INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of Information
Press Service

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Release - Immediate

September 25, 1936

BIOLOGICAL SURVEY TO IMPROVE FUR ANIMAL EXPERIMENT STATION

Construction of New Buildings to Follow Purchase of 16-acre Tract at Saratoga Springs, N. Y.

- - -

Improvement and development of the Fur Animal Experiment Station of the U. S. Biological Survey at Saratoga Springs, N. Y., to provide better and more permanent research and administration facilities will get underway as soon as negotiations for the purchase of the 16-acre tract now occupied by the station are completed. An appropriation of $21,500 for purchase and improvement of the site was made by Congress last summer. For the last 12 years the Survey has leased the land on which the station is located.

Plans for new buildings, relocation of several buildings on the area, and development of the grounds have been completed. A new office and laboratory building is to be built near the main entrance to the station. The present office and laboratory building is to be moved and used for fur-animal research and other activities. Improvement of the director's residence, installation of a new heating plant in the utility building to serve all buildings on the station, converting the storage shed into an abbattoir, and moving the mink and furring sheds to other locations are planned.

The experiment station is the outgrowth of similar activities by the Survey between 1913 and 1923 in other sections of the country. One station was operated for a time near Pritchard, Idaho, and the other near Keeseville, N. Y. The present station is in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains and in a region noted for the quality of fur produced in the wild.

522-37

Results of the research and experimental work in feeding, breeding, and managing foxes, minks, and martens are available to fur farmers, the fur trade, and others interested in fur farming. Various types of pens and equipment used in fur farming also are tested.

In seeking an economical and satisfactory ration for young foxes the Survey is feeding about 20 fox pups at the station on a ration in which the raw meat portion has been replaced by beef meal and liver meal. This ration also includes a cereal mixture, ground green bone, and a green vegetable. Previous experiments have shown that mature foxes do well on this ration up to the time of pelting. Mature foxes are being fed tankage and liver meal in an experiment to determine the value of these foods as a substitute for raw meat.

Studies also are underway to determine the genetic basis of the silvering of foxes -- formation of silver-banded hair in the fur. Two years ago the Survey learned that the crossing of Alaskan Silver and standard strains produces a cross that yields a high quality pelt.

Because martens in captivity are shy breeders the Bureau is trying to develop methods of feeding and management that will insure a greater production of young martens. One litter was produced at the experiment station last year and two this year. Before scientists of the Survey learned that the female marten requires about 9½ months to develop its young, it was generally believed that the gestation period ranged from 60 to 102 days.

Controlled experimental work with minks was begun at the Saratoga Springs station last year. Both old and young minks are on test rations to determine the value of frozen fish as a part or whole substitute for raw meat in the ration during the fur-developing period. All animals used in the experiments are weighed and examined frequently during the periods they shed or develop fur. Surplus animals are pelted and proceeds from the sale of skins are turned over to the United States Treasury.