages that were too small. There were also problems with improper killing methods. The FSA considered the conditions on fox farms to be “unsatisfactory”.²¹⁵

When another investigation of 45 farms was released in the media only months after the FSA's inspection campaign, the Authority inspected several farms again. The FSA stated that they “take the fact that we found so many breaches of the regulations seriously. This is surprising as this round of inspections was well publicised in the media beforehand.”²¹⁶

In the discussion that followed, one inspector stated: “We just have to trust the farmer because we do not have the capacity to follow up continuously”.²¹⁷

In December 2014 an undercover documentary of fur farms was shown on Norwegian television, NRK. Following the documentary the FSA met with the fur farmers association, and demanded explanations of their practices. The FSA was not satisfied by the answers and indicated that the fur industry interpreted the regulations incorrectly.²¹⁸

Investigations in Finland

In Finland, the animal rights group Oikeutta eläimille released material in 2010 (28 farms), 2011 (83 farms) and 2013 (13 fur farms, out of which 10 have been filmed also in 2011 and 2012). Some videos were also released in 2015.²¹⁹ In total Oikeutta eläimille has thus filmed more than 10 % of Finnish fur farms).²²⁰

According to the organization over 30 % of the farms investigated during the year 2010 were certified. They write: “In reality, the certified farms have the exact same problems as the uncertified farms. Sometimes even worse”.²²¹ In the same investigation, fur farms belonging to three key figures of the Finnish fur industry were amongst those investigated

and animals in poor condition were found on these farms. The findings included animals with large head wounds, serious infections and leg injuries. These farms belonged to the current Chairman of the board of Saga Furs, the former Chairman of the Finnish Fur Breeders' Association (until 2012) and a former board member of Saga Furs, and Chairman of the Northern Finland branch of the Fur Breeders' Association and Vice-Chairman of the Finnish Fur Breeder's Association, who has also been a board member of Finnish Fur Sales (now Saga Furs) and who is one of the private owners of Saga Furs.²²²

Both the Chairman of the board of Saga Furs and the Vice-Chairman of the Finnish Fur Breeder's Association of that time admitted in public that the footage was from their own farms²²³ although they initially claimed in the media that the material obtained by the investigation showed “rotten apples”, (until they discovered the following week that the material was from their own farms).²²⁴

After the first undercover investigation, Finnish fur farmers carried out special inspections on the farms that had been filmed. As a result, three of the inspected farms lost their certificates – for less than a year (one selling season). The Finnish Fur Breeders Association's own veterinarian carried out the inspections. He inspected 28 farms and found omissions on six farms. Three of these six farms were certified.²²⁵

Investigations in Norway

Since the early 1990s, animal interest organisations have documented conditions on Norwegian fur farms. Up until 2009 there were no specific regulations for fur farms. A certain degree of illness and injury had been defined as “normal” and the White Paper on Animal Welfare (2002-2003) stated “not all farmers use veterinarians for animals that are ill.”²²⁶

In 2008, 2009 and 2010, the Network for Animal Freedom and Animal Protection Society of Norway presented video footage from fur farms in Norway, covering 185 farm visits in total. One of the farms investigated in 2010 was a farm owned by the Chairman of the board of the Norwegian Fur Breeders Association. Material from the farm showed dead and severely injured animals. After media coverage of the issue the FSA carried out an inspection and once again dead and injured animals were found.²²⁷

In 2012, similar investigations were carried out on a number of farms, showing similar problems despite the implementation of certification of all farms.

In 2014 the undercover documentary “Inside Fur” was shown on Norwegian television, NRK, featuring Frank Nervik who went undercover in the fur industry as an apprentice, and thus revealing what the film describes as a culture of breaching the regulations.²²⁸

Investigations on Nordic fur farms have revealed a series of problems including infected wounds, missing limbs from biting incidents, eye infections, bent feet, overweight foxes and mouth deformities. In Finland investigations have been presented in 2010 (Oikeutta Eläimille & Animal Defenders),^{xiv,xv} 2011,^{xvi} 2013,^{xvii} and 2015 (Oikeutta Eläimille).^{xviii} In Norway investigations were released in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012 (Network for Animal Freedom and the Animal Protection Society of Norway).^{xix} In Sweden investigations were conducted in 2010 (Animal Rights Alliance),^{xx} and in Denmark in 2009 (Anima)^{xxi} and 2011 (Anima) including a farm belonging to the head of the European Fur Breeders' Association.^{xxii} Fur farmers tried to legally prevent publication in Denmark but lost the case.^{xxiii}

Photo: Oikeutta Eläimille, Finland (A, B, C, E, F); Network for animal freedom, Norway (D)

6. Advancement of the political animal welfare debate

As a result of the advances in animal welfare science and growing public awareness of animal welfare issues, fur farming has become a hotly debated issue in several countries. Many of them, including major fur farming countries, have already banned fur production or some aspects of it. According to Saga Furs, it has "chosen to work only with European farms that meet a rigorous set of national and international standards guarding animal welfare".²²⁹ However, several European countries with rigorous animal welfare legislation have already banned fur farming or implemented welfare demands which the industry is unable to follow. This development appears to be a key factor in Saga's decision to become a completely Finnish (owned) organisation. Norway withdrew from Saga due to concerns over its priorities: "A decision was made to (...) sell our share of SAGA. In this way, resources were freed up to allow the board and administration to focus on the most central and decisive areas, especially politics."²³⁰

Political situation in Finland

Finland is the only original Saga country that has been able to continue fur farming without major restrictions on the species or conditions allowed for fur farming. But even in Finland the future of fur farming seems uncertain as an increasing number of politicians are becoming critical of the practice. Both the Green Party and the Left Alliance now want a total ban on fur farming in Finland.²³¹ This has led to an intensification of the pro-fur lobbying in the country.

A first potential step towards banning fur farming was taken when the previous government included an intention to investigate the possibility of encouraging the voluntary transfer from fur farming to other industries in its action plan in 2011.²³² In March 2012, a new piece of legislation and new form of political participation, Citizens' Initiative, was introduced in Finland. If an initiative undertaken by citizens gathers at least 50 000 supporters over six months it must be considered by Parliament.²³³

In May 2012, animal protection groups and environmental NGOs published their proposal for a total ban on fur farming in Finland.²³⁴ The initiative received altogether 70 000 signatures. Parliament was thus obliged to consider the ban, but it rejected it, as expected. MPs voted against the proposal by a margin of 146 to 36, but an interesting fact is that those voting for the ban included seven out of the 19 government ministers.²³⁵

The Agriculture and Forestry Committee of the Finnish Parliament has also expressed concern for the welfare of the animals in the fur trade.²³⁶

Political situation in Norway

In 1995, the first opinion poll on fur farming showed that 48.5 % of respondents thought it "important to work against the fur industry".²³⁷ In 2014, a survey showed that 68 % of the public thought farming animals in cages for their fur was wrong.²³⁸

In 1994 the Council for Animal Ethics stated that fur farming should be phased out.²³⁹ Today, the Norwegian Veterinary Association and the Veterinary Institute are amongst the institutions which have stated that fur farming should be phased out.²⁴⁰

In 2000, following a TV documentary, the Socialist Left Party (SV) put forward a proposal in the parliament to introduce regulations to ensure that more of the animals' behavioural needs are met.²⁴¹ It was not passed but the youth wings of several political parties, as well as individual politicians, made statements of opposition to fur farming.

The political opposition has grown since then. In 2011, the Labour Party voted in favour of a "controlled phasing out" of fur farming.²⁴² In 2011, the Liberal Party also decided to take a stance in favour of phasing it out.²⁴³ The socialist Red Party and The Green Party are also in favour of a ban.²⁴⁴ The right-wing Progress Party is in favour of removing the subsidies for fur farming and in favour of stricter regulations.²⁴⁵ In 2015 part of the subsidies were in fact removed by the minister of agriculture from the Progress Party.²⁴⁶ The Christian Democratic Party, The Conservative Party and The Centre Party have not as yet (2015) taken a stance against fur farming but in 2015 six members of parliament from the Conservative Party wrote an opinion piece against it.²⁴⁷



NOAH's Torchlight March against Fur: Every year thousands of Norwegians appeal for a national ban on fur farming outside the parliament in Oslo, and in many other cities. In 2014 7000 people participated. Photo: NOAH

The Norwegian Parliament promised to evaluate fur farming in 2012/2013. This was a decision made in the White Paper on Animal Welfare from 2002/2003 where fur farming was criticised for failing to meet the animals' behavioural needs.²⁴⁸ In the White Paper on Food and Agriculture from 2011/2012, the Ministry acknowledges that "fur farming is controversial in Norway".²⁴⁹ In 2014 a governmental report on fur farming, NOU 2014:15, was published. Amongst the eight people appointed to write the Norwegian report was the Danish president of IFASA, a research organisation which has received financing from the European fur industry.²⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the report stated that "it is uncertain whether today's husbandry systems provide a level of animal welfare which society will accept in the future". Five of the authors suggested that the current welfare challenges could be overcome if "the suggested measures related to animal welfare are followed up within reasonable time".²⁵¹ However the measures described were much the same as those suggested by the White Paper of 2002/2003. Consequently three of the authors pointed

Prohibitions against fur farming worldwide

Sweden

In 1995, Sweden adopted an ordinance which entered into force in 2001 stating that foxes in captivity should be able to dig and to fulfil their needs to move and socialize with other foxes.²⁵⁴ Sweden's Minister of Agriculture said the following about the change in the law: "That is an example of how the animals' interests and needs take precedence over the industry's needs – even when that can cause an entire industry to disappear."²⁵⁵

The farming of minks and chinchillas has also been under consideration at the Swedish Board of Agriculture.²⁵⁶ In 2003, it was suggested that mink farmers should be given a deadline to improve the conditions of the animals. In 2006, the government presented a proposal to change mink farming, including demands for swimming water, facilities for climbing etc.²⁵⁷

However, France appealed the proposal to the European Commission.²⁵⁸ Before the time for the appeal had expired, the proposal for stricter regulations was withdrawn

"(...) fur farming is controversial in Norway."

- Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2012

out that "little has been done since the Animal Welfare Paper of 2003 pointed out the need for new housing systems".²⁵² They recommended the phasing out of fur farming as they found it "unlikely that repeating the need for new housing systems will lead to solving this through research in the foreseeable future".²⁵³

The hearing of the report was closed in April 2015, and the future of fur farming in Norway is still undecided.

due to a change of government and mink farming continues.²⁵⁹ Finally, in 2014 stricter regulations for chinchilla farming came into effect, leading to the closure of the last chinchilla farm.²⁶⁰

Denmark

Denmark has for many years been the world's biggest mink producing country²⁶¹, but it can also be included in the list of

countries that have implemented a prohibition against aspects of fur production.

On January 2007 Denmark adopted new rules for fox farming, including demands for soil to dig into as well as larger cages. The law came into effect from January 2008. However, the government was not satisfied with the results of the change. The Ministry of Justice, responsible for animal welfare, said they did not view the industry as justifiable. On 29th May 2009, the Danish Parliament adopted a ban on fox farming on animal welfare grounds. However, a long transition period was also adopted: 15 years for those who have fur farming as their main occupation.²⁶²

The Netherlands

A ban on fox farming was adopted in the Netherlands in 1995 after a period of scientific and political evaluation starting in 1994. The ban fully entered into force in April 2008 following a long phase-out period.²⁶³ A ban on chinchilla farming was adopted in 1997.²⁶⁴

In 1999, the Dutch Parliament proposed that a ban on mink farming should also be explored and the following year the Minister of Agriculture agreed to the ban.²⁶⁵ Following the fall of the Dutch government in 2002, the proposed ban was rescinded and the mink breeders made a commitment to improve mink welfare conditions instead.

However, in 2006, a new proposal to ban mink farming was once again tabled. Lengthy discussions followed with regard to compensation for mink producers and EU regulations. In 2008, the Dutch Parliament sent a communiqué to the WTO notifying them of how the ban would operate: “The legislative proposal prohibits in general the killing, or having killed, of animals with the sole, or main, view of obtaining their fur.”²⁶⁶

The Dutch Parliament voted in support of the bill in July 2009.²⁶⁷ The Senate approved the bill in December 2012, when a majority voted to ban the production of fur.²⁶⁸ The bill bans mink fur farming on ethical grounds. It argues that killing animals and infringing their welfare to make a non-essential product like fur cannot be justified. The ban was enforced in January 2012 with a transition period until January 1st 2024.²⁶⁹ However, the Dutch Federation of Mink farmers (NFE) pressed charges against the Dutch State about the compensation measures. In the ban there is a provision for compensation in time (phase-out period of 12 years) and money (demolition costs and in some cases pension costs). The court concluded in May 2014 that it is unclear if the fur farmers will be given proper compensation. The judge took the ban out of force.²⁷⁰ The Dutch State has appealed against the breeders and the verdict is expected in November 2015.

Belgium

One of the three regions of Belgium, Wallonia, banned fur farming as from January 1st 2015. The region of Brussels is in the process of banning fur farming as well.

The State Secretary of Brussels made the following statement: “Raising animals, encaged solely for the production of luxury objects, is no more of our time. The animals live outside their natural habitat, often in small cages, and develop acute stress reactions such as self-mutilation. I hope also that this will initiate a cultural change in relation to wearing fur. As the capital of Europe, Brussels can play a pioneering role in promoting a more respectful policy of animal welfare within the European Union.”²⁷¹

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

The UK Farm Animal Welfare Council stated in 1989 that fur farming was not “an acceptable alternative enterprise”.²⁷² In 2000, “keeping of animals solely or primarily for slaughter for the value of their fur” was prohibited in England and Wales. The ban came into force in January 2003.²⁷³ It was the Labour Government that brought in the ban. Similar bans were introduced in 2001 in Scotland²⁷⁴ and in 2002 in Northern Ireland²⁷⁵

Germany

Germany adopted new regulations for fur farming in 2006 with stepwise improvements of the minimum conditions for keeping the animals. Among the new rules there are requirements such as an increased cage space: 1m² per animal and a minimum area of 3 m² in total for minks, and 3m² per animal and a minimum area of 12m² in total for foxes and raccoon dogs. From 2016 onwards, the regulations will also demand



swimming water for minks in a container measuring 1m² in surface area and 30 cm in depth and for foxes and raccoon dogs an area of minimum 2m² in the cage where the animals can dig.²⁷⁶

On the basis of the evidence from other countries that have implemented stricter regulations, these new regulations would probably lead to the closure of the remaining German fur farms by 2016. Since the end of 2011 when increased cage space had to be implemented the number of mink farms in Germany reduced from approximately 25 to 9.²⁷⁷ Realizing that stricter animal welfare regulations could mean closure, some mink farmers challenged the regulations in court. The Administration Courts of Schleswig-Holstein reasoned that the new standards would make fur farming unprofitable, and thus the regulations would need to be made at a higher level.²⁷⁸ The federal state Schleswig-Holstein proposed, and the Bundesrat adopted this proposal, for such higher regulations to be put in

place.²⁷⁹ The decision of the Bundestag is still pending.

Austria

In Austria, the prohibition of fur farming went into effect in six of the nine states in 1998. In the remaining three counties, the regulations were too strict for fur farming to be financially profitable. The last fur farm in Austria moved out of the country in 1998.

In 2004, Austria took the next step and incorporated the provision that “keeping animals for the purpose of obtaining fur is prohibited” into their animal welfare law. The legislation entered into force in January 2005.²⁸⁰

Macedonia

In the Republic of Macedonia, according to the Law for animal protection that entered into force October 2014, it is forbidden to breed animals used for the production of fur, leather or feathers.²⁸¹



Switzerland

There are no fur farms in Switzerland. Fur animals are viewed as wild animals. In order to be held in captivity, wild animals have to be kept in conditions that are equivalent to those required in modern zoos.²⁸² This makes fur farming non-profitable, so it does not exist in the country.

Croatia

Fur production, especially chinchilla farming, used to be widespread in Croatia.²⁸³ In 2007, a new animal welfare law entered into force which included a fur farming ban with a ten-year phase-out period (to 2017). The law states that: “It is prohibited to rear animals for fur production purposes.”²⁸⁴

Bosnia-Herzegovina

In 2009, the “Law on Animal Protection and Well-being of Bosnia and Herzegovina” was adopted in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This

law will enter into force in 2018 and breeding “animals for fur production” will be prohibited.²⁸⁵

Serbia

The Animal Welfare Act of Serbia adopted in 2009, stated in Article 4, that the farming of fur animals should be prohibited from January 1st, 2019. Chinchilla farmers who are still operating in the country are trying to lift the ban.²⁸⁶

Italy

In Italy, according to Legislative Decree 146/2001, animals which are bred for fur, should be kept on the ground. However, an exception to this is mink farming. For minks the farmer decides whether cages should be used instead. Consequently fur farming in Italy consists of minks kept in standard cages.²⁸⁷

There has been extensive discussions about the conditions of mink farming and suggestions for requirements such as swimming water has been made at a political level. But to date these proposals have not led to change.²⁸⁸

Israel

Israel has no ban on fur farming. However, the issue of fur production was put on the map when Knesset (parliament) member Nitzan Horowitz proposed the world’s first bill on a total fur ban on 18th March 2009: “§2. The purpose of this bill is to prohibit the production of, and trade in, fur and fur products in Israel.”²⁸⁹

Knesset member Ronit Tirosh later reintroduced the bill and it passed the first reading in the Knesset. A survey of the Israeli public revealed that 86 % were against the killing of animals for the sole purpose of obtaining fur when asked the question: “Do you find it moral to kill animals if they are killed only for their fur?” and 79 % answered positively when asked the question: “Would you support a bill to ban the trade of fur in Israel?”. Despite this, the bill has not yet been passed. The Knesset members have been subject to significant lobbying and pressure from the Fur Council of Canada, in particular.²⁹⁰

But still The Knesset made history voting on a bill to ban the farming and processing, import, export and sale of fur from all animal species that aren’t already part of the meat industry.²⁹¹

The USA

The USA does not have any prohibitions against fur farming. However, West Hollywood is the first city in the world where a ban of fur sales has been adopted. In 2011, the City Council decided in favour of an ordinance which would ban the sale of apparel made in whole or part from the pelt of an animal with hair, wool or fur (with the exception of certain vintage items). The ban went into effect in September 2013.²⁹²

The state of New York passed a law against the electrocution of fur animals in 2007.²⁹³ Electrocution is a common method of killing foxes around the world, including in Norway and Finland.

Brazil

In 2015 Sao Paulo became the second city in the world to ban the marketing and selling of fur.²⁹⁴ Previously the city had already banned fur farming.²⁹⁵

Saga Furs' role in development of animal welfare legislation

Saga strives to create an image of an ethically responsible company working for the best possible standards of animal welfare.²⁹⁶ According to Saga Furs, they work closely with European authorities to promote legislation and adopt practices based on the Council of Europe's 'Convention for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes'.²⁹⁷ In practice, this has often meant the Nordic fur industry opposing proposed welfare improvements, including lobbying against fur farming bans in both their own countries and other fur farming countries.

Finnish Fur Sales (now Saga Furs) has been open about its political lobbying against fur ban proposals in countries other than their own, for example in Denmark and the Netherlands, in co-operation with The European Fur Breeders' Association and The International Fur Trade Federation. The Finnish government and the fur industry have also worked together against the proposal HR891 in the US Congress which aimed at stopping the fur trade with species belonging to *Nyctereutes procyonoides* – i.e. raccoon dogs.²⁹⁸

Finnish Fur Sales (now Saga Furs) and the Finnish Fur Breeders' Association have also given financial support to certain candidates in Finnish parliamentary elections - something which has been reported in the national media.²⁹⁹ In particular, the connections between Finland's former Prime Minister, Mari Kiviniemi, and the fur industry have been discussed.³⁰⁰

When new regulations for Norwegian fur farming were discussed in 2010, the Norwegian Fur Breeders Association (FBA) was more concerned about the possible costs than improvements for the animals. In their response to the public consultation on the proposed regulations, the FBA had "problems understanding the significant changes" in the regulations.³⁰¹

The FBA opposed the increase in cage size for both minks and foxes³⁰² as well as the requirements for flexible cage solutions for breeding animals between whelping seasons.³⁰³ They opposed requirements for social contact for weaned fox cubs;³⁰⁴ they found it unacceptable that electrical killing instruments should be equipped with a monitoring system

(to monitor the strength of the current being used) unless similar regulations were to be implemented in other countries as well;³⁰⁵ they wanted to reintroduce exhibitions of live foxes which were previously banned on animal welfare grounds;³⁰⁶ they wanted to be able to use neck tongs on foxes;³⁰⁷ finally, they wanted the general text about animals being able to move, lie naturally, perform varied activities and experience variation in their environment to be cut out from the regulations.³⁰⁸

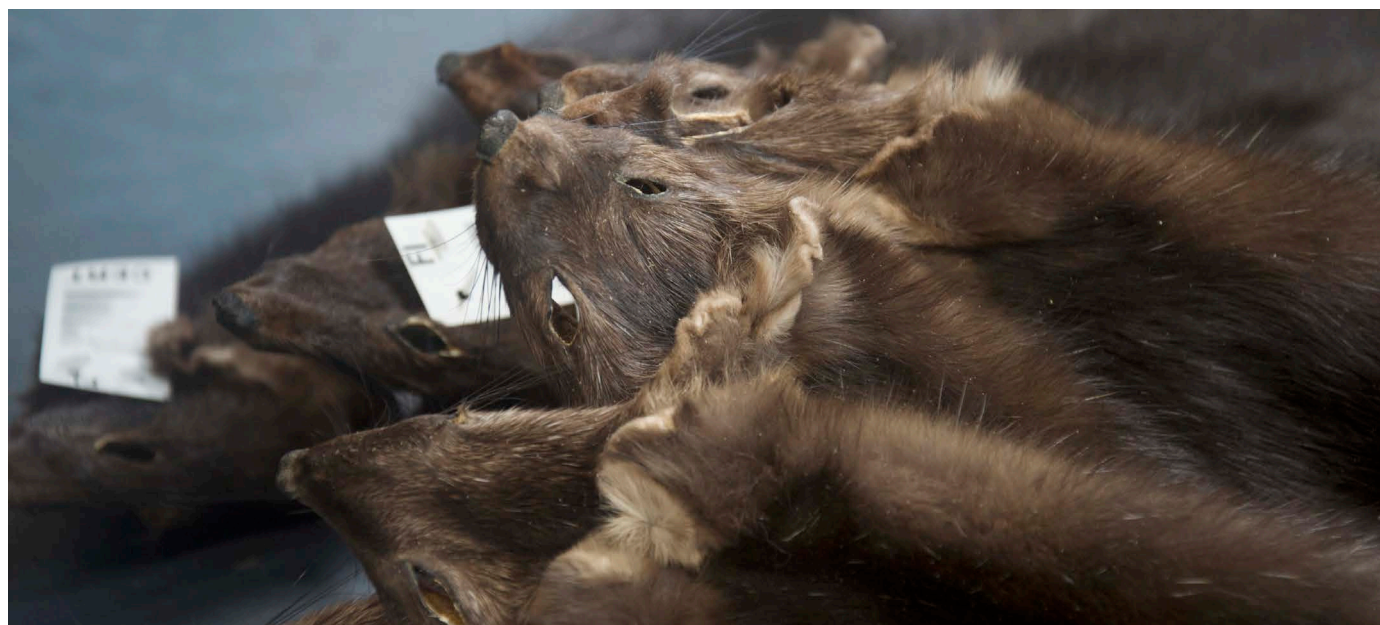
The FBA stated that "the proposed regulations will weaken the competitiveness of Norwegian fur production by going further than the Recommendations of the European Council".³⁰⁹ The Food Safety Authority adjusted the regulations on several points in line with the complaints of the FBA thus lowering the proposed animal welfare standards.

In practice, the fur industry's attitude towards animal welfare has often been different from the one they express publicly. In the recommendations of the Council of Europe as well as in the EFBA's own code of practice it is stated: "Where there is a significant level of stereotypy or self-mutilation in mink on a farm, the system of housing or management shall be changed appropriately so that the welfare of animals is improved. If these measures are not sufficient, production should be suspended".³¹⁰

In response to recent demands for a ban on fur farming, the Finnish fur industry, however, released a statement saying, "in stereotypic behaviour, an animal is repeating a familiar series of movements and kind of falls into a mantra as endorphins are released into its body. In animal welfare research on fur animals it has been noted that stereotypic behaviour does not lower the welfare of animals. Also, it has been noted that animals that do not display stereotypic behaviour do not have a better level of welfare. In humans there is also action that can be equated with stereotypic behaviour, like jogging and dancing. Stereotypy should not be equated with compromised animal welfare."³¹¹

Even though stereotypic behaviour is a complex phenomenon it is considered an important welfare indicator which indicates that "the environment is not providing sufficient opportunities for the animals to perform their normal behaviour".³¹² It is disturbing that representatives of the fur industry fail to acknowledge this fact.

Sable skins at Finnish farm. Photo: Animalia



7. Saga and Asian fur markets

Promoting fur products in Asian markets, especially in China, has been an essential part of Saga's work. Saga started exploring the Chinese market in 1978 and held its first fur fashion show in China in 1986.³¹³ The show was opened by Gunhild Øyanger, the Norwegian agricultural minister at the time.³¹⁴ Since the 1980s, Saga has regularly visited China to promote the use of fur to Chinese companies and consumers. As they themselves say, "(n)urturing the Chinese market remains a vital element in the Saga Furs' expansion strategy".³¹⁵

The promotion of fur markets in China

Saga Furs has described sharing their innovations in fur with Chinese furriers, design schools and "the budding crop of young Chinese designers".³¹⁶ Examples of this work are the seminars for clothing and other fashion textile companies organized in Beijing and Shanghai in June 2010. According to a Saga Furs' press release, "Chinese participants at the Saga Furs Presentation seminars were eager to learn how they could add fur features to their production or retail lines".³¹⁷

In January 2013 Saga Furs of Finland invited a group of VIP fashion editors from China to an exclusive tour at Saga Furs Design Centre during the Copenhagen Fashion Week in Denmark. As Saga Furs says, their product development manager gave an in-depth briefing on fur types and the Saga Furs techniques that go into the making of luxury furs to their Chinese guests and the head of design and innovation explained how Saga Furs works with top designers to help them integrate Saga Furs techniques into their creations.³¹⁸

In 1992, the Finnish fur industry's magazine reported that Saga's marketing efforts have played a major role in making fur garments a part of China's fashion scene. For example, Saga gave a fur coat to the first winner of the Miss Shanghai competition which made fur trim products the height of fashion in Shanghai. According to the article, major marketing efforts are planned in China in the future to guarantee the market for the

Nordic farmers' fur products in coming years.³¹⁹

The Norwegian Fur Breeders Association painted the same picture. In a speech at the Association's annual meeting in 1999, their Chairman stated: "The Nordic countries are working actively through Saga, making extraordinary efforts to increase the demand for fur products, especially in China."³²⁰ In the Association's magazine in 1997 they wrote: "China is today the world's most important fur market. Without the opening of the Chinese fur market, fur production in the Nordic countries would look very different today."³²¹

In 2008, an IFTF press release announced that despite the economic downturn in other parts of the world, the growing luxury markets of Russia and China have ensured that the fur trade is in a good position.³²² These two large Eastern countries are key areas where the fur industry sees a bright future for itself. In 2008, China became the world's primary consumer of fur products as European and American demand fell.³²³

In 2010, the Norwegian Fur Breeders Association reported that 1500 fur shops had opened in China that year and that these shops alone needed 5 million mink skins in order to have enough goods to sell.³²⁴ In spring 2011, at the Finnish Fur Sales (now Saga Furs) auction in Helsinki, the largest group of buyers came from China/Hong Kong.³²⁵ Asian sales make up more than a third of the global total, and China is described as vital to the industry.³²⁶

Consequently, in 2014, political change within China

"It's my first real experience with fur and I didn't know much about it before."

- Karen Duan, international copy editor at Vogue, China, on a Saga event.^{XXIV}



Fur event in China - from Norwegian documentary "Inside fur".
Photo: Frank Nervik/Piraya Film AS

“Nurturing the Chinese market remains a vital element in the Saga Furs’ expansion strategy”

- Saga Furs^{xxv}

which led to a crackdown on corruption affected the global fur industry deeply as, in turn, some fur buyers were arrested and ended up in jail or on trial.³²⁷

The promotion of fur farming in China

The Nordic fur industry has helped to create enormous markets for fur products in Asia. In addition to this, it has also more directly helped fur farming to expand in the region. Nordic involvement in China has played a key role in the expansion of fur farming and fur production in China.

Fur farming first started in China in the 20th century and it grew rapidly in the 1950s. After that, however, the real growth did not start until the economic opening up of China and new foreign investment from the end of the 1980s onwards. Most of the current Chinese fur farms have been built during the past 15-20 years.³²⁸

In 1995, the Norwegian Fur Breeders Association magazine wrote about China: “(...) very few are involved in fur farming and skin production (...) The reason for the low numbers is that there is neither tradition nor expertise in the area”.³²⁹ This was soon to change.

Finnish fur farmers have exported fur animals for breeding purposes to China and instructed Chinese fur farmers in artificial insemination methods for fur animals.³³⁰ According to Finnish Customs, Finnish farmers exported thousands of animals to China between 2004 and 2006. The conditions of the animals horrified workers at the airport in Finland and the export business came to the public’s attention. In 2011, at least one fur farm in Finland planned to export animals to China. Even though the Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association has now condemned these exports, individual farmers want to continue with the business.³³¹

In Finland’s largest newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, a fur farmer commented in January 2009 that Finnish fur farmers have undercut their own market by exporting foxes to China: “(a)t the beginning of the millennium the Chinese flew 10,000 live blue foxes from Finland to China to serve as stud animals”.³³²

In recent years, the Nordic fur industry has started to describe Chinese and Asian fur farming as the biggest competitor to European fur farming.³³³ The export of high quality breeding stock foxes to China has been condemned for this reason.³³⁴ The fur industry has also used China as a reason to continue farming in Europe – referring to the low level of animal welfare in China.³³⁵

At the same time, the International Fur Trade Federation and associated organisations stress that Western standards are being introduced in China and that the IFTF will continue to work with its Chinese member organization.³³⁶ In 2009, the State Forestry Administration of the Chinese Government issued a White Paper on the status of the fur sector in China. This paper describes education and technical training arranged for people working in the fur industry and plans for creating marking systems for Chinese fur production.³³⁷

Today China is the most important fur manufacturing area in the world. It is also one of the biggest fur farming countries.

Recent reports from China Leather Industry Association suggest that in 2014 China produced 60 million mink pelts, 13 million fox pelts and 14 million raccoon pelts - as discussed in chapter 3.

China is a major exporter of fur products. But at the same time China is also a major buyer of mink and fox pelts from other countries, especially Scandinavia.³³⁸

There is an inherent hypocrisy in the claim of the “threat from China”. The Chinese fur industry would probably not have grown to its current size had it not been for Saga’s and the Nordic fur industry’s persistent efforts to create interest in this line of business. The huge and growing demand for fur seen in the Chinese market is still strongly encouraged and supported by Saga. Saga and Chinese fur production have a long history together and, it seems, they are planning to ensure their common future. The strengthening of Saga also means a strengthening of the Chinese demand and production of fur. In the same way, a phasing out of fur production in the Nordic countries would be a blow to the Chinese fur industry and put a stop to Saga’s continuing influence on Chinese consumers.

8. Saga and the fashion industry

Saga Furs has promoted itself as the choice of high end luxury brands within fashion. However, in the fashion industry, opposition to fur is widespread - even in Saga countries. Norway was the first country where fur was banned from the catwalk of the official fashion week.

Saga in fashion

A couple of famous design houses have believed Saga's marketing claims and continue to use fur – claiming that the fur they are using is ethical, as it is Saga fur.

During a recent campaign asking Burberry to stop the sale of animal pelts, the company responded: "Burberry believes that any materials sourced from animals should be produced without inflicting cruelty or threatening the environment. We will not use natural hides if there is any concern that they have been produced with any disregard for animal welfare. For this reason we do not source such materials from China. We source natural hides very carefully, safeguarding the correct ethical standards and traceability. We principally source fur from SAGA furs in Finland who are well known for upholding high standards for ethical treatment of animals and share our concerns about animal welfare. Consistent with this approach, the farms which supply fur are open to third-party inspections at any time."³³⁹

Fendi is another design house Saga Furs and Finnish Saga Furs farms have been proud to present as their customer.³⁴⁰ A Chinese connection is again present as Fendi has travelled to China to present its own fur exhibition.³⁴¹

Other fashion brands that have co-operated with Saga Furs for a long time are Roberto Cavalli, Jason Wu,

Joseph Altuzarra, Jean Paul Gaultier, Cristopher Kane, Revillon-Yves Salomonin and Roksanda Ilincici.³⁴²

Fashion against fur

However, the list of prominent names within fashion who have turned their backs on animal fur is growing. Stella McCartney and Marc Bouwer are amongst some of the top designers who have produced entirely "cruelty free" collections.³⁴³ Project Runway host and fashion dean of Fifth & Pacific, Tim Gunn, is also strongly against the use of fur in fashion.³⁴⁴

There are also several other well-known designers and fashion houses that are outspokenly fur-free such as Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein.³⁴⁵ Furthermore, fashion brands such as American Apparel, Topshop, H&M, Zara, Filippa K, Gina Tricot and Esprit follow a fur-free policy.³⁴⁶ In 2015 Hugo Boss announced their decision to go fur free.³⁴⁷ Even brands and designers who use real fur – such as Prada and Chanel (Karl Lagerfeld) - have sometimes opted for fake fur in their collections.³⁴⁸

Recently, several initiatives within the fashion world have emerged: The New York based "Pinnacle: Reinvent the Icon", started in 2010 by artist Joshua Katcher, has created an anti-fur fashion magazine which is distributed at the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in New York.³⁴⁹ In the Netherlands in 2011, "Fur Free Fashion" was another initiative where designers have

"OFW is now choosing to adopt a fur-free policy. This has been a natural choice as we do not wish OFW to be an arena for promoting products based on treatment of animals which, for animal welfare reasons, is illegal in many countries"

- Pål Vassbotten, CEO of Oslo Fashion Week, 2010



Fashion show at Oslo Fashion Week 2011, after the OFW had taken a fur free stance. The designer shown is Fam Irvoll - one of the supporters of NOAH's Fashion Against Fur campaign. Photo: Ole Haug

created fashion shows featuring the fur-free message.³⁵⁰ Their appeal to Amsterdam Fashion Week resulted in an anti-fur organisation becoming a partner to the fashion week, hosting an official fur free show.³⁵¹

Norway: First Fashion Week to say no to fur

In the autumn of 2010, following an initiative from NOAH and Norwegian fashion designers Kjell Nordström, Fam Irvoll and Hilde Marstrander, over 200 fashion professionals signed the pledge "Fashion Against Fur".³⁵² Among the signatories were fashion magazines, including Norwegian *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan*, as well as the Oslo Fashion Week (OFW) team. OFW launched its fur-free policy with director Pål Vasbotten announcing that "OFW is now choosing to adopt a fur-free policy. This has been a natural choice as we do not wish OFW to be an arena for promoting products based on treatment of animals which, for animal welfare reasons, is illegal in many countries".³⁵³ The fur free stance of the Norwegian fashion scene remains strong, with no Norwegian fashion magazines being willing to run fur ads as of 2015.³⁵⁴

The decision of OFW attracted international attention.³⁵⁵

Elle France wrote: "This is a beautiful initiative, which shows us that fashion can be responsible, and a great idea that should be exported all over the world".³⁵⁶

Finnish designers against fur

In Finland, the homeland of *Saga*, many designers refuse to use fur in their collections for ethical reasons; they know the reality of fur farms all too well. Finnish fur-free designers include Paola Suhonen of *IvanaHelsinki*, Samu-Jussi Koski of *Samuji*, Anne-Mari Pahkala and the design duo Marjo Kuusinen and Piia Keto who run the brand *KAKSITVÄ*. Furthermore, fashion and clothing retailers in Finland have been very willing to join the public list of fur-free retailers.³⁵⁷

Perhaps the strongest brand of Finnish fashion – *Marimekko* – sold its fur brand *Grünstein* in 2004 announcing publicly that buying *Grünstein* had been a mistake: "Marimekko is best when it is purest, without *Grünstein*", said Kirsti Paakkanen, then managing director and largest shareholder in *Marimekko*.³⁵⁸ This indicates that fur does not have a particularly good image even in one of the world's biggest fur farming countries and the home of *Saga*.

9. Saga and corporate responsibility

According to Saga Furs, their three main values are reliability, profitability and sustainability, the last of which is based on the respect for people, the planet and animal welfare.³⁵⁹ Saga's corporate responsibility policy focuses on three areas: social, financial and environmental. But what do these admirable words mean in practice?

Social responsibility?

Saga claims to be socially responsible by ensuring animal welfare.³⁶⁰ But far from ensuring animal welfare, the husbandry standards endorsed by Saga have been criticized by researchers and veterinarians, even within Saga countries, and outlawed in a growing number of countries. STS, OA, and certification systems fail to answer this criticism of animal welfare standards and remain first and foremost marketing initiatives.

Saga also lists dialogue with politicians, decision makers and stakeholders as an aspect of their corporate social responsibility. In practice, this has included funding the campaigns of pro-fur politicians, participating in controversial publicity campaigns and working against animal welfare legislation improvements in several countries.³⁶¹

banning the fur industry. Furthermore, for many farmers fur is not their only means of livelihood and the continuation of fur farming may be counterproductive as young farmers would benefit from choosing livelihoods with greater security and better future prospects.

From 1998 until 2011 the number of fur farms in Finland was falling by about 50–100 farms per year. There used to be fur farms all around Finland but nowadays they are mainly concentrated in the Ostrobothnia area. In the 1980's there were about 6000 fur farms in Finland. In 1995, only about 2000 remained and now there are only 970 fur farms left in Finland.³⁶⁴

In Finland, fur farming has recently been calculated to have a direct employment effect, calculated as person years, of about 4700.³⁶⁵ The majority of the Finnish fur farmers are quite aged and the industry has struggled to find new entrepreneurs

“The development towards bigger and fewer farms has caused the employment to decrease.”

- Oslo Economics, 2012^{XXVI}

Social responsibility for Saga includes “efforts to safeguard jobs and investment in the fur and fashion industries”.³⁶² In practice, this kind of social responsibility seems to be the only one that they have truly paid attention to.

Economic responsibility?

Saga aims to make a profit as does any other business. However, when Saga claims to support rural communities and peripheral industries³⁶³ one needs to see the bigger picture.

The Nordic countries where Saga primarily operates are affluent countries whose economies can easily survive

to take over the business. Even without a ban a significant proportion of these farmers will retire in the near future. Fur farming is not the main occupation of many farmers, but while the amount of fur farms has dropped the amount of animals per farm has increased.

Before Finland joined the EU, public subsidies for fur farming were substantial. When recession hit the fur industry at the end of the 1980s, the government intervened to help. In 1990–91, the fur industry received an additional package of 25 million euros from the state in direct support for the price of skins. Without this funding package the Finnish fur industry would probably not have survived this period.³⁶⁶



**Minks on Norwegian farm: Fur farming accounts for only 1 % of agricultural income in Norway.
Photo: Peter Dean/NOAH**

When animal welfare regulations were tightened the Finnish government granted subsidies to farmers to renovate their farms and cages to comply with the new legislation. Farmers were given a ten-year transitional period but in the end the Finnish state funded 22 % of these investments.³⁶⁷

In Norway, fur farming has primarily been a part-time job.³⁶⁸ This is still the case, but there is a development towards larger industrial scale fur farms with some full time employment. Even so, the number of person years in fur farming in Norway is only 350³⁶⁹. The number of farms has dropped continuously since the 1990s³⁷⁰ and is now 277 farms.³⁷¹ Although nearly all Norwegian fur is exported, the industry only accounts for 1.2 % of the export value from primary industries, which in turn is only 3,4 % of total export value.³⁷² Fur farming accounts for 1 % of the total income in the agricultural sector, whereas flower production accounts for 6 %.³⁷³

In Norway, the fur industry still receives public money: ca. 35 million NOK a year in total until 2015.³⁷⁴ In addition, there are also local subsidies which are e.g. used to pay farmers' expenses to comply with new regulations.³⁷⁵ Only 10 % of Norwegians agree with subsidizing fur farming although 60 % support other agricultural subsidies.³⁷⁶ In 2015 the government decided to cut 17.8 million NOK in fur subsidies from 2016.³⁷⁷

The fur industry is highly dependent on economic and

fashion cycles. For example, in 2006 production costs were higher than the income from the fur skins and the average Finnish fur farm made a loss of €14,300 that year.³⁷⁸ Contrary to the impression Saga gives, fur farming is not a viable means of safeguarding jobs in Nordic countries.

Environmental responsibility?

Whilst Saga presents a picture of an environmentally concerned company, they do not address the environmental challenges of the fur industry on which they base their business. "Fur is an ecologically sustainable raw material", claims Saga. However, on several occasions, national advertising boards have refused to allow the fur industry to make such claims in advertisements.³⁷⁹

Fur farms negatively affect local forests and waters. In Finland alone, the fur industry causes 430 tons of nitrogen and 45 tons of phosphorus to be released into the environment each year from the animals' faeces.³⁸⁰

In addition to this direct negative environmental impact, fur farming has indirect consequences for the environment as a result of the high energy consumption of fur production. A life cycle assessment of mink and fox pelts produced in Finland was made by MTT Agrifood Research Finland in 2010-2011. The research was funded by the Finnish Fur Breeders Association

"The carbon footprint of a mink skin is almost equal to the daily footprint of an average Finnish consumer, and the footprint of a fox skin is approximately three days' worth. The footprints of fur alternatives are much smaller, at their smallest only a fifth of the footprint of a mink coat."

- The life-cycle assessment of Finnish fur ^{XXVII}

and Finnish Fur Sales. The studied impact categories were greenhouse gas emissions, acidification and eutrophication, and ecotoxicity was studied qualitatively. Results were also compared to other winter coat materials (acryl, acryl-cotton, polyester-cotton).³⁸¹

A fur coat's carbon dioxide footprint was many times that of other materials. Also, the fur coat's acidifying emissions were significantly higher than other materials. One aspect of the fur production chain which was pointed out as being better was that it has a decreasing impact on the amount of eutrophying emissions because it uses the fish from special fish removal programmes in Finland. However, these fish can also be used as e.g. biofuels. On the other hand the eutrophying emissions of other materials were low. All emissions were scaled to the estimated life time of different coats.³⁸²

In a Dutch study the environmental impact of a mink fur coat and trim has been found to be higher than the impact of faux fur coats and trim.³⁸³

During the tanning and dyeing stages, fur is processed with various chemicals. The Norwegian governmental report on fur farming from 2014 states that the fur industry does not have any overview regarding their use of chemicals.³⁸⁴ In "Poison Report 2011" an independent specialist laboratory checked 35 fur collars, coats, hoods or scarves from seven European countries for traces of poisonous substances.³⁸⁵ All tested furs contained hazardous chemicals. A majority of the mink, fox, and raccoon dog, seal and nutria furs were contaminated with dangerous chemicals such as formaldehyde, NPE, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) or chlorinated paraffins. Legal restrictions and industrial standards were frequently exceeded.

Children's clothing turned out to be particularly hazardous.³⁸⁶

The report was followed by similar test results finding dangerous chemicals in children's fur garments in Italy and Denmark. The most common findings in the fur garments were chemicals that are endocrine disruptors or carcinogenic.³⁸⁷

Saga's environmental responsibility fails to address the fact that fur is a luxury product with a production process that consumes resources and causes pollution.

Real responsibility

Saga fur is not a choice that companies building an ethical profile should make. Not only does Saga use fur produced in conditions that are highly problematic for animals and their welfare and in ways that have significant environmental costs, but it also promotes the use of fur and fur farming globally.³⁸⁸

Advances in faux fur production have led to products that can look and feel like real fur should that be desirable. This means that creative minds do not have to censor any of their ideas for the sake of animals. They only have to say no to fur from real, suffering animals from the miserable conditions of fur factory farms.

Increasing consumer awareness will create a demand for real corporate social responsibility. Saying no to real fur is a key part of taking this responsibility seriously. Saying no to fur is an important part of a positive and ethical corporate image and receiving positive attention from consumers. Saga may try to offer a story of happy animals, but this is a myth - as most sagas usually are.



Wild arctic fox in Norwegian national park at Dovre mountain.
Photo: Roger Brendhagen.

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