



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of the Secretary
Press Service



Release - Immediate

March 8, 1923.

BLUE FOX PRODUCTION
ON THE ISLANDS OF ALASKA

Blue fox farming in Alaska is confined principally to islands ranging in size from 40 to 300 acres, lying along the southern coast, east and west of Cook Inlet, reports a representative of the Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture, who made a recent trip of investigation to Alaska. Some of these islands are near the mainland, others 100 miles or more from it. Many of them are timbered and have an abundant vegetation, but others are barren or grow only low shrubbery.

White and blue foxes are not different species but merely two color phases of the same fox. The white is the normal winter coat of one phase, and in summer the coat of the white fox is brown and tawny. The fox which is dark bluish gray or maltese in winter and sooty gray and brown in summer is an abnormal representative of the same species. Most of the blue foxes in Alaska have come from the Pribilof Islands or from Siberia. Ranchers may have from 3 pairs to 20, but an island carrying more than 100 pairs is rare.

The number of pups raised per breeding pair per year is very difficult to determine. The majority of breeders seem to think they raise four or five to a litter, but as the foxes run wild and their dens are only found by chance, an exact count can not be taken. A breeding pair is worth from \$250 to \$400. Some breeders sell 20 to 30 pairs in a season, but the majority of ranchers make most of their money from the sale of pelts. A pelt is worth from \$150 to \$250. The highest priced skins are those of a dark maltese color, well furred and carrying a high percentage of guard hairs.

The Biological Survey suggests two methods of improving blue fox stock. One is to examine the foxes more carefully during the pelting season and then select the best types as breeders. The other is to kill off the inferior types and replace them with new and better foxes either bought or traded.

The proper feeding of blue foxes during the winter is undoubtedly the greatest problem the fox rancher has to solve. The foxes eat raw, smoked, or salted fish. Salted fish is soaked in water 10 to 12 days to freshen it. Corn meal and other cereals are mixed with fish and cooked before feeding. The feed is scattered along the beach, or put in feed houses located at different points on the island. The wet, damp climate makes it practically impossible to dry and preserve food properly.

Methods of feeding can be improved in many ways. Most ranchers give too much feed and do not distribute it uniformly at regular intervals, and some do not give enough attention to sanitation. For purposes of study and investigation to aid those in the industry, the Biological Survey is planning to engage in the production of blue foxes at its experimental fox farm at Keeseville, N.Y.