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URGES SANCTUARIES FOR FUR ANIMALS.

Farming of wild fur-bearing animals and the establishment of large sanctuary tracts is urged by the United States Department of Agriculture as the <sup>sure</sup> only means of preserving the fur supply, which is being diminished to the vanishing point. Muskrats, skunks, foxes, and minks are among the animals which can be successfully bred in captivity or under conditions of semi-domestication.

Decrease in the supply of fur-bearing animals in the United States, coupled with a vastly increased demand, leads the department to urge domestication of the animals and the establishment of preserves where they may be safe from molestation.

Unless fur-bearing animals are rigidly conserved, the Biological Survey declares in Department Circular 135, the time is not far away when many of the more valuable species will be exterminated and furs will be worn only by the very rich. This fact is said to be recognized by the fur trade generally, and by individuals who have made a study of the subject.

Directly or indirectly fur contributes to the support or comfort of a large part of the population of the United States. We import as much fur as we produce. In other words, we could sell at home twice as much fur as we are now producing, in addition to the foreign demand.

Since 1914, the center of the fur trade has been transferred to the United States. The greatest fur sales in history are now being held here, and all branches of fur dressing, dyeing, and manufacturing are being successfully carried on by American enterprise.

Most of the fur goods produced in America are manufactured in or near New York City, where in 1918 there were about 60 dressing and dyeing plants, 500 dealers, 1,200 manufacturers, 18,000 operatives and an investment estimated at between \$200,000,000 and \$300,000,000.

Values of skins have risen to heights that have surprised even those on the inside, and skins that formerly had little or no value as fur be-

came popular under various trade names. A comparison of the highest prices paid at the October sales in St. Louis in 1915 with those in 1919 illustrates the increase in fur values. Beaver advanced in these four years from \$17 to \$38.50; otter from \$14 to \$101; muskrat from 36½ cents to \$5.10; red fox from \$15.20 to \$64; fisher from \$25.50 to \$205; skunk from \$3.36 to \$10.60; marten from \$15.20 to \$145.

The crest of the rising wave of fur values was reached at the auction sales of February and March, 1920, when weasel brought \$4.10; muskrat, \$7.50; skunk, \$12.25; raccoon, \$30; lynx, \$66; red fox, \$71; mink, \$75; otter, \$105; marten, \$201, and fisher, \$365. The fur market has <sup>been</sup> greatly depressed recently, but its recovery to normal demand and prices in the near future is anticipated.

The Biological Survey cites the case of . . . one man who bought a mink-lined coat complete in 1913 for \$500; after wearing the coat two years he sold the lining for \$1,000 and replaced it with nutria at a cost of \$150; in 1917 he sold the nutria lining for \$250 and put in a muskrat lining at a cost of \$55; in 1919 he sold the muskrat lining for \$300 and still has the shell of the coat and a clear profit of \$845. Two boys near Ottawa, Ill., sold \$1,000 worth of muskrat, skunk and mink skins during the winter of 1919-20. Alaskan trappers in 1918 sold furs valued at \$1,363,600. Skunk skins are estimated to have brought \$1,000,000 to New York State trappers in a single year.

A fact not generally known is that the United States Government realizes millions of dollars annually from its fur industry. The sealskins taken on the Pribilof Islands by the Bureau of Fisheries in 1919, to the number of 27,821, were worth nearly \$4,000,000. From these islands, the same year the government harvested 938 blue foxes, with pelts worth \$165,000. The skins of bears, bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions, and timber wolves killed by predatory animal hunters of the Biological Survey in 1918 and 1919 brought nearly \$160,000.

In the resultant stimulation of the fur garment trade the department foresees an intensified pressure on fur-bearing animals, which have been rapidly decreasing in number as a result of excessive trapping, clearing

of forests, and draining of marshes. Already beavers and martens have been exterminated over a large part of the country. Even <sup>in</sup> Alaska, trappers have had a close season of several years declared for the protection of beavers.

Reports from raw fur buyers indicate that fur-bearing animals have decreased approximately 50 per cent during the last decade. A raw fur buyer in Boston declared that the muskrat supply of 1918-19 was 50 per cent short of normal and the following winter had decreased another 50 per cent. In 1917 Wisconsin trappers took 800,000 muskrats; in 1918, less than 300,000 and in 1919 only 150,000.

The department urges stringent uniform State laws and close seasons over periods of years for the protection of species, but it believes that still further measures are necessary to preserve fur-bearing animals.

Department Circular 135 asserts that a greatly increased production can be made possible only by domesticating the animals, just as live stock are now raised, and by establishing preserves for them where they will be safe from molestation. Protected areas stocked with the best fur animals that can be found will become centers from which choice breeding stock can be obtained for establishing other preserves <sup>and</sup> for private use.

Wild creatures soon learn where they are safe from molestation. Wild waterfowl in city parks swarm around visitors who feed them as if they were domesticated. Wardens in Jasper Park, Alberta, say that as soon as the hunting season approaches many wild animals take refuge in the park.

Muskrat farming is a profitable industry in Maryland. Marsh owners in Dorchester County harvest from 100,000 to 125,000 muskrat skins a year. There is a market for the meat as well as for the fur. A single Baltimore firm handles 25,000 to 30,000 muskrat carcasses a year and is unable to supply the demand at that. One Maryland hotel has them on the bill of fare as "marsh-rabbit." Marshes that were considered valueless are now worth from \$30 to \$40 an acre for muskrat culture.

Experiments in propagating fur animals in confinement have been tried with varying results. The Department of Agriculture has already determined that silver foxes, black foxes, blue foxes, skunks, and muskrats can be farmed profitably under suitable conditions.

The department calls the attention of farmers to the desirability of keeping poachers off their forest lands and encouraging fur-bearing animals by preserving hollow trees and by substituting animal-proof chicken yards for the gun and trap in protecting their poultry.

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