

Conservation, Science, and Canada's Fur Farming Industry, 1913–1945

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Fur farming gained its greatest popularity during the 1920s, when nature conservation became prominent at the national level in Canada. Promoters claimed that fur farming, as a thoroughly modern answer to the apparent and inevitable exhaustion of nature, would eventually replace the wild trapping industry altogether. By the 1940s, however, the fur farm was in decline. Farmers operating small-scale enterprises faced problems with the management of their stock and much higher costs than did trappers. Economic considerations aside, promoters never managed to separate fur from the mystery of the wilderness. The new demand for “genuine” fur in the 1940s market might indicate that Canadian society believed that the north and its wilderness were no longer imperiled.

L'élevage des animaux à fourrure n'a jamais été aussi populaire que durant les années 1920, la conservation de la nature étant alors devenue une question d'intérêt national. Ses tenants affirmaient que l'élevage d'animaux à fourrure, une réponse tout à fait moderne à l'épuisement manifeste et inévitable de la nature, remplacerait un jour l'industrie du piégeage tout entière. Mais au tournant des années 1940, l'élevage d'animaux à fourrure était sur son déclin. Les petits éleveurs avaient de la difficulté à gérer leur cheptel et faisaient face à des coûts beaucoup plus élevés que ceux des trappeurs. Toutefois, nonobstant les facteurs économiques, les tenants de l'élevage ne réussirent jamais à rompre le lien entre la fourrure et le mystère de la nature. Le regain de la demande de fourrures « authentiques » sur le marché des années 1940 révèle peut-être que la société canadienne ne voyait plus de menace planer sur le Nord et sa vie sauvage.

HISTORIANS HAVE NOT explored many issues in the twentieth-century fur trade, and, not surprisingly, they have left largely alone the troubled record of fur farming in Canada.¹ Fur farming, which at first glance might

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1 Most research and writing has regarded the trade in pre-industrial, often pre-Confederation conditions.

be a concern of agricultural history, is often seen as a speculative adventure that won some popularity as a get-rich-quick scheme. To social historians, however, the history of the fur farm can provide valuable insights into popular assumptions regarding the disappearance of northern “wilderness” in Canada while revealing one of the strategies of progressive resource conservation. In effect, farmers, writers, and representatives of the Canadian state had once positioned this industry in the larger march of progress. Promoters portrayed the fur farm as a thoroughly modern answer to the apparent and inevitable exhaustion of nature and a safeguard for one of the oldest economic pursuits in the country. To substantiate claims that farming would eventually replace the wild trapping industry altogether, they could point to significant gains farmers enjoyed in national fur production.²

In Canada, the glut in fur production following World War II, the difficulties farmers encountered in maintaining standards and controlling costs, and more recently the near-total collapse in the fur market have been factors conspiring to disappoint the dreamers who initially supported the industry.³ Yet, a decade or two earlier, boosters had wholeheartedly believed that innovations in animal husbandry and veterinary science could guide farmers to breed Canada’s annual contributions to fur auctions more efficiently. By using “scientific” model farms as guides, following careful breeding schemes, and imposing regulated diets on captive furbearers, promoters argued, the fur farmer would effectively tame wild animals as well as transform a feature of Canadian heritage into a modern business enterprise. Furthermore, they believed that, in domesticating furbearers, Canadians would gain some ascendancy over their harsh environment and the uncertain marketing and pricing problems of a small, but still important, staple of the economy. They proved to be wrong.

Government reports and how-to books are among the sources valuable for examining the booster years before World War II, the social concerns

Arthur J. Ray addresses the post-Confederation trade, but his work carries little information regarding fur farming, an endeavour marshalling far different resources, larger scales of investment, and different sites of operation than the wild fur industry. Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); E. E. Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company, 1670–1870*, 3 vols. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960).

2 After World War I farmers had contributed a relatively meagre amount — about 3% to 5% — of the total furs produced in the country. By 1928, however, they contributed 12% of the nation’s fur harvest, by the early 1930s 30%, and by 1938, on the eve of the Second World War, 43%. In 1919 the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (DBS) began collecting statistics concerning fur farming production, from which these figures are drawn.

3 Presently, mink is farmed to the greatest extent; chinchilla, fox, and nutria are also farmed. The numbers of farms across the nation, however, are far lower than they were in the past. Bowness estimated 2,585 farms in Canada in 1968, most of them mink producers in Ontario. Mink accounted for 98% of farmed furs that year. E. R. Bowness, “Fur Farming in Canada” in Malvine Bolus, ed., *People and Pelts: Selected Papers of the Second North American Fur Trade Conference* (Winnipeg: Peguis, 1972), pp. 59–60. Since the anti-fur lobby of the 1970s, fur farming has suffered the same fate as the trapping industry.

motivating the industry's first promoters, and the expansive expectations placed on the modern fur farm. Two interrelated explanations can be advanced as to why hopes invested in this industry went largely unfulfilled. Significant failures in production in the fox industry are revealed in the annual reports published by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Speculative fervour drove the industry off its firmer foundations in Prince Edward Island, when lowered hygiene and breeding standards began to devalue farmed fur severely. Furthermore, characteristics of the Canadian fox farm suggest that some of the business ethics of late-nineteenth-century trapping dogged the new industry. Apart from those providing breeding stock, fur farmers remained individualistic and shunned joint-stock approaches; they also brought lax breeding standards to their enterprises. These observations lead to the other side of the problem arising in the marketplace, where fashion catalogues reveal that consumer demands in fur products could not bear the progressive ideal promoted in the fur farming industry. In the minds of producers and consumers, strong connections continued to exist between fur products and the ideal of wilderness, to such a degree that the "scientific" planning of ranches, the forced enclosure of breeding stock, and domestication of wild animals were concepts that could not be sold to consumers. Indeed, the fur garment industry in the 1930s and 1940s had to respond to demand for wild and "genuine" fur in women's coats. As a consequence, farmed products were often relabelled with names carrying images of the wilderness. They were effectively lost in a marketplace that promoted the very ideals that industry boosters had once attempted to dispel in a modernizing society.

Promoting the Fur Farm

It was with obvious enthusiasm that the Prince Edward Islander John Walter Jones introduced fur farming to the Canadian public in 1913. Jones, later premier of the province and one of many fur farmers who gained local political prominence in the Maritimes, had been sponsored by the Canadian Commission of Conservation to report on the status of fur farming in the country. He was a good person for the job, having studied at Ontario's Agricultural College and the University of Toronto and worked between 1909 and 1912 at the American Department of Agriculture's Arlington experimental fur farm.⁴ Turning his attention to Canada, Jones reported the success of enterprises in P.E.I., then reaping high prices offered for silver fox (sometimes fetching \$500 a pelt). He was convinced that other Canadians could profitably begin similar enterprises.

His work was of great interest to the commission launched in 1909 by Wilfrid Laurier. Created largely to keep pace with progressive-era demands

⁴ Michel F. Girard, *L'écologisme retrouvé : essor et déclin de la Commission de la conservation du Canada* (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1994), pp. 220–221.

for more scientific planning of resources in the country, the conservation commission, not surprisingly, supported the idea of fur farming. Since its inception, Laurier's commission had attempted to inventory and suggest conservation regulations largely to provincial governments on such diverse matters as hydro-electric potential, minerals, forests, fish, and wild furbearers.⁵ By 1914 the commission had republished Jones's report, largely due to its high demand both in Canada and in such distant places as Australia.⁶

Jones was not the original pioneer among Maritimer farmers, however, nor was farming a strictly twentieth-century innovation. In 1860 John Handley, a farmer in Wellington County, Ontario, reared two silver foxes on his farm, acknowledged as the first attempt in Canada.⁷ Interest began growing in the 1880s both in the United States and Canada. Minkeries were reported in operation near Toronto, run by former fur traders in the mid-1880s, and Prince Edward Islanders had by then begun experiments in breeding, penning, and feeding fox.⁸ While few records have survived of this first generation of farmers, evidence suggests that many of the techniques used by Canadians and Americans — particularly those breeding fox — were first created in the Maritimes at this time. In 1887 the industry's legendary Sir Charles Dalton began raising foxes on P.E.I. and by 1896, with Robert Oulton, placed fox raising on a commercial footing by using wire fencing and large, "natural" outside pens on their successful Cherry Island ranch. The carefully controlled "Dalton-Oulton Strain" was winning high profits as foundation stock, used by other farmers, at the time Jones made his report.⁹

Before these enterprises began, fox farming had periodically been carried out in the fur trade itself when periods of depletion and changing demands

5 See *Annual Reports of the Commission of Conservation* and supplemental volumes published by the commission. The group's committee on fisheries, game, and furbearing animals had previously looked into furbearers. George Colpitts, "Science, Streams and Sport: Trout Conservation in Southern Alberta, 1900–1930" (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1990), p. 11. See also Michel F. Girard, "The Commission of Conservation as a Forerunner to the National Research Council, 1909–1921" in Richard A. Jarrell and Yves Gingras, eds., *Building Canadian Science: The Role of the National Research Council* (Ottawa: Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association, 1991).

6 J. Walter Jones, "Fur Farming in Canada" in *Annual Report of the Commission of Conservation for the Year 1913* (Montreal: Gazette Printing, 1913). It was republished the following year. Girard points out its popularity in *L'écologisme retrouvé*, p. 221.

7 A short but valuable history of the fox farming industry, as well as one of the only known interviews with the "father" of silver fox farming, Sir Charles Dalton, is provided in "A History of the Silver Fox Breeding Industry", *The Canadian National Record for Foxes*, vol. 1 (Summerside: Canadian Silver Fox Breeders' Association, 1922), p. xxvii.

8 E. Randle Bowness, *History of the Early Mink People in Canada* (Canadian Mink Breeders' Association, 1980), p. 4.

9 See Pritchard's interview with Dalton and his overview of the origins of the four strains of fox available by 1921. "A History of the Silver Fox Breeding Industry", pp. xxvii–xxix. See also E. Randle Bowness, excerpted in *Fox-Tales*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1982), published by the Greater Summerside Chamber of Commerce, pp. 8–9.

for fur led to concerted efforts to collect valuable colour phases of fox for the London market. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), already trying to conserve beaver stocks in the 1820s, also attempted to diversify into other furs in the next decades, especially by the 1840s when beaver plummeted in value.¹⁰ Fox was taken in new volumes, which led some individuals anxious to acquire the allusive and mysteriously rare silver fox, largely found in colder Canadian climates, to learn trapping techniques. Walter Butler Cheadle's own hunt for silver fox in the 1860s well demonstrated the lengths some went to capture a prized pelt.¹¹ In the free-trade era, some trappers kept fox captive until their pelts primed, an early expression of the modern fur farm.

Though farmers raised fox and some mink by the 1880s,¹² their ventures were small and largely experimental, barely enduring the problems presented by poor breeding, inadequate pens, and especially the prevailing depression-era low prices that did not compensate farmers who took the trouble to launch these schemes. In the 1890s, however, prices rose and new woven wire fencing came on the market, suddenly changing the potential profits and the viability of these enterprises.¹³ A significant promoter of farmed ventures was an American, A. R. Harding, a former fur buyer who by 1898 had launched the magazine *Fur-Fish-Game* and operated a publishing house in Columbus, Ohio, providing cheap how-to books on all aspects of the "science" of trapping, pelt and hide preparation, and fur grading. His book, *Fur Farming*, in its fifth edition by 1907, drew together previous American studies on farming and provided beginners with instructions on mink, marten, skunk, and fox raising. Harding frequently noted the success of fox farms on Prince Edward Island, and his book contained a chapter on fox raising in Canada, always stressing the massive profit potential for farmers who were well versed in fur grading and applied high standards to their business.¹⁴

The popularity of Harding's books and the dissemination of information in the first decade of the century were accelerated by the industry's potential for real profit. From the late 1890s onwards, fur prices had begun to climb

10 Lorne Hammond, "'No Ordinary Degree of System': The Columbia Department of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Harvesting of Wildlife, 1825-1849" (M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Victoria, 1988), pp. 29-32; Arthur J. Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade", *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1975), pp. 49-68.

11 Walter Butler Cheadle, "My Hunt of the Silver Fox", June 1867, publication unknown, Canadian Institute of Humanities Microforms, 16453.

12 Bowness, *History of the Early Mink People*, pp. 9-11.

13 A. R. Harding, *Fur Buyer's Guide: Complete Instructions about Buying, Handling and Grading Raw Furs* (Columbus: A. R. Harding, 1915), p. 154.

14 A. R. Harding, *Fur Farming: A Book on Raising Fur-Bearing Animals, Telling All about Enclosures, Breeding, Feeding, Habits, etc.* (Columbus: A. R. Harding, 1907).

with the depletion of traditional trade mainstays such as beaver, once again trapped out of many Canadian watersheds. Demands for furs for automobile seats, fashions, and other uses led to a further surge in prices, especially for marten and such traditionally unpopular short-haired varieties as muskrat. New dyeing techniques perfected in Germany and the prevalent practice of passing low-value furs as popular fashion pieces led to a whole host of “new” types of mock varieties. Muskrat gained value as a cheaper, mock variety of seal and beaver; nutria, through shearing and dyeing processes, could also resemble seal and beaver; rabbit, sheared and dyed, found currency as seal, white fox, black lynx, and ermine (weasel).¹⁵ Not only, then, were traditional high-value furs in demand but lesser quality furs found higher prices with their new use by the turn of the century.

Promoters like Jones and Harding, though, were not only considering the huge profits to be won in the marketplace. For them, farming offered a solution to the problem of resource depletion, a growing concern for governments fearing that the “keenness of the hunt” was leading to the extermination of furbearers. New, extensive road and rail systems in northern Quebec, Ontario, and the prairie provinces ensured that “the uttermost sanctuaries of the fur-bearers are [being] invaded”, Jones claimed.¹⁶ According to his research, the “invasion” of human settlements into furbearer areas, the clearing of forests, and the draining of swamps — all signs of progress in a civilized society — had ensured that prices of fur had climbed between 1892 and 1911, while pelts had decreased in number. Jones believed that the “hunter-trapper age” was passing: “the hunting and trapping of wild furbearing animals must give place to their domestication if the demand for furs is to be satisfied.”¹⁷

In 1913, when Jones’s observations were disseminated through the energetic promotions of the Canadian Commission of Conservation, P.E.I. still led the country in farming ventures. The province provided expertise to other regions through individuals like E. Randle Bowness. Born in Bedeque in 1909, he was trained by his father, who owned a ranch in Summerside, and later became a veterinary expert for Ontario fur farmers.¹⁸ Other names included the Fromm Brothers and Fred and Jim Colpitts, who had begun their joint-stock venture in the province in 1913.¹⁹ That year P.E.I.’s commissioner of agriculture reported 277 fox ranches in operation, collectively raising over 3,000 furbearers.²⁰ When heightened speculation sparked inter-

15 Jones points out that since 1887 the London fur auctions had passed prohibitions on such “mis-naming”. in “Fur Farming in Canada”, p. 7. See Robert G. McCandless, *Yukon Wildlife: A Social History* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985), pp. 106–107.

16 McCandless, *Yukon Wildlife*, p. 3.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

18 See Forward of *Fox-Tales*, vol. 1, no. 1 (November 1981).

19 Ian Sclanders, “You Take Two Foxes...”, *Maclean’s Magazine*, January 15, 1947, pp. 18, 37–38.

20 Summary of fur farming in Canada, *DBS Report for the Year 1919*, p. 3.

est in the industry, so that fox, mink, and other farms appeared throughout the country, these Maritimers provided both the breeding stock and the technical knowledge for the industry's expansion. By 1915 the Prince Edward Island Silver Fox Breeders' Association was formed, followed in 1920 by the Canadian Silver Fox Breeders' Association — largely populated by Maritimers. Prominent fur farmers such as the "Fur King" of Saskatchewan, A. K. McNeill, and the Colpitts brothers, who eventually led the industry in Alberta, originally practised their trade on Prince Edward Island.²¹

They had found silver fox — a rarely occurring colour phase of the red fox — a profitable furbearer to cage, raise, and pelt for market. Owners in P.E.I. had imported most of this breeding stock from the Yukon, where a higher proportion of silver fox was known to exist.²² They had less trouble regulating diet, suppressing disease, and controlling breeding for silver fox than for other furbearers. The fox also suited the first application of farming because its valuable colour phases could be anticipated in the offspring of similar parents. The later promoters of "scientific" breeding were optimistic that this would allow farmers to bypass what had been an expensive tradition in the collection of fox furs. The HBC had always been forced to buy the numerous and less valuable colour phases of fox — red and cross — to gain from trappers the coveted black (or silver) phases exhibited in about 2 to 17 per cent of litters.²³ While early fur farming had experimented with virtually every species, including beaver, muskrat, mink, rabbit, and even larger animals like lynx, foxes were least affected by the constraints of pens and the artificial diets imposed upon them by breeders.

Fox was clearly the leading farmed species by the time the Dominion Bureau of Statistics began reporting on the industry in 1919. That year it reported 424 fox, three mink, and two raccoon farms in Canada.²⁴ The bulk of those enterprises still existed in Prince Edward Island, with the remaining in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec. By 1920 the number of fox farms in the country grew to 578 and after that date, possibly because

21 McNeill is profiled by H. H. Kritzwiser in "Fur King", *Canadian Business*, vol. 18, no. 11 (November 1945), pp. 50–51. Three generations of Colpitts became prominent as fur farmers in New Brunswick and later in Alberta. See "Business in the Maritimes", *Canadian Business*, vol. 18, no. 1 (January 1945), p. 86. See also Glenbow Institute Archives and Library, Calgary (hereafter GA), Robert W. Gillis, "History of Alberta Fur Farming", unpublished manuscript, M3776.

22 McCandless, *Yukon Wildlife*, p. 112. See pp. 113–114 for an overview of the fox farming ventures in the Yukon.

23 As Hammond points out, the "mystery" of the silver and its rare occurrence in litters had forced buyers to buy up at their cost trappers' other fox pelts, granting a barrier to overexploitation and perhaps providing a natural survival mechanism for the fox. Hammond, "'No Ordinary Degree of System'", pp. 30–31. Some of these matters are addressed in Lorne Hammond, "Marketing Wildlife: The Hudson's Bay Company and the Pacific Northwest, 1821–49", *Forest and Conservation History*, vol. 37, no. 1 (January 1993), pp. 14–25.

24 *DBS Report for the Year 1919*, p. 3.

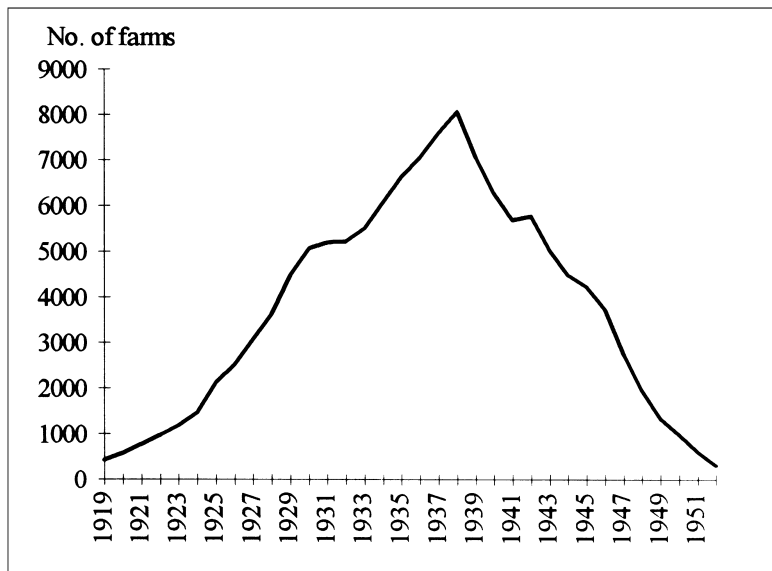


Figure 1 Total number of Canadian fox farms: 1919–1952
Source: DBS Reports

of the relatively easy entry into the market and heady inter-war fur prices (a silver fox pelt could sell in 1919 for \$250), fur farming rapidly gained popularity. By 1923 fox farms numbered 1,179. Fox farming reached its greatest popularity in 1938 when there were 8,073 farms in the country (Figure 1). Pelts reaching the market from such ventures, not surprisingly, increased exponentially. In 1919 farms produced 111 pelts. The next year the number climbed to 2,843. By 1938 fox farmers produced almost 275,000. New farms then began raising larger quantities of muskrat, and the years of World War II saw the emergence of the new favourite, mink. Since 1933 the Dominion Bureau of Statistics had believed mink “may well be regarded as permanently established”²⁵ and they gained popularity after the war, largely replacing fox on farms. Farmers also raised badger, lynx, fitch, marten, fisher, coyote, chinchilla rabbit, Siberian hare, and karakul sheep. Beaver and muskrat farms gained popularity by the late 1920s, muskrat becoming the highest producer of all species, second to fox, by 1929. In 1931, 159 muskrat and 13 beaver farms were operating, most of them in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia.²⁶ Little information is available concerning these ventures, except for the numbers provided in Table 1. The overwhelming energy in farming was devoted to fox, and statistics by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (DBS) are most detailed for fox farms.

²⁵ There were 577 minkeries that year. *DBS Report for the Year 1933*.

²⁶ From DBS reports for the years 1920, 1925, 1930–1931.

Table 1 Total Numbers of Miscellaneous Farms in Canada

Year	Mink	Raccoon	Marten	Fisher	Coyote	Badger	Fitch	Nutria	Muskkrat	Beaver
1920	6	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1924	30	29	1	4	2	-	-	-	-	-
1927	268	157	9	7	3	4	-	-	172	13
1931	795	294	17	7	5	30	14	-	159	13
1935	636	120	5	4	1	4	38	-	41	14
1938	2,222	2	10	1	-	2	30	10	30	10

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics reports for the years 1920, 1924, 1927, 1931, 1935, and 1938.

Magazine writers began taking some interest in the industry as farms made larger contributions to national fur production. In the years of the Second World War, *Saturday Night* recognized the impressive gains in the marketplace of farmed fur, *Country Life* advised agriculturists how best to get involved in the new industry, and *Maclean's* reported on massive joint-stock schemes.²⁷ During this period of expansion, promoters claimed that the “Greatest Profit-Making Industry of the Age” was firmly grounded in controlled breeding and rigorous business standards.²⁸

In the 1920s and 1930s confidence grew that farming was a more efficient, “scientific” approach to fur production, which in the past had been at the mercy of Canada’s natural elements and poor trapping practices. In the traditional setting, traps or scavenging animals often damaged pelts. Trappers impatient for revenue often overkilled animals susceptible to depletion or took them before their furs were primed. Environmental factors affecting a season’s harvest ranged from epidemics of disease to poor food or related population cycles.²⁹ The twentieth century also introduced periods of rampant over-trapping due in part to widely fluctuating prices. Over-trapping concerned both provincial governments and trappers themselves and many looked to fur farming as a more rational, efficient, and safe way to harvest a dwindling resource. Before provincial governments could exert much control over northern trapping activities and launch conservation schemes like Manitoba’s muskrat restoration projects in the later 1930s,³⁰ many industry observers believed that Canada was changing too rapidly for furbearer populations to keep up. Shortly after World War I roads and railways made northern areas accessible to transient trappers who soon conflicted with native Indians.³¹ Post-war interest in trapping in Manitoba, for instance, had sent hundreds of white trappers into traditional Native

27 “Fur Farming Grows”, *Saturday Night*, November 16, 1940; “Mink Farm”, *Maclean's*, January 1, 1939, pp. 10, 23–24; “Fur Farming Has Grown into Big Business to Satisfy Milady’s Fashion Caprice”, *Saturday Night*, December 6, 1941, pp. 4–5; “Fur Crops For Farmers”, *Country Life*, November 1941, p. 51; “Breeding of Silver Foxes”, *Country Life*, April 1940, p. 17.

28 GA, “Possibilities in Fox Farming”, pamphlet, Parkhill Silver Black Fox Company, Calgary, Alberta, 192[?].

29 See K. Ambrock and Lorraine Allison, “Status of Muskrat on the Peace-Athabasca Delta”, *Canadian Wildlife Service Bulletin*, 1972. For historical overviews of populations, see Arlen Todd and Lori Greisbrecht, *Alberta Fur Production and Management 1920–1978* (Edmonton: Alberta Energy and Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Division, 1979). For North American inventories of trapped furbearers, see Milan Novak, *Furbearer Harvest in North America, 1600–1984* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 1987).

30 R. J. Taylor, “Trapper’s Harvest”, *Maclean's*, July 15, 1940, pp. 30–31.

31 The Department of Indian Affairs, provincial game offices, and fish and game conservation associations all voiced approval to have large areas of the north set aside as strictly “native” trapping areas in the 1920s, although none of these proposals was acted upon. Beaver “preserves”, however, were created in Northern Ontario and Manitoba to serve the needs of trappers, and muskrat areas were set aside in Saskatchewan. See Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade*, p. 117.

trapping areas. By 1926 V. W. Jackson, a professor of biology with the Manitoba Agricultural College, reported that there were 200 or 300 white trappers in an area of northern Manitoba where there was room for, at most, 100 or 120. In areas where native Indians traditionally had been the sole harvesters, southern interlopers now made up 50 per cent of the ranks.³² Not surprisingly, Jackson was an enthusiastic supporter of fur farming. "The possibilities of fur farming is [*sic*] just dawning upon us," he said. "The vogue of furs has nearly exhausted nature's supply and fur farms will have to supply the future, just as agriculture supplemented nature's supply of wild fruits and seeds in the dawn of civilization."³³ He lauded the dawning of a new age for the fur trade and the nation, when such enterprises as the All Star Ranch near Winnipeg could ship 114 registered foxes from the province that year alone.³⁴

This modernist vision of the trapping industry had gained apparent credibility a decade later when another government advisor reported the same social and environmental changes to the Manitoba Economic Resources Board. "With the inevitable advances of civilization, the area available for trapping has decreased although the numbers of trappers have increased," J. Melvin reported in the late 1930s, noting again the intrusion of white trappers fleeing the Depression economics in the south and invading Native trapping regions. With supply yet dwindling, not only was fur farming a peaceful solution to competition, but the industry could pick up the ever-slackening returns from the trapping industry. Already, Melvin noted that the number of fur farms had expanded from two in 1920 to 660 in 1937.³⁵

Alberta and Saskatchewan governments watched similar competition growing between white settlers and newcomers in traditional Native trapping areas. In Alberta the Department of Agriculture handled hundreds of farming permits and distributed copies of regulations throughout the 1920s. Amidst the general popularity of fox farming, H. A. Craig, the deputy minister, noted that about 500 people were already raising chinchilla and that number was "increasing very rapidly". Farmers with worthless marshland were attempting to raise muskrat. When the province introduced a new licensing system in 1930, it had 800 applicants eager to begin operations.³⁶ By that time, Benjamin Lawton, the chief game guardian, estimated that there were

32 GA, V. W. Jackson, "Fur & Game Resources of Manitoba", Industrial Development Board of Manitoba, 1926.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

34 McLaren points out that Jackson, while promoting fur farming in such books as *Rat Farming in Manitoba*, was also a leader in the eugenics movement. Both fur farming and the onus placed upon genetic manipulation in eugenics were, in fact, quite complementary. McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), p. 26.

35 GA, J. Melven, "The Fur Industry of Manitoba", Manitoba Economic Survey Board, 1938.

36 Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton (hereafter PAA), Department of Agriculture in Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, Craig to Baker, October 10, 1928; Craig to Hoadley, December 13, 1930.

about 13,500 silver fox, almost 800 cross fox, 300 red fox, 45,000 muskrats, and 1,600 mink on Alberta fur farms.³⁷ Most observers believed that such production was a more rational way to meet market demand, with wild furs apparently depleted and American promoters stating that “today our supply is at the exhaustion point [and] that is the sole reason why fur farming properly conducted, will be a success.”³⁸

Fur farm proponents, however, believed such success had to be grounded on firm scientific principles. As the industry gained more national footing, agricultural colleges and provincial agricultural departments wholeheartedly approved of the scientific front farming gave to the fur trade — and believed in the theoretical possibility that farmers could produce better furs than trappers could in the wild. Since 1921 even the Hudson’s Bay Company publication, *The Beaver*, had noted the many people clamouring for information on fur farming. “The whole subject is having scientific investigation, even today, and before long much valuable information will be available,” the magazine reported.³⁹ The company soon launched three fox farms in the Northwest Territories.

One of the most widely known boosters of the scientific farm idea was Robert G. Hodgson, editor of the *Fur Trade Journal*. Increasingly, Hodgson promoted farming as a sounder alternative to a competitive wild fur industry. Of the many books he published on trapping and farming, his 1925 title, *Trapping in Northern Canada*, asserted that “contrary to popular belief, it is no longer necessary for the would-be trapper to journey hundreds of miles”. Fur farming instead yielded a “worthwhile” income for those wishing to attempt it near their homes.⁴⁰ He claimed that Canada invited the improved techniques to domesticate wild animals. In a series of books on farming he stated that “the mink is no longer a mystery, so far as raising them commercially for their fur is concerned”. Now the marten, fisher, and weasel were “rapidly falling into line” also.⁴¹

In this, fur farmers believed they were taking advantage of new insights into breeding principles to uphold the quality of particular strains. Hodgson’s books included chapters on line breeding and provided a Felch’s Breeding Chart — pointing out the right way for farmers to maintain the best foundation stock, avoid uncontrolled inbreeding, and stop disease from spreading.⁴² Through line breeding and ruthless culling, farms would reproduce the best animals and get them to market. Promoters believed other colour phases could also be developed, later proven by such fox breeders as

37 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, Benjamin Lawton’s Estimates for year 1913.

38 O. Kuechler, *Practical Fur Ranching* (Columbus: The Hunter-Trader-Trapper Co., 1927), p. 9.

39 “Fur Conservation”, *The Beaver*, vol. 2, no. 2 (November 1921), pp. 8–10.

40 Robert G. Hodgson, *Trapping in Northern Canada* (Oshawa: Fur Trade Journal, 1925), p. 14.

41 Robert G. Hodgson, *Fur Farming: The Weasel Family* (Oshawa: Fur Trade Journal, 1925), p. 5.

42 *Ibid.* Chapters 2 and 3 have discussions on line breeding.

Fred Colpitts, who helped to launch the “platinum” as a new colour phase in the late 1930s and to circumvent the sagging prices in a saturated silver fox market. Hodgson and others were intent upon educating farmers about correct breeding standards, making each as knowledgeable as fur buyers and trading post factors had once been. This was the point of titles like *Breeding and Reproduction in Fur Bearing Animals*, Hodgson’s guide to “scientific breeding” for newcomers in the field.⁴³ Meanwhile, his *Fur Trade Journal* frequently published submissions from farmers and regularly carried “success stories of ranchers from Prince Edward Island to the Pacific Coast” who usually pointed out the need for better breeding standards applied to farmed animals.⁴⁴

Government information and agricultural departments spread more information about the “scientific” possibilities of farming. The Federal Department of the Interior distributed information to farmers converting swampy farmland into suitable muskrat habitat in 1920, informing them about the number of rats they should stock and ways to avoid food and fencing problems.⁴⁵ The same department published the farming booklet entitled *The Muskrat: A Canadian Fur Resource*, containing information on how to stock and maintain marsh areas, construct fences, and feed muskrats.⁴⁶

Scientific advice disseminated from experts like E. Randle Bowness, already mentioned, and J. A. Allen, a pathologist in charge of the Canadian government’s fox research station in Summerside. Allen later supervised Manitoba’s research station. He co-wrote the *Theory and Practice of Fox Ranching*, which included numerous photographs of parasites and tell-tale skin sores from disease, and gave readers prescriptions for veterinary remedies.⁴⁷ Most research for Allen’s book had taken place at the Summerside site, itself a tribute to the scientific turn taken in the industry. The federally funded research building contained two laboratories, offices, and a watch tower where observations could be made of the 35 fox pens constructed outside in the main yard. Additionally, there were breeding and exercise pens.⁴⁸ Model farms showing farmers preferable layouts and penning plans, as well as experimental stations, were soon built by provincial governments. By 1934 Quebec’s Department of Public Works, Game and Fisheries and

43 E. E. LaBerre, revised and edited by Robert G. Hodgson, *Breeding and Reproduction in Fur Bearing Animals* (Toronto: Fur Trade Journal of Canada, 1941).

44 See backflap advertisement of the *Fur Trade Journal* in Robert G. Hodgson, *Farming Nutria For Profit* (Toronto: Fur Trade Journal of Canada, 1949), p. 6. Many of the articles carried in the *Fur Trade Journal* were reprinted as a book in 1931. These shed light upon ideas shared among many contributors. R. G. Hodgson, ed., *A Scrap Book of Mink Raising* (Toronto: Fur Trade Journal of Canada, 1931).

45 GA, Robert Cole Files, M7753, Lynch to Cole, January 16, 1929.

46 *The Muskrat: A Canadian Fur Resource* (Ottawa: Department of Interior, 1928).

47 J. A. Allen, *Theory and Practice of Fox Ranching* (Charlottetown: Irwing Printing, 1926).

48 G. Ennis Smith, *Experimental Fox Ranch* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1928).

Ontario's Department of Game and Fisheries had established experimental stations. Manitoba established a model farm for raising fox, mink, and other species at the same time. By 1936 the Alberta government had built a model farm and experimental station for mink and fox at the Oliver Mental Hospital. The Hudson's Bay Company's own experiment on Esquimo Island in the St. Lawrence River soon became a tourist attraction that publicized this modern development in the fur trade.⁴⁹

The model farms promoted correct breeding standards, but they also reflected the hope that progressive management and rational organization could replace the fur trade. Like agricultural model farms, these fur farms had government representatives who hoped newcomers in the industry would take home techniques that would produce the best wares Canada could offer to international fur markets. One federal government publication in 1939 included a photograph of a Quebec mink pen bearing the cutline that "Mink are raised here with modern, scientific methods." Another photograph of an experimental fox farm in Manitoba carried the message that platinum fox pups were raised in scientifically regulated environments "under ideal conditions".⁵⁰ Model farms encouraged higher sanitary standards and impressed upon farmers the need for vigilance in breeding practices. Their orderly, geometric appearance, the rows of clean, whitewashed pens and tidy fencing, contrasted starkly with the wild settings originally associated with the trapping industry.

Promoters also placed fur farming against the backdrop of wider changes in the Canadian economy, assumptions that fur resources were near exhaustion, and a broad social concern that the northern wilderness was disappearing. Rather than being merely another business adopting scientific planning and rationalization, fur farming affirmed a degree of national betterment and improvement and heralded the arrival of Laurier's century of modernization and advancement. Government agencies taking some lead in this transformation of the trapping industry were in turn quick to separate farmed furbearers from their wild kin and measure the nation's improvement accordingly. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics reported on farmed furs in 1919, distinguishing them from wild fur harvests. Fox, mink, nutria, beaver, and muskrat raised in pens or propagated on swampy farmland were treated as essentially different than their wild counterparts. Certainly, farmed animals gained much more value with investment, penning, feed, and land rent associated with their rearing — all factors not influencing the value of wild furs. But fur farm promoters were also anxious to measure modernization in Canada, signalled in no small way by the domestication of furbearers.

Indeed, fur farming modernized an aspect of the economy already radically changed by such regulatory innovations as registered trapping lines, fur

49 J. Eric Love, "Raising Foxes for Fur", *The Beaver*, outfit 262, no. 1 (June 1931), pp. 223–225.

50 These photographs were included in the *DBS Report for the Year 1939*, pp. 7–8.

quotas, and export and permit fees. New game ordinances recognized farmed fur as apparently free from seasonal, ecological, and environmental constraints that had made open and closed seasons, quotas, and registration systems necessary. Alberta regulations reflected this hope. Initially, the province's Department of Agriculture regarded farmed pelts in the same way as it did wild pelts. Fur farmers, until 1928, paid the same fur and export taxes as did trappers. Farmers also had to abide by existing season dates, whether they raised fox, muskrat, or mink. By 1928, however, considerable numbers of farmers protested this treatment, and by 1930 Benjamin Lawton suggested to the Department of Agriculture that season dates might not apply to ranched species and proposed an amendment to the Game Act allowing farmers to harvest in any season. The new Fur Farm Regulations also exempted farmers from fur taxes and export fees placed upon wild pelts. Showing its steady approval of the industry, the government lowered fees on licences and the rent it charged farmers on public land.⁵¹ The government also dropped its usual tax on animals as "stock in trade" held on farms within school districts, and instead recognized farmed animals as regular livestock, exempt from taxation.⁵²

No wonder trappers and buyers reliant on wild furs protested what they perceived as the government's favourable treatment of farmers. Since 1915 the Alberta government had conducted provincial fur auctions — the first of many provincial governments to offer such services — which often gave part-time trappers better prices and selling advantages than established buyer companies.⁵³ Angry fur buyers in the Alberta Raw Fur Merchants Association complained that these government-sponsored auctions also favoured fur farmers by giving them "similar selling advantages to those provided [to livestock and cereal farmers] in the case of poultry, eggs, dairy, etc."⁵⁴ Certainly the government buying body undercut the merchant association's own freedom to control prices and enter profitably what was always a volatile market.⁵⁵

Early regulations often ignored many of the enduring constraints that faced both farming and trapping industries, overlooking thorny issues, such as the live-trapping and pelting of animals, that emerged in the case of the HBC's venture into farming in the Northwest Territories. At Chesterfield and Pangnirtung, the company began ranching fox in the late 1920s, and later raising beaver as a conservation measure on islands in James Bay.

51 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, "Fur Farm Regulations, February 1930".

52 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, Ward to Craig, October 15, 1930.

53 Ray discusses Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba government auctions. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade*, pp. 133–134.

54 "Alberta Fur Men Protest Government Treatment", *Northern Fur Trade*, January 1926, p. 4.

55 The Association's minutes show its own problematic attempts to establish pricing from 1917 to the 1930s. PAA, acc. file 85.354, Alberta Raw Fur Merchants Association, *Minute Book*.

Regulatory problems surfaced when the company sought licences for Indians to trap breeding stock for the farms, in numbers large enough that law enforcement officials were concerned that fox might be depleted with this stretching of existing regulations. The company's lawyers had argued, and the NWT government finally agreed, that the HBC had authority to trade fox whether dead or alive, and licences were issued in much the same way as trapping permits had been.⁵⁶ Within the year, however, RCMP personnel were troubled over a number of further matters. How foxes were to be trapped was not specified in legislation; neither was the season for trapping, nor what to do with foxes killed in the traps and then sold out of season. The RCMP believed that Indians live-trapping foxes for farms had to be constrained within the open season dates and forced to trap on their registered lines. These concerns surfaced when a trapper was discovered collecting fox out of season for farms and selling those that had died in his traps to the HBC — the same company embarking on fur farming.⁵⁷

These issues eventually found legislative redress, but by government promoters anxious to make one of Canada's oldest commercial endeavours more efficient and reshape it into an economic activity appropriate for a progressive society.⁵⁸ The industry's leaders believed that, through superior breeding and controlled conditions, fur farmers could provide better furs for the market than had traders. Regulations that recognized farmed fur differently than wild were written at a time when Canada was transforming with increased industry, settlement, and northern development. Since Canada was modernizing, this industry, so reliant upon dwindling wild spaces, would require domestication if it were to continue. Canadian furbearers, penned and reared like cattle, chickens, or pigs, would have to reside, not in the howling north, but in the shadows of Canada's new urban centres.

An Industry in Trouble

It did not take long for the former director of the Summerside Experimental Farm and present director of the Manitoba model farm, Dr. J. A. Allen, to find the cause of disease rampant throughout Alberta's fur farms in the early 1930s. Alberta's status as a fur farm centre of Canada had steadily risen throughout the previous decade. The province's contributions to national fur auctions, while small compared with mass-producing provinces such as Ontario and Quebec, nevertheless fetched higher prices than almost all other provinces except for Prince Edward Island.⁵⁹ Alberta farmers had diversi-

56 National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (hereafter NAC), RG84, vol. 1387, file 405-3-3, Munson Allen *et al.* to O. S. Finnie, May 8, 1928.

57 NAC, RG84, vol. 1387, file 405-3-3, M. A. Joyce to N.W.T. Directorate, April 8, 1929, and June 26, 1929.

58 It should be noted that farming was gaining popularity at the same time in the United States and Scandinavian countries, particularly Norway.

59 The Dominion Bureau of Statistics tracked the highest auction prices for silver, cross, red, and blue

fied into a number of other endeavours, including chinchilla and muskrat farming. Moreover, farmers had placed increasing amounts of capital into fox farming to the point where Allen believed that the province's reputation was one of the most sterling in the country.⁶⁰

In spite of all this, 1,500 foxes and 500 mink had died on farms near Edmonton and Calgary in 1931. The reasons were not hard to discover. Allen reported to the Alberta government that near Edmonton a large fox ranch was "found in a very filthy and most unsanitary condition". Allen discovered on that farm alone 27 diseased foxes suffering from ear mites, distemper, and hookworm. When he left, he ordered the burning of half a ton of meat used for feed. He made similar reports about other farms all over the province. Foxes languished in far too small pens. Often animals were housed on the same patch of ground for years while soil turned "putrid". Allen ended his observations with the pronouncement that farmers would have to abide more closely to proven standards in raising animals, be more selective with food and its proper quantities, and remain vigilant for disease.⁶¹

Despite the scientific rhetoric reaching farmers from government sources, Allen's report suggests that they were hardly creating businesses emulating model establishments. Farmers throughout Canada reported that cold and exposure killed significant numbers of young animals on farms, while distemper, worms, poor nutrition, and accidents killed thousands of adults and pups annually.⁶² Scientific observers were also disappointed with the quality of animals sold as pelts from farms. Instead of raising superior animals with pelts capturing the best auction prices, farmers tended to allow poor population strains to lower the quality and therefore the selling price of their animals. One frustrated writer in *Fur Trade Journal*, describing mink farms in Canada, said that "the majority of the animals are of poor quality and instead of finding this out the average farmer keeps on producing stock of little value".⁶³

National experts at a gathering sponsored by the Department of Agriculture in 1937 were not exaggerating when they stated that the fox farming industry in Canada was "at a cross-roads". Present at the meeting was one of the original farm promoters, J. Walter Jones, who made comments on an industry sagging with deflated prices and losing its hold on the international silver fox market. Farms in Scandinavia were producing better quality pelts

foxes in the 1930s. Alberta consistently ranked highly as a producer of silver and cross fox pelts, as well as foundation stock. Prince Edward Island, meanwhile, consistently sold the highest valued live animals and pelts. See *DBS Annual Report for the Year 1930*, p. 39.

60 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, Allen's correspondence in 1930-1932.

61 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, J. A. Allen, "Report, 1931".

62 "Causes of Death of Foxes, 1927 and 1928", *DBS Annual Report for the Year 1928*, p. 35.

63 "Looking Forward" in Hodgson, ed., *A Scrap Book of Mink Farming*, p. 20.

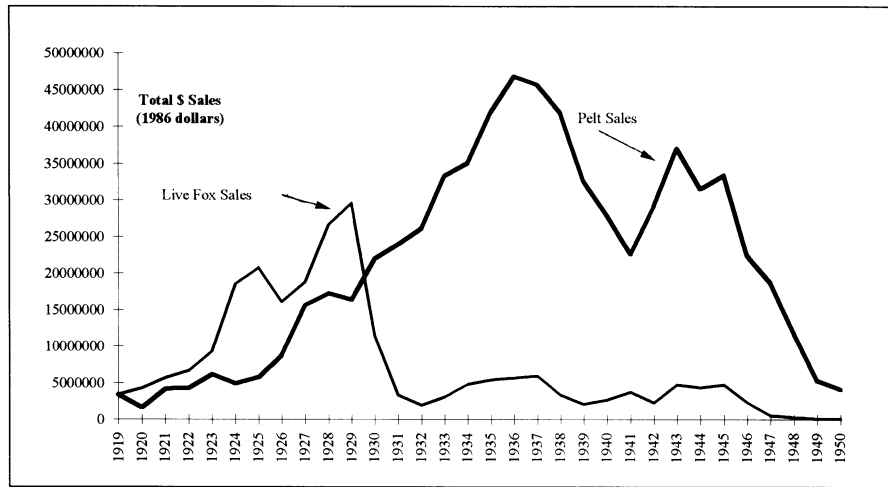


Figure 2 Total \$ value of live vs. pelted foxes from Canadian farms, 1919–1950
1986 Dollars

Source: DBS Reports

while inexperienced Canadian breeders were still “indifferently” producing fox of any standard.⁶⁴ The report recommended a series of measures such as an experimental farm established in Ottawa, illustration farms built in the Maritimes, a grading and marketing body for fur farmers, and appointment of an officer in the Department of Agriculture to oversee the industry.

A host of problems were undermining the fox farms in Canada. Farmers maintained a long practice of selling their best animals live to newcomers to form breeding stock. By doing so, they could ask far higher prices than they could expect from pelts at auctions. Consequently, what farmers put up for auction were essentially the worse pelts raised on their farms. This profit strategy is seen particularly in fox farming statistics. Throughout the 1920s, when excitement over farming drew thousands of new players into the industry, newcomers were eager to procure a superior foundation stock, since only flawless animals would likely reproduce offspring with any value. They were willing to pay four to six times the price that a superior animal would fetch as a pelt and, not surprisingly, fox farms sold their best wares alive to new farmers as long as the numbers kept increasing.⁶⁵ Figure 2

64 NAC, RG17, vol. 3026, file 37–12–9(1), Report on 1937 Meeting “Foxes in Canada”.

65 In this period, foundation stock remained a crucial commodity for farms to turn a profit. It was the significant decline in live sale prices that eventually struck at the capital value of fox farms. In 1926, for instance, a live sale (which, as mentioned earlier, often became the foundation stock for a new farmer) sometimes earned the seller as much as \$175. *DBS Report for the Year 1927*, p. 14. By 1932 the same live sale fetched about \$32. *DBS Report for the Year 1932*, p. 43.

shows the total dollar value of live fox sales, which steadily rose. In 1929 farms collectively earned over \$6,000,000 in revenue from that market. The same year, farms collectively earned little more than \$2,000,000 from pelt sales to auction houses. It is obvious that farms specializing in foundation stock sales were those organized as joint-stock businesses, carrying out large economies of scale and maintaining the most rigorous standards, obviously the case with Parkhill Silver Black Fox Co. in Calgary, which could offer high-grade breeders to any interested party.⁶⁶

Figures showing total value of pelts, however, can hide the relatively low dollar value per pelt buyers were often paying for farmed furs. Although silver fox was the pelt of choice among farmers, it was not trapped in enough quantities to allow comparison with its wild counterpart. Red fox sales, however, can provide some comparison between the quality of farmed versus wild furs. In 1925 trappers earned an average of \$72 a pelt for red fox while farmers earned on average only \$19 a pelt. In 1930 wild red fox sold at an average of \$81 a pelt; that year, the highest price given for a farmed red fox pelt was for one raised on a Quebec farm, fetching only \$50.⁶⁷ The central factor leading to these shortfalls in industry standards — namely, farmers maintaining unsanitary, disease-ridden facilities, allowing poor strains to develop, and diverting animals of high quality into the foundation stock market rather than the pelt market — was cost. Fur farming was proving to be far more expensive than any enthusiastic promoters had even guessed.

Before making crude estimates of the possible component costs that made up farmed fur prices, it is important to survey typical characteristics of fur farms throughout Canada in the 1920s and 1930s. As mentioned earlier, Prince Edward Island had been the original farming centre of the country. In 1920, 53 per cent of fox farms across the country were based in that province. Ten years later, however, P.E.I. claimed only 14 per cent of the farms. By then, Quebec had steadily drawn more players into the industry, followed by Ontario. In 1933 Quebec claimed 35 per cent of farms in the country. By the end of the 1930s, also, the prairie provinces supported between 10 to 15 per cent of the country's farms (Figure 3).⁶⁸

Again, the most complete information available on the organizational characteristics of fur farming in this expanded national setting concerns fox farms. P.E.I. enterprises originally attracted the highest proportion of joint-stock companies. As farming became more popular throughout the country,

66 See note 28, "Possibilities in Fox Farming".

67 See *DBS Fur Farm Report for the Year 1925* for the average price of farmed red foxes that year. Average Canadian prices of wild fur can be found in Novak, "Furbearer Harvests in North America". For the highest prices paid for both live animals and pelts, see "Highest Prices Recorded in Sales of Foxes and Fox Pelts, 1930", *DBS Report for the Year 1930*, p. 39.

68 Compiled from farm numbers provided by DBS reports for the years 1920, 1923, 1930, 1933, and 1935.

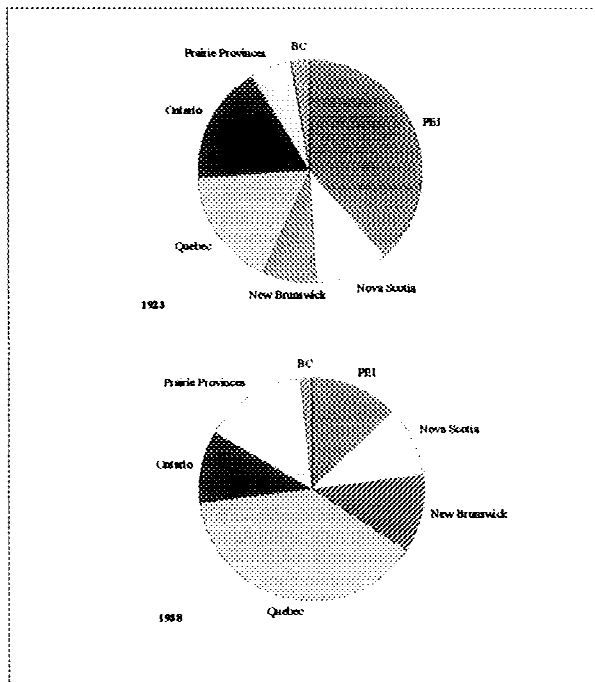


Figure 3 Fox farms by province, 1923 & 1938
Source: DBS Reports

the industry did not interest large-scale investment conducive to joint-stock arrangements. Rather, fur farming was carried out extensively by partnerships or, more frequently, by individuals. Even P.E.I.'s farms increasingly featured individual business enterprise. Throughout the 1920s partnership arrangements remained proportionally stable throughout Canada, but the percentage of farms operated by individuals soared. Starting as 60 per cent of the total number of farms, individual enterprise claimed 80 per cent of farming by 1928. In the Depression years, individual arrangements composed almost 90 per cent of fox farms (Figure 4). Manitoba and Prince Edward Island exhibited the most radical decline in joint-stock operations while all the other provinces experienced a similar, but more moderate, decline in this approach to farming.

A fur farm in Canada, then, could soon be characterized as an individually run business, and individual farmers had to bear the necessary costs of capital investment. Proprietors tended to hire fewer wage-earning employees as the industry expanded.⁶⁹ The numbers of wage-earning employees hired

⁶⁹ DBS reports show employee numbers in Canada rising gradually from around 250 in 1920 to a high of around 1,500 in 1929. These numbers hardly kept pace with total numbers of fox farms.

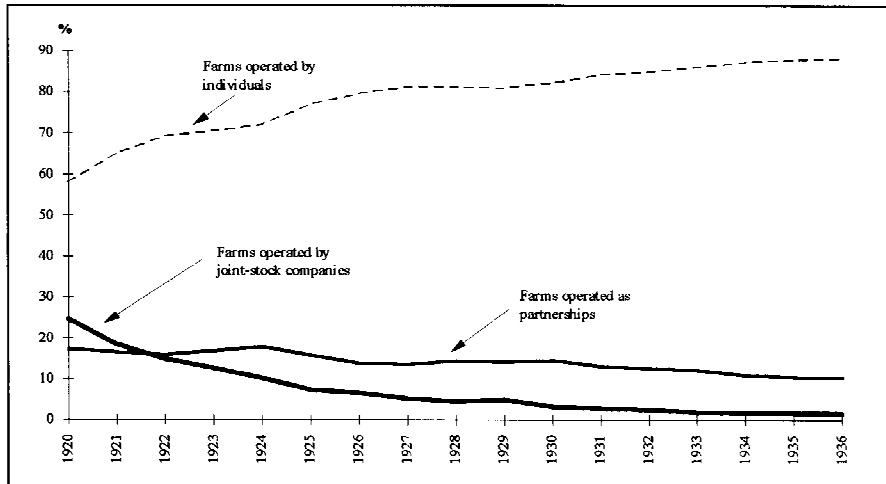


Figure 4 Organizational character of fox farms in Canada, 1920–1936

Source: *DBS Reports*

on fur farms did not match the increase in the number of farms, suggesting that farm owners either hired no employees or hired fewer throughout the 1930s. Likely the few large fox farms operating in each province used most of the hired help. The Colpitts Ranch in Alberta, for instance, that maintained about 1,600 silver fox in the mid-1930s, undoubtedly carried far many more employees than the average small-scale farm did.⁷⁰ A further point is that these more numerous small-scale farms were likely raising between 10 to 20 foxes,⁷¹ and the smaller farms, especially those with fewer than five animals, tended to go out of business more commonly than larger ones.

Geographic distribution in the two largest fur-farming provinces, Quebec and Ontario, suggests that these small enterprises were not solely devoted to fox as a farmed product. The greatest concentration of farming activities in Quebec, the province eventually claiming the largest proportion of fox farms in the country, occurred initially in the Lac-St-Jean, Saguenay region, on the north and south shores of the St. Lawrence, and in counties between Quebec City and Montreal. These were close to urban centres or transporta-

70 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, Notes on Colpitts Ranch, 1931.

71 In 1925, for instance, 24% of Canadian farms had five foxes or fewer; meanwhile, 49% of Canada's farms had fewer than 20 foxes. Only 15% of farms had more than 30 foxes. The DBS monitored, but did not differentiate in its reports, farms producing furs and those producing both furs and other livestock. These smaller operations, with fewer than five animals, likely were raising other types of livestock. See "Classification of Fox Farms According to the Number of Foxes", *DBS Report for the Year 1925*, p. 23.

tion routes, such as Dorchester, Beauce, and Charlevoix. The same pattern of distribution arose in smaller concentration and almost exclusively in Ontario's southern regions. These were located in mixed farming areas and on medium to large farms.⁷² It is likely that fox breeding enterprises were added onto struggling mixed farming businesses where animals did not benefit from large pens and carefully balanced diets. The mixed-farming setting suggests that the fox were fed farm and butchery scraps. It is telling that by 1934 only 3 per cent of farms maintained 80 foxes or more.⁷³

Farmers discovered unexpected expenses, especially those who had added fur farming to their existing agricultural or husbandry businesses. Although it was tempting to assume that farmers could "add on" a mink or fox enterprise with relative ease, reality did not bear this out. Original designs in mink ranches included natural, colony, or cage settings, but it was the last and most expensive design that became the norm if breeding standards were to be maintained and infighting between animals kept to a minimum. Separate cages for mink, fox, nutria, chinchilla, and most short-haired animals required special feeding arrangements, and miles of fencing were required for muskrat and beaver. Such fencing, cage mesh, and deep walls ran into the order of thousands of dollars. So did their annual maintenance.⁷⁴ There were also capital investments in land, buildings, and equipment. Traditional trapping occurred in remote areas and on trapping lines established by some provincial governments by the end of the 1920s, procured with a registration fee and rented annually. Farmers, however, assumed the cost of renting or purchasing land rising in value, whether they owned their land or rented it for a fee from provincial governments.⁷⁵

It was food costs, however, that made fox ranching more expensive than previously guessed. The Colpitts ranch, near Calgary, faced the challenge of procuring about 1,100 pounds of gophers a day to feed its foxes — and Jim Colpitts had originally left P.E.I. for Alberta to find cheaper food for

72 Distribution was assessed by identifying counties in Quebec and Ontario containing more than 20 farms in the years 1928 and 1938. DBS reports for the years 1928 and 1938. Counties with more than 75 farms in Quebec in 1938 were Beauce, Bellachasse, Charlevoix, Compton, Dorchester, Frontenac, Lac-St-Jean, L'islet, Lotbinière, Montmorency, Nicolet, Portneuf, and Roberval. The largest concentrations of farms in Ontario counties the same year were in Lanark and Renfrew. Farm size and mixed farm status were assessed in reference to Philip D. Keddie and Julius A. Mage, *Southern Ontario: Atlas of Agriculture, Contemporary Patterns and Recent Changes* (Guelph: University of Guelph Occasional Papers in Geography No. 7, 1985).

73 That year 17% of Canada's farms had 30 foxes. The majority of farms, 72%, still maintained fewer than 20 foxes. "Classification of Fox Farms According to the Number of Foxes", *DBS Report for the Year 1934*, p.36.

74 "The Muskrat: A Canadian Fur Resource", Department of Interior, 1928.

75 The Alberta government charged \$1.00 per acre on land leased to licensed fur farmers. By 1930 the rental charge was lowered to 25 cents per acre. See PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332.

the family's ranch business.⁷⁶ Robert Gillis, a second-generation fur farmer in Alberta, pointed out the difficulty farmers soon had providing food for their operations.⁷⁷ Although it is easy to assume that opportunities abounded for farmers to use fish offal and waste matter from slaughterhouses, leading furbearers like fox had in fact temperamental diets which limited farmers in what scraps they could use. Almost all food had to be kept fresh or frozen. Initially, fox farmers used rough fish, purchased cheaply from native Indians or collected themselves by netting. This strategy presented larger problems with time. The cost of food and the difficulty of balancing fox diets apparently led the HBC to quit its northern fox ranches by 1941.⁷⁸ By the late 1940s food costs were cited as the major detriment to fox farming ventures. A Dominion Wildlife Service report noted that in central Alberta farmers had once used tons of rough fish from nearby lakes, but with the resulting serious stock depletion and subsequent regulatory curtailment, farmers had lost most of their profits.⁷⁹ A report on the possibility of fur farmers using coarse fish from Great Slave Lake was likewise discouraging.⁸⁰

What cost considerations, capital investments, and the organizational character of farms suggest is that a farmer operating a small-scale enterprise faced far greater difficulties producing a pelt than a trapper did. In 1926, for instance, the government advisor, V. W. Jackson, reported the typical costs faced by a trapper in an average season. He estimated that a trapper would pay about \$120 a year in food. His long-term capital investment was roughly \$1,000, including tents, dogs, sleds, and traps.⁸¹ Trappers were also not confined to one species of furbearer. Most could shift attention to more lucrative pelts if there was a decline in prices for others. They also could take advantage of the relatively lax government supervision of their industry, having a great deal of freedom to choose where, when, and what species they trapped in each season.⁸² Wild peltries, then, had fewer costs attached to their selling price.

The fur farmer, however, faced a far different profit potential. Had large joint-stock companies thrived in the country, perhaps capital costs, food, and other expenses might have been kept lower with specialization of labour and economies of scale. This was not the case. Fur farmers were on the whole

76 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, Notes on Colpitts Ranch, 1931.

Jim had gone to Alberta in 1927 because "food was cheaper in the west than in the east". Sclanders, "You Take Two Foxes", p. 37.

77 GA, Gillis, "History of Alberta Fur Farming".

78 NAC, RG84, vol. 1387, file 405-3, 0011-A, Gibson to Parsons, September 3, 1941.

79 NAC, RG84, vol. 1387, file 405-3, 0011-A, DWS to Dr. Lewis, October 9, 1948.

80 NAC, RG84, vol. 1387, file 405-3, 0011-A, Report of W. A. Kennedy and L. C. Hewson, 1948.

81 GA, Jackson, "Fur and Game Resources", pp. 37-38.

82 Michael, G. Boyd, "Management of Marten, Fisher, and Lynx in Saskatchewan, with Special Reference to the Effect of Forest Harvesting in the Mixedwood Boreal Forest" (M.A. thesis, Department of Environmental Design, University of Calgary, 1978), pp. 5-15.

independent operators who had to bear the cost of improvements themselves. This pushed operating expenses upward to a point where many could not produce pelts for the same unit price that trappers could expect. Furthermore, farmers could not switch to different species if prices fell. Having poured money into foundation stock and appropriate buildings and pens, a farmer had little opportunity or time to switch from fox to mink, for example, with much ease if the market changed. In times of slumping prices, farmers had but one strategy to make a profit, by increasing production. While some farmers such as A. K. McNeill in Saskatchewan sought to create exotic colour phases to buoy up prices, the majority of farmers seemed to lack this degree of independence and marketing innovation.⁸³ They instead overproduced their wares.

As pointed out, fox farmers initially enjoyed profits earned by selling foundation stock as the industry rapidly expanded. Likely this market provided them with the bulk of their profit during the 1920s. When the market became saturated by 1930 and high prices for breeding stock could no longer be won, farmers increasingly turned to pelt production to pay for their operations. It would seem that overproduction due to high operating costs, beyond the question of demand, caused the sagging fox prices in the ensuing decade. During the Depression era, fox was one of the few species of fur that fell significantly in value, never to recover. Initially, with the stock market crash of 1929, all fur markets plummeted.⁸⁴ However, by 1935 international demands rose for muskrat, red squirrel, ermine, beaver, marten, and lynx; many of them fetched higher prices after 1935 than they had throughout the 1920s.⁸⁵ Arthur J. Ray has pointed out that fox farming, by inundating the market with fur, led to a decline in prices.⁸⁶ He does not, however, fully explain why farmers were inclined to flood the market to the extent they did at the risk of depressing prices. The character of their organizations — largely individually operated at high cost — led the industry to overproduce wares. Moreover, the sheer popularity of farming ensured that any overproduction across the industry would cause massive devaluation in prices (Figure 5).

A Changing Market

Beyond economic perspectives, however, other reasons can be posited to explain the uncertain status of the industry in Canada. Individualism and poor breeding standards suggest that those involved with the industry were influenced by ethics that then guided the trapping industry: trappers worked individually, took what nature provided, and sold for whatever could be

83 H. H. Kritzwiser, "Fur King", *Canadian Business*, vol. 18, no. 11 (November 1945), pp. 50–51.

84 See "Stock Market Crash Smashes Fur Prices", *Edmonton Journal*, December 7, 1929.

85 Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade*, pp. 118–134.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

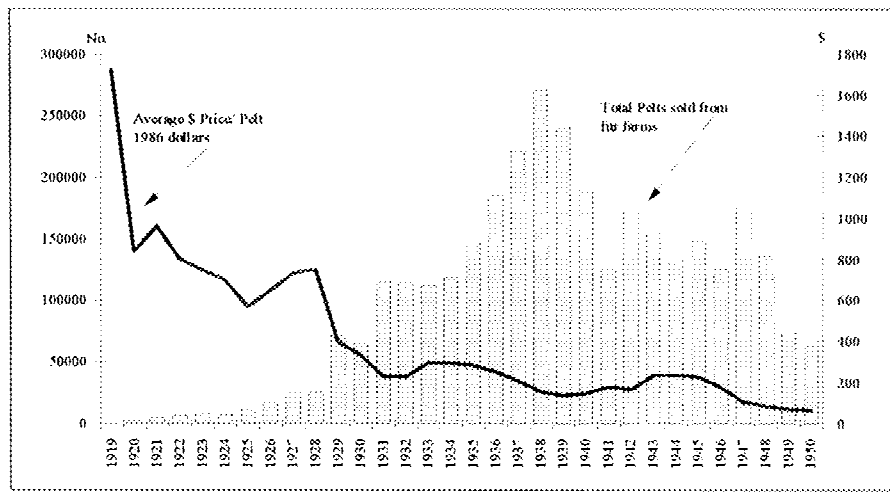


Figure 5 Farmed fox pelt numbers & average annual price/pelt
1986 dollars

Source: DBS Reports

gained on the market.⁸⁷ Many farmers apparently had difficulty following the lead of government and industry promoters anxious to separate fox, mink, and other furbearers from their wild setting and domesticate an industry so closely associated with ideals of individualism and freedom in nature.⁸⁸ Furthermore, fox farmers began floundering at a time when the wild fur trapping industry showed signs of revival, in the 1940s and 1950s, after government organization of the trade was stabilizing and conservation programmes were making visible improvements on once-depleted traplines. Theories of furbearer population cycles also gained greater currency in the early 1940s, allowing many to believe that nature's bounty was not in the midst of disappearing but available in endless cycles of depletion and abundance.⁸⁹ In this context, the wilderness was not necessarily vanishing, an assumption that had partly driven the industry's rapid expansion.

87 Hodgson's statement seems applicable, that fur farming had developed "from the trapper's idea of cashing in by supplying the fur markets in an easier way". LaBerre, revised and edited by Hodgson, *Breeding and Reproduction in Fur Bearing Animals*, p. 7.

88 These ideals appear in such pictorial representations of trapping in Canada in the free trade era. See "Fur Trappers in Canada", *The Illustrated London News*, May 15, 1880, p. 481.

89 Ferguson, writing in 1946, said that he had been drawn to the Athabasca trapping areas for mink in the late 1920s because "furs run in cycles of abundance and scarcity, seven years making each complete cycle — so the books said." Chick Ferguson, *Mink, Mary and Me: The Story of a Wilderness Trapline* (New York: M. S. Mill Company, 1946), p. 8. Lloyd Keith saw scientific work investigating animal population cycles beginning in 1931. Hammond, "No Ordinary Degree of System", p. 22.

If these issues were influencing producers, however, there was yet the irreconcilable concept of domesticity applied to fur as a consumer's product. Marketers and advertisers reluctantly removed fur products from their original wilderness settings in their store-fronts. The retail side of the fur farm, in fact, failed to reflect what original promoters believed, that the fur pelt could find value after being removed from the wilderness and retain the "mystery" that often heightened its value on the market.⁹⁰

A survey of Eaton's and Simpson's Fall and Winter catalogues from 1900 to 1945⁹¹ reveals this limitation in the fur coat market during the heyday of fur farming in Canada. Marketers rarely followed fur farming promoters by placing a progressive ideal in their products. Catalogue readers were assured of the close connection existing "from trapper to wearer" behind Simpson's fur coat line in 1925.⁹² Fur farmers soon supplying the entire silver fox garment industry in Canada were not mentioned in garment advertisements. With processes available to Canadian tanners and fur dressers, farmed fur was often remade into "wild" pelts. The ranched rabbit was transformed and renamed "Beavertine", "French Beaver", popular "Syberian Seal" (advertised with illustrations of a seal on an ice flow),⁹³ and Arabian Lynx. Goatskins could also be passed as "Korean Beaver". Muskrat, although never farmed in enough quantities to be called a farmed fur, was sheared and dyed to imitate seal; lowly dog pelts could replicate "costly Sitka Fox!"⁹⁴ or more often "Manchurian wolf". Concurrently, furs raised on farms and imported in huge quantities from Australian and American farms were more often sheared, dyed, processed, and finally marketed as ambassadors of the northern wilderness. Those raised on Canadian farms, such as silver fox, found little representation in this market as farmed products. Though farm cooperatives attempted some marketing, as revealed in their showrooms,⁹⁵ the farmed pelt was largely lost within the volumes passing through auctions and later in the dressing and garment industries.

This is not to suggest that farmed furs could never have found a market. In recent years, mink has been accepted as a "humanely" farmed commodity, ironic in light of the earlier analogies drawn between fur farms and

90 Hammond observes that the rare and largely unexplained occurrence of silver fox pups in litters gave them a "mystery" that heightened their value in London markets. See Hammond, "No Ordinary Degree of System", p. 30.

91 GA, Catalogue Collection.

92 GA, *Simpson's Catalogue*, Fall and Winter, 1925–26, p. 45.

93 GA, *Eaton's Catalogue*, Fall and Winter, 1936–37, p. 170.

94 As seen in the 1932 Sears Roebuck catalogue. *Sears Roebuck Catalogues of the 1930's: A Journey Back to Hard Times and High Hopes* (New York: Nostalgia Books, 1978).

95 The Calgary Co-Op Fur Farmers' Association by 1948 proposed the building of a warehouse and mill with a showroom. GA, M7539 no. 13, "Proposed Two-Storey Building, Calgary Co-Op Fur Farmers' Association", 1948. Also M848 no. 50, plan showing fur display room.

“internment camps”.⁹⁶ Progressive-era consumers, particularly women, often demanded manipulated, coloured, and even “electrified” furs. This demand invited farm contributions, since colour phases could be capitalized upon in the farm setting. Blue and platinum foxes, occurring far too rarely in the wild, were farmed in enough quantities to become huge fashion successes. Practically all silver and exotic fox, as well as special strains of mink, were raised on farms. The farm, then, offered a potential source for innovative fashion pleasers.

Changing demands for fur products in Canada might explain why consumers never fully embraced farmed and exotic furs, and many of the key changes occurred among female consumers. An analysis of the fur goods industry and retail catalogues clearly reveals “separate spheres” between male and female consumers in fur coats. Both markets changed enough before the Korean War to make farmers largely invisible as contributors to the fur coat industry. Men’s fur coats were never high fashion pieces, commanding low retail prices and reflecting the late-nineteenth-century use of fur as a decorative addition, rather than an ostentatious display of conspicuous wealth. Demand by men for fur coats steadily declined by the end of the 1920s. With the rapid expansion of the fur goods industry in Canada — businesses finishing furs into garments and catering almost exclusively to home markets — production of men’s fur coats declined precipitously in all provinces except Quebec, where men’s coats, interestingly, were still produced until the Second World War. Elsewhere the widespread use of artificial fabrics at that time probably ended much of this use of fur. In the rising number of small factories finishing fur goods all over Canada — particularly in the immigrant-booming western provinces — men’s fur coats fell dramatically in importance after the end of the 1920s.⁹⁷ Ontario and other provincial fur goods producers made almost no coats for male customers after 1930.⁹⁸ Until this time, fur coats being worn by men were characterized by fewer styles and were consistently made of “genuine” furs, usually beaver or buffalo. Male customers were assured that these coats afforded utility, practicality, and durability. In the declining years of the men’s fur coat market, catalogue selection dwindled from as many as five styles to the lone style offered in 1925–1926, made of “genuine beaver”.⁹⁹

96 Sclanders used this analogy in “You Take Two Foxes”, p. 38.

97 Between 1921 and 1948 the number of men’s fur coats produced in Canada declined from around 4,600 to 1,700, almost all of which were produced in Quebec factories. See DBS reports on the “Fur Garment Industries”, 1921, 1925, 1928, 1940, 1945, and 1948.

98 The DBS “Fur-Goods Industry” report for 1940 shows Quebec manufacturers producing 1,173 coats for men; Ontario produced 20, Manitoba 419 (perhaps reaching large numbers of francophones), and other provinces (mostly English-speaking) only 85 (p. 8).

99 According to *A Shopper’s View of Canada’s Past: Pages from Eaton’s Catalogues 1886–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), the 1899–90 Eaton’s catalogue offered five styles made of “Black Beaver”, “natural Dark Muskrat”, Raccoon, and “Bear Goat” models (p. 65). The 1908

The women's market meanwhile flourished during the same period. When fur coats gained greater currency early in the century, the women's coat was almost immediately decorative. The fragility of the women's coat was stressed in magazines like *Chatelaine*, which published instructions for women about how to care for, clean, and beat furs and advised on the need for professional storage facilities to ensure their preservation.¹⁰⁰ The same female market was saturated with wide varieties of mock products: the "electric" seal, the dyed hare, and manipulated sheepskins became prominent favourites. In the 1920s, especially, women sought exotic furs — those transformed by dyeing processes, sheared, piled, and otherwise recreated either to emulate other furs or to pose as furs never encountered in the wild at all. Such furs as "Thebetine", or recreated sheep, are good examples. These furs were hardly genuine. The female consumer was far from the wild in this evolutionary transformation of a raw fur that passed initially through a number of male hands — the trapper's, the auctioneer's, the fur treatment specialist's — to the final female seamstress. Such processing was, not surprisingly, long associated with fur farms, which *Saturday Night* graphically depicted as a "Big Business to Satisfy Milady's Fashion Caprices". In a series of photographs, that article showed the transformation of a farmed fox beginning with it alive in a pen, to its pelt passing through the hands of male dressers, operators, and cutters. The tanned and dressed fur finally found itself in the hands of a female garment worker who sewed on buttons.¹⁰¹ In this representation, the fur made a journey from wilderness entered and exploited by males to the domestic sphere overseen by females. This separation between the sexes can be also seen in statistics of the fur dressing (raw) versus the fur goods (dressing) industries in Canada, which showed a heavily male-dominated industry dealing with wild furs and greater female involvement with the final treatment of dressed fur.¹⁰² Although beyond the scope of this discussion, these matters invite closer scrutiny.¹⁰³

catalogue carried "servicable raccoon", shells of black beaver, and German Otter. It did carry a coat of "Hard usage", being "black china dog". The Simpson's 1925–26 catalogue carried one coat for men, made of beaver (p. 256). Eaton's three models offered in 1936–37 were made of Korean Beaver, Beaver Lamb, and Buffalo (p. 170). The Eaton's 1944–45 catalogue carried no fur coats for men.

100 See Julia Wolfe, "The Care of Expensive Furs", *Chatelaine*, December 1929, p. 57.

101 "Fur Farming Has Grown into Big Business", p. 5.

102 DBS reports on the "Fur Goods Industry", including reports on dressers, from 1921, 1925, 1928, 1935, 1940, and 1948 show that female employment was consistently and comparatively high in fur goods factories, although this does not mean that women enjoyed the same salaried, as opposed to wage-earning, positions and annual number of work days as men. In 1921 women occupied 49% of the employment in fur goods industries, falling to 39% in 1948; conversely, women occupied only 13% to 22% of positions dressing raw fur in the same period. In 1945 wartime employment still accounted for only 28% of positions for women in the industry.

103 Sources did not allow for a close assessment of how many women ran fur farms. Indian, Métis, and white women worked as trappers, although Ferguson was probably typical in his belief that the trapline was no place for a woman. Ferguson, *Mink, Mary and Me*, p. 6.

Fur farms producing “domesticated” wares might have met female demands for exotic products by providing hybrids and new colour strains. However, the Depression years and the concurrent overstocking of the fox market completely changed the consumer demand for exotics. During this time, catalogues stressed the lure of mock furs not because they offered exotic diversity, in which women could explore individuality,¹⁰⁴ but because they were cheap. So was fox. It was ignobly overworn now that it could be purchased far cheaper than ever before. During the 1930s, when the first glut of silver fox production pulled down prices, the “double” fox shawl came in vogue, allowing a woman to wrap, not one animal, but two (including heads, tails, and feet) around her neck, a product offered in such low-budget consumer pages as Simpson’s catalogues.¹⁰⁵ After Depression-era economics lifted, mock varieties apparently became associated with cheap emulation, and in the later 1930s and 1940s female consumers demanded “genuine” wares, those closely associated with colder, wild climates and true wilderness conditions.

This return of the female consumer to the wild, though, should not be accepted as merely a consumer change in the post-war economic boom. Social factors might also be considered for further investigation. The new demand among women for “genuine” fur may have exhibited a shift in popular attitudes to nature. The 1920s fashion market had revealed widespread concerns for the decline of the northern wilderness and demonstrated, in exotic furs, the hopes being placed in furbearer domestication. The 1940s market, however, had changed. The apparent efficacy of wildlife management programmes, the further establishment of federal and provincial parks, and the gaining currency of the theory of furbearer population cycles might have led Canadians to believe in the permanency of northern wilderness areas. The concerted programmes of northern development finding priority in post-war governments also contrasted starkly with attitudes of the earlier period, when white trappers were “invading” and exhausting northern regions. The return of fashion fur to the “wild”, then, might indicate that Canadian society believed the north and its wilderness was no longer imperiled, and the fur farm no longer necessary.

The Disappearing Fox Farm

Before the decline of the fox farm, government officials and industry promoters initially believed that farming amounted to a civilized expression of a “passing” trapping industry. They had certainly hoped that farming would

104 Simpson’s assured prospective buyers of “French Dyed Electric Seal” (or dyed rabbit), “if you like individuality in your fur coat, here it is!” *Simpson’s Catalogue*, Fall and Winter 1925–26, p. 46.

105 See the 1932 *Sears Roebuck Catalogue*, which told consumers that “Quality Coats, with luxurious furs are not expensive Now!” Low prices meant women could afford not just one, but “a two-skin” fox scarf. *Sears Roebuck Catalogues of the 1930s*.

artificially maintain animals “which are dwindling to the danger point in the wilds”, as one experimental farm expert stated in 1938.¹⁰⁶ Their hopes for a thriving industry, however, clearly floundered with the disappointing returns from most farm enterprises. By then fox farming was disappearing as a national endeavour. The industry that had attracted over 5,000 farms by the end of the 1920s was reporting less revenue after each year’s fur auctions. By 1948 only 1,955 farms were operating. In the next two years, that number dropped to 308. Furthermore, in the midst of their rapid growth in the 1920s, farms had produced few of the high-quality pelts pathologists such as J. A. Allen had envisioned, pelts that would surely claim higher prices than those trapped. If anything, the rush of farmers into the industry had inundated an already unstable market with poor-quality wares. Farms never gained control over breeding, nor were they able to replicate in full the conditions promoted at government experimental and model farms. While some farmers produced high-quality breeding stock and pelts, and the industry was sustained in the minkeries that replaced fox farms, most had proven lax in keeping poor strains from developing. Their enterprises were dilapidated, unsanitary, and plagued with disease.

Fur farming seemed severely debilitated by its frequent organization as one-farmer enterprises which hired few employees and struggled to meet high capital expenditures and operating costs. Perhaps the most profit-earning potential in the fox industry occurred between 1920 and 1929 when the foundation stock market was thriving. When the industry went into its pelt phase, their abundance soon devalued prices, and, with no foundation stock market to meet, farmers no longer enjoyed the same profits.

Beyond these economic considerations, promoters had difficulty reconciling wild features of the fur trade to a new, progressive business enterprise. Marketers never disconnected the meaningful tie between fur and the “mystery” of the wilderness. It is no surprise that fur farming gained the greatest popularity in the 1920s, when nature conservation gained prominence at a national level in Canada. The initial efforts of the Commission of Conservation to protect wildlife as a valuable tourist and recreational resource, the proceedings of annual Dominion-Provincial Conferences on Wildlife beginning in 1921, and efforts of such individuals as Gordon Hewitt to conserve Canadian wildlife all provide context for the popularity of fur farming. Conservationists like Hewitt, after all, publicized a social concern for the implications of settlement and growing human developments upon wildlife populations.¹⁰⁷ After a Depression-era decline, the 1940s

106 PAA, Department of Agriculture for Alberta, acc. file 73.307/332, Allen to Mullen, November 30, 1937.

107 Proceedings of the Commission’s 1919 Conference on Wildlife and such articles as Gordon Hewitt’s “The Need of Nation-wide Effort in Wild Life Conservation”, *Tenth Annual Report of the Commission of Conservation*, 1919, Wildlife Conference. One of the most complete surveys of national

saw trapping revive as a viable economic venture, and in the 1950s muskrat, lynx, and other furs could command staggeringly high prices. In the meanwhile, the fur farm was no longer as important in the age of conservation, trapline management, and regulated fur sales. Furthermore, farming had failed to replicate wild animals efficiently as consumers started rejecting exotic pelts in favour of wild furbearers. Although their farms found some market presence, the industry's promoters had hardly transformed a centuries-old Canadian economic pursuit into a business befitting a modern age.

wildlife resources was compiled by Hewitt in 1921 as *The Conservation of the Wild Life of Canada* (New York: Scribners, 1921). Proceedings of the annual Provincial/Dominion Wildlife Conferences, from 1922 onwards, can be found in NAC, Department of Indian Affairs records, RG10, vol. 7631, file 420-1-2.