

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Ban on Keeping Mink to Be Lifted at End of Year

Country: Denmark

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Report Category: Livestock and Products, Agriculture in the News, Agricultural Situation

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Report Highlights:

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (known as the Fødevarestyrelsen) has announced Denmark will lift its temporary ban on keeping mink as of January 1, 2023. The ban had initially been imposed for 2020/2021 for the sake of public health during the coronavirus pandemic and was later extended to include 2022. With roughly 1,200 farms, Denmark had been the world's largest producer of mink skins prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

Background

After the [Danish Patient Safety Authority](#) identified a patient in June 2020 with coronavirus (COVID-19) who was associated with a mink farm in North Jutland, samples were taken from 34 mink on the farm. The [Danish State Serum Institute](#) conducted analyses of the samples. The Government later confirmed the presence of the virus among the farm's mink population. For additional information, see [DA2020-0004: Government to Cull Mink on COVID-19 Infected Farm in North Jutland](#).

Subsequently, the Danes identified five additional mink farms with the presence of COVID-19 (bringing the total number of infected mink farms in early September 2020 to six). While instituting a series of protective measures, the [Danish Veterinary and Food Administration](#) (Fødevarestyrelsen) and the Danish health authorities assessed that it was justifiable to let infected herds live because the risk of spreading the infection to humans was believed to be minimal. For additional information, see [DA2020-0008: Sixth Danish Mink Farm Infected by Coronavirus](#).

In late September 2020, however, the number of cases on Danish mink farms had significantly increased. Accordingly, the Government announced it had decided to cull mink farms infected with COVID-19, or that were suspected of being infected with COVID-19, as well as healthy herds within a radius of 8 kilometers (5 miles) of an infected herd. For additional information, see [DA2020-0011: Denmark to Cull One Million Mink Due to Coronavirus](#).

On November 4, 2020, Denmark's Prime Minister, Mette Frederikson, announced that all mink on Danish mink farms were to be preventively culled after a mutated version of the coronavirus had begun to spread in the country. Previous measures implemented by the Government to contain the virus had proved insufficient. Her decision also came after the Danish State Serum Institute (SSI) warned that the "mutated virus among mink may involve the risk that the upcoming vaccine will not work as it should."¹ For additional information, see [FA2020-0013: Government to Cull All Mink in Denmark](#). This decision was ultimately found to be unlawful,² led to criticism from opposition political parties and the resignation of country's Minister of Food and Fisheries,³ and even led to early elections to be held in November 2022.^{4/5}

Production May Resume

In late September 2022, the SSI issued a risk assessment (an unofficial google translation is attached) in which it noted that while preventive measures are needed to protect workers from infection, the risk to public health will be limited by reopening mink production, albeit at a "significantly reduced" level, in January 2023.⁶ On this basis, the government has decided not to extend the temporary ban (i.e., from January 1, 2023, it will again be permitted to keep mink in Denmark).

¹ <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/alle-danske-mink-skal-aflives-af-frygt-virusmutation>

² See, e.g., <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jun/30/denmarks-covid-mass-mink-cull-no-legal-justification-report>

³ See, e.g., <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/mogens-jensen-traekker-sig-som-foedevareminister-efter-minkskandale> (in Danish)

⁴ See, e.g., https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-a-mink-cull-tipped-denmark-into-political-crisis/2022/10/06/5d8717ba-4588-11ed-be17-89cbe6b8c0a5_story.html

⁵ See, e.g., <https://www.politico.eu/article/denmark-hold-early-general-election-november-mette-frederiksen/>

⁶ <https://foedevarestyrelsen.dk/Dyr/Dyr-og-Covid-19/Mink-og-COVID-19/Sider/Genaabning-af-minkproduktion.aspx> (in Danish)

The Fødevarestyrelsen notes several criteria that must be met for producers. An unofficial translation follows⁷:

Monitoring Program

All mink farms must be monitored according to the standard monitoring program set out in [Commission Implementing Decision \(EU\) No 2021/788](#). Approximately 60 samples will be taken by the Foedevarestyrelsen from mink per week.

Infection Control Plan

The plan must contain the following elements:

- The number of people with access to the company is limited as much as possible, and a record of visitors to the company is kept.
- Guidelines for how to ensure that people entering the company do not have symptoms of or are infected with COVID-19.
- Hand washing with soap followed by hand disinfection, as a minimum upon entry and exit from the company.
- Change of clothes to and from the company, as well as handling of used work clothes.
 - Changing footwear or washing and disinfecting footwear.
- Bath for everyone with access to the crew area. The bath is taken at the exit of the company after finishing work.
- Use of protective equipment:
 - in healthy herds: surgical mask and visor or goggles
 - in herds that are suspected of being or are infected: FFP3 mask and tight-fitting goggles.
- Course in hygiene and correct use of protective equipment.
- Other animals that roam the company must be kept within this area. Animals kept outside the company must not have access to the company.

Cleaning and Disinfection

Requirement for cleaning and disinfection of equipment before it is moved from/to another company (machines, tools, etc.).

Throat Swab Tests

Examination via throat swab samples from all mink upon importation into Denmark or before moving to another company in Denmark.

Separation of Mink

Separation of relocated mink from the rest of the mink in the receiving herd until the results of the investigations are available.

Dead mink for furring or disposal must be placed so that collection can take place without the driver/furrier staff having access to the herd area.

⁷ Id.

Outbreak of COVID-19 in Mink Herds

Handling a crew infected with COVID-19:

- Crews suspected of or found to be infected with COVID-19 are subject to public supervision.
- Depending on the COVID-19 situation in the Danish population and the associated risk assessment from SSI at the time in question, the infected herd will either be subject to public supervision until there is no longer an active infection among the mink, or the herd will be euthanized.

Control of Claims

The requirements will be subject to inspections by the Fødevarestyrelsen in the herds. In addition to the regular sample-based basic controls, all mink herds will receive an annual control visit. This control visit will focus on infection protection and hygiene.

Recommendation

The company is recommended in their infection protection plan to draw up guidelines for testing people who work in the company:

- Antigen testing before the working day on a mink farm begins and two weekly PCR tests.

The company is also recommended to draw up guidelines in the infection protection plan so that persons who have been in a healthy, suspected, or infected company with fur animals or in a fur factory are not given access to the company within the first 24 hours after the contact has ended.

What's Next?

It remains to be seen if the Danish industry, both in production and trade, can and/or will ever return to its pre-coronavirus levels. Media reports that Danske Minkavlere (the Danish breeders association) believes the 15 breeders who exist under a so-called dormancy scheme will resume production.⁸ Despite the ban on domestic production, Copenhagen Furs, one of the world's leading fur auction houses, held its first physical auction in two years in September 2022 and reported selling 3.5 million skins – 98 percent of its inventory.⁹ Four auctions are planned in calendar year 2023 with a total offer of 10 million mink skins.¹⁰

Attachments:

[SSI Risk Assessment \(Google Translated\).pdf](#)

⁸ See <https://www.danskeminkavlere.dk/nyheder/2022/august/danske-minkavlere-nu-kan-nogle-faa-avlere-forhaabentligt-igen-producere-mink-i-danmark/>

⁹ See <https://landbrugsavisen.dk/kopenhagen-fur-melder-udsolgt-efter-f%C3%B8rste-rigtige-auktion-i-%C3%A5r> and <https://www.kopenhagenfur.com/da/nyheder/2022/september/september-auktionen-2022-foerste-rigtige-pelsauktion-i-to-aar/>

¹⁰ <https://www.kopenhagenfur.com/da/nyheder/2022/oktober/auktionsdatoer-2023/>