



SILENT SUFFERING IN OUR OWN BACKYARD:

FUR FARMING IN THE UNITED STATES

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Images kindly provided by Anima International. Images are representative examples of the global fur farming industry and its practices.

INTRODUCTION



**WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT, IN 2020,
MORE THAN EVER BEFORE
THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR FUR
TO BE IN ANYONE'S CLOSET.**

Wearing animal fur as clothing has been steadily falling out of fashion for decades. As members of the public learned about the cruel conditions faced by animals on fur farms, they have turned their back on the practice in droves. Concerns over cruelty and decreasing demand has resulted in many major fashion houses, including Armani, Gucci, Michael Kors, Prada Group, and Versace implementing fur-free policies. They join designers such as Diane von Furstenberg, Stella McCartney, and Vivienne Westwood who are pioneering fur-free high fashion trends. Stores such as H&M, Macy's Inc., and Zara have also committed to being fur-free retailers, while manufacturers such as Ecopel have filled the gap in the market left by the failing fur industry by creating high quality and sustainable fur substitutes. What is clear is that, in 2020, more than ever before there is no excuse for fur to be in anyone's closet.

Despite the industry downturn, fur farms still exist, and animals are still raised and killed in their millions globally; their lifeless bodies discarded and their skins used to make unnecessary coats, hats, or even trinkets on a key ring. Many in the U.S. may think that this cruel farming of animals for their skin happens elsewhere – in the traditional fur industry strongholds of Europe and Canada. That could not be farther from the truth. In reality, fur farms are right in our own backyard, in the United States. More and more, European countries are banning fur farming by law while fur farming here in the United States continues with an almost complete lack of meaningful regulation or oversight.



In 2018, there were an estimated 245 mink farms in 22 states producing 3.1 million animal pelts and totaling \$82.6 million dollars.¹ These numbers only include mink farms; no publicly available records are kept for other species. As such, these figures do not include farms that breed animals like fox, bobcat, nutria, rabbit, and chinchilla and so, the total of lives taken to fuel frivolous fashion fads far exceeds these figures. More than 85% of fur used in fashion is derived from animals in factory fur farms.² Wisconsin is the leading mink producing state, generating more than one million pelts annually, followed by Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Minnesota.³

Born Free USA investigated the U.S. fur industry in 2009 and published the results in our *Cruelty Uncaged* report. Disappointingly, on revisiting this issue a decade

later, while other countries have made great strides in closing down the fur farm industry, the U.S. has failed to make progress, and the legislative landscape remains almost identical today as it did in 2009. Even more concerning is that the states that have regulations in place to offer a modicum of protection to animals exploited on fur farms, state officials could not provide the most basic information about fur farming in their state and are confused in their understanding of who is responsible for enforcing the laws. Many states are unaware if there are fur farms in their states, and where those farms might be located. This means that millions of animals are likely suffering unseen, unmonitored, and unprotected in this country. Not only is this an enormous animal welfare issue, but with news surfacing at the time of

writing of COVID-19 breakouts in U.S. fur farms, it also presents a significant public safety risk.

This report amends and updates the data presented in our 2009 *Cruelty Uncaged* report, and will provide a current analysis of fur farming in the United States. Exploring animal welfare, oversight and regulation, and emerging public health threats, our analysis will highlight just how far the U.S. has fallen behind in bringing this cruel industry under control and what steps must be taken to tackle this issue in the interests of animals and human society.

*For more information on fur farming in the United States, this report can be read in conjunction with the 2009 **Cruelty Uncaged** report, which provides a comprehensive overview of the welfare concerns and issues surrounding domestication, which are summarized as part of this report.*

¹ "Facts and Figures About Farmed Fur." Fur Commission USA, <https://furcommission.com/>. Accessed August 20, 2020.

² "Mink Farming Fuels Rural Economies." Fur Commission USA, <https://furcommission.com/mink-farming-2/>. Accessed August 20, 2020.

³ Id.

AN AGRICULTURAL PURSUIT



MYTH:

ANIMALS FARMED FOR THEIR FUR ARE "DOMESTICATED."

FACT:

MINK AND FOX HAVE BEEN BRED IN CAPTIVITY FOR AROUND 90 YEARS AND ARE STILL FUNDAMENTALLY WILD ANIMALS. IN COMPARISON, THE DOMESTICATION OF DOGS IS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEGUN IN A SINGLE WOLF POPULATION BETWEEN 20,000 TO 40,000 YEARS AGO.

The fur industry often claims that mink and fox raised for their fur have been domesticated and selectively bred to be adaptable to living in fur farms and in these extreme, unnatural conditions. However, this is not true. They have only been kept and bred in captivity for a relatively short amount of time.¹

Wild animals are those who have not been domesticated. Domestication is a process that occurs over millennia and involves selective breeding to express traits

which, ultimately, leads to the domesticated animal becoming significantly distinguished from their wild counterparts.

The claim of domestication by the fur industry serves a dual purpose. The first reason is that the industry argues that mink and fox – both wild animals – have become adapted to their lives in the cages of fur farms. Being aware that the idea of a caged animal is unpalatable to members of the public, it serves the industry's purpose to

present the animals as content in their captive environments.

The second, and likely more important, reason is that by convincing state legislatures that these animals are domesticated, fur farms can be classed under agriculture and the animals classed as livestock or as domestic animals. This excludes the animals from oversight under state laws. In the United States, at least 14 states have regulations that classify fur farming as an “agricultural pursuit” to this end.

¹ Mink and fox have been bred in captivity for possibly 90 years, which is less than three percent of domestication time of animals such as cattle, pigs, horses, and dogs that have been raised in captivity by humans for more than 5,000 years. Sources: Hansen S W 1996 Selection for behavioral traits in farm mink. *Applied Animal Behavior Science* 49: 137–148; Trut L N 1995 Domestication of the fox: Roots and effects. *Scientific* 19 (1): 11–18; Nimón A J, and Broom DM 1999 The welfare of farmed mink (*Mustela vison*) in relation to housing and management; A Review. *Animal Welfare* 9: 205–228; and Nimón A J, and Broom DM 2001 The welfare of farmed foxes (*Vulpes vulpes* and *Alopex lagopus*) in relation to housing and management; A Review. *Animal Welfare* 10: 223–248. Accessed September 23, 2020.

LIFE FOR ANIMALS IN FUR FARMS



In fur farms, animals live miserable lives of extreme confinement and are denied the ability to engage in natural behaviors they would otherwise exhibit in the wild. Furbearing animals are often bred and maintained to maximize fur output with little or no consideration for their health, comfort, and quality of life. This can lead to deformity and obesity, which increase their discomfort, and to the display of stereotypical behaviors due to the severe and chronic stress of their living conditions. The animals suffer throughout their short lives until the day they are brutally killed for their pelts. Sadly, death provides their only release and is often precipitated by extreme fear, stress, illness, and pain.

Most states have no regulations governing the ways in which animals in fur farms are kept. Only six states were found to have any

kind of specific welfare regulations, which mandate minimum standards of care for animals in fur farms. These minimum standards of care are assessed in multiple categories including areas like type of caging, natural behaviors and environmental enrichment, veterinary care, and killing methods. However, even in these instances, the standards required are so low that they would have no real bearing on the quality of life for the animals involved.

TYPE OF CAGING

The living environment for animals farmed for their fur is a source of pain and suffering. Fur farms usually house animals in wire mesh cages with no solid surface underfoot. Using this material is for the fur farmers' benefit, not the animals'. This type of caging allows animal excrement to fall to the ground below and not collect in the cage, which saves

In North Dakota, the state's vague regulation states that the board may examine all lands and buildings licensed as game bird and animal farms, deer farms, or fur farms to determine whether all nontraditional livestock held on licensed farms are treated in a humane manner and confined under sanitary conditions with proper and adequate housing, care, and food. By not defining the words 'humane', 'proper', and 'adequate' fur farmers in North Dakota can interpret this as they see fit, misleading that the animals are receiving quality care.

time and money for the farmers who then can clean the cages less often. However, without a flat, smooth, stable surface to step on, the animals have to strain and grip to stabilize their footing,



MINK, AND OTHER WILD ANIMALS FARMED FOR THEIR FUR, PRESENT SERIOUS DISEASE RISK TO OTHER ANIMALS AND HUMANS. THESE INCLUDE COVID-19, TOXOPLASMOSIS, STRAINS OF PARVOVIRUS, AND CANINE DISTEMPER.

which can lead to injuries in the short term and leg deformities and other health issues over a longer period. Moreover, while excrement falls to the floor when cages are not stacked, some fur farmers stack cages on top of one another to maximize space in the interest of profit, meaning that animals are often subjected to showers of feces and urine from those who live above them. These unsanitary living conditions contribute to the spread of disease and parasites, further impacting the welfare of animals whose living conditions are already compromised. Cleaning and sanitizing of cages is largely left to the whim of the farmers, with only two states being found to have implemented regulations mandating minimum standards.

SIZE OF CAGE

While caging wild animals, in and of itself, negatively impacts

the animals' welfare, the tiny living spaces afforded to mink in fur farms causes further suffering. Research suggests that the average size of a cage for farmed mink is 1'x1'x3'.¹ This provides space for the animals to stand up and turn around but no opportunity for movement in any meaningful way. These animals spend their entire lives in a space little larger than a cat travel crate. This has significant impact on joint, muscle, and bone health.

NATURAL BEHAVIORS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Fur farms offer little to no opportunity for animals to express their innate natural behaviors, including general movement (as outlined above) and species-specific behaviors such as swimming for mink, digging for foxes, dust baths for chinchillas, or burrowing for rabbits. Missouri is the only state found with any

In North Carolina, regulations for a minimum single mink pelt cage is 2 feet depth x 0.5 feet width x 1 foot height. A minimum single fox pelt cage is 2.5 feet depth x 3 feet width x 3 feet height. North Carolina regulation also states that cages shall have a den area large enough for all animals in that cage to turn around and lie down.

In Missouri, regulations for minimum single mink enclosure space is 9 square feet, or 3 feet length, with an enclosure height of 2 feet. Minimum grey and red fox enclosure space is 40 square feet, or 6.32 feet length, with an enclosure height of 5 feet.

kind of minimum regulation that mandates animals be able to carry out natural behaviors, and no states were found to have

¹ Mason GJ, Cooper J, Clarebrough C. Frustrations of fur-farmed mink. *Nature*. 2001;410(6824):35-36. doi:10.1038/35065157. Accessed September 23, 2020.

regulations demanding that environmental enrichment be provided to mitigate some of the boredom and stress of life in a tiny cage, which has a significant psychological impact. As a result of their barren environment and inability to properly express their natural behaviors, stereotypies such as bar-biting, self-mutilation, pacing, and rocking are commonly found in animals on fur farms, as they are in other wild animals in unnatural captive situations.

VETERINARY CARE

During months of research and after contacting respective state agencies regarding their states' regulation (or lack thereof) of fur farms, not a single state was found to have regulations mandating the provision of veterinary care for sick or injured animals on fur farms, much less regulation requiring any kind of preventative veterinary provision or oversight. This is despite multiple global investigations carried out on fur farming revealing animals with untreated injuries, including infected sores and cuts, puncture wounds from fights, and even severed limbs.

KILLING METHODS

The most common methods of killing in fur farms are:

Cervical dislocation: breaking the neck of the animal.

Electrocution: metal electrodes are placed inside the anus



and mouth of the animal and an electrical current passed through them.

Gas: animals are placed in a carbon monoxide or carbon dioxide chamber. It is possible for the gas to simply render an animal unconscious and for the animal to merely appear dead. Animals only stunned by the gas can be skinned alive and regain consciousness during or after the process.

After a miserable life, animals raised on fur farms experience painful and terrifying deaths for the sake of a fur coat or trinket. Despite the potential for significant pain and suffering at the point of killing, only three states in the U.S. were found to have any kind of minimum legislation in place to regulate the ways in which animals in fur farms are killed.

In Missouri, minimum regulation states that semiaquatic animals, such as beaver and muskrat, shall be provided a pool of sufficient water depth for the animal to completely submerge. However, mink are not specified.

In Michigan, their minimum regulation states that game covered by a license may be taken or killed in any manner and at any time, except that game birds covered by a license may not be shot.

In New York, their minimum killing methods regulation only states that electrocution of furbearing animals is prohibited, where no person shall intentionally kill or stun to facilitate the killing of a furbearing animal by means of an electrical current.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES, COVID-19, AND THE THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH



Wherever animals are held in high densities in unnatural, cramped conditions in captivity, the threat of disease spread is significant. There have been multiple documented outbreaks of disease in fur farms in the United States, including toxoplasmosis and canine distemper. A canine distemper outbreak in 1999 led to kit mortality of 10,408 individuals on a single farm.¹ Other diseases, such as Aleutian mink disease parvovirus (ADV) is highly prevalent on mink farms

and is often fatal. It does not only affect farmed mink but can pass with ease to wild populations of mink and other species, including short-tailed weasels, fishers, martens, river otters, striped skunks, raccoons, and foxes.²

Equally concerning at the time of writing, during the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, is the possibility of disease spread to humans. COVID-19 is an example of a zoonotic disease, an illness that can be passed from animals to people. Mink in at least one farm in Utah have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus – the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans. The same farm also reported positive cases of COVID-19 in humans who had come into contact with the mink.

While this was the first reported incident in the United States, the virus has been described as “ripping through” mink farms in Europe, leading to the premature killing of more than 1 million mink in the Netherlands alone by early August 2020.³ Two farms in Utah are under 30-day quarantine at the time of

writing and the potential extent of spread between farms and to and from humans and animals on the farms is yet unknown.

With the human death toll as a result of COVID-19 approaching one million at the end of September 2020, 20.7% of those deaths occurring in the U.S., and the virus still not under control, that mink farms may exacerbate the impact of the pandemic should be reason enough for states to act swiftly. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Netherlands’ parliament voted in late June to permanently close mink farms following the COVID-19 outbreak across fur farms in the country. This brought forward the planned national ban, initially due to come into effect in 2024. In the final days of August, Finland’s largest political party, the Social Democrats, also announced a commitment to work towards ending fur farming in the country. And, at the time of this writing, Poland, the third largest fur producer in the world, is rapidly moving a fur farm ban through its parliament.

1 In the same toxoplasmosis outbreak, 1,976 (26%) of the females lost their litters and as a result were killed in the course of farm management. Source: Frank R K 2001 An outbreak of toxoplasmosis in farmed mink (*Mustela vison* S.) J Vet Diagn Invest 13: 245–249 Accessed August 20, 2020.

2 Kenyon A J, Kenyon B J, and Hahn E C 1978 Protides of the Mustelidae: Immunoresponse of mustelids to Aleutian mink disease virus. American Journal of Veterinary Research 39: 1011–1015 Accessed August 20, 2020.

3 Cahan, E., 2020. COVID-19 hits U.S. mink farms after ripping through Europe. Science. Accessed August 20, 2020.

FUR FARMING LEGISLATION IN THE UNITED STATES



Given the worldwide recognition of the cruelty of fur farming and the long-recognized but often ignored risks of zoonotic disease spread within the industry, exemplified by the recent COVID-19 outbreak, it was deeply concerning to learn that little has changed in the decade since our last investigation into the industry. Presently, there has not only been an almost complete lack of legislative effort to provide even the most basic animal welfare protection in fur farms, but the dearth of regulatory oversight means that state governments often could not even confirm if fur farms were present within their states. Those who knew fur farms existed may not know where they are located nor how many animals are held by them. Some states were unable to confirm which of their

departments would be responsible for oversight of fur farming, if any monitoring was carried out. This means that, despite the high risk to animal welfare and public health, there is no meaningful, much less consistent, controls governing the industry.

THE LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE ON FUR FARMING IN THE U.S. HAS REMAINED STAGNANT FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, WHILE ANIMALS CONTINUE TO SUFFER.

Legislation on fur farming in the United States is drastically lacking, and falls significantly behind other countries. There are no federal regulations that oversee how fur farms operate, much less controls over how they care for, house, and kill the animals. While state regulations are few and far between, there is no consistency

between those that do exist to establish even a minimum standard for best practice. More disturbing is that since our last *Cruelty Uncaged* report in 2009, nothing of note has changed; the legislative landscape on fur farming in the U.S. has remained stagnant for more than a decade, while animals continue to suffer.

The Animal Welfare Act and the Humane Slaughter Act do not cover animals raised for fur or the slaughter of furbearing animals, respectively. United States federal laws such as the Endangered Species Act, the Lacey Act, and the Fur Seal Act protect animals in the wild but do not include animals on fur farms. However, there are two federal laws that govern fur products in the United States. The Fur Products Labeling Act requires that garments containing fur must be properly

labeled to include information like the species from which the fur was taken, the country of origin, and who manufactured the product. The second federal law is the Dog and Cat Fur Protection Act, which prohibits the import, export, and sale of dog and cat fur products in the U.S. Neither of these provide any kind of protection to animals on fur farms.

In the absence of federal controls, the regulation of fur farming is left to the individual states. Our research has shown, however, that state anti-cruelty laws generally exclude farmed animals, including those used for their fur. Months of research into state fur farming legislation, including contacting each state's wildlife management and agricultural departments, confirmed that the regulation of fur farming is practically non-existent and what little regulation does exist is poorly understood by the states themselves. This, combined with a poor understanding of the extent of fur farming among the general public in the U.S., means that this cruel practice tends to go on behind closed doors with little to no oversight.

While no state has comprehensive fur farm regulations, of those that do exist, there are only five states that we were able to establish as having implemented licensing regimes that are underpinned by an inspection program. Meanwhile, 16 states were found to have opted

for either regulations that require a license but no underpinned inspection program or regulations that facilitate inspection but have no associated licensing regime. Licenses without inspections render the regulations largely meaningless and the issuance of a license becomes little more than a rubber-stamping exercise. Of course, in states where no license is required, it is unclear how the state officials might inspect a farm when they have no knowledge of where it might be located.

THE REGULATION OF FUR FARMING IS PRACTICALLY NON-EXISTENT AND WHAT LITTLE REGULATION DOES EXIST IS POORLY UNDERSTOOD BY THE STATES THEMSELVES.

Compounding the issues outlined above is the absence of comprehensive welfare regulations in any state. This raises further questions over the value of any kind of licensing and/or inspection when there are little or no criteria to license or inspect against. Only six states were found to have any kind of regulation dealing with the care of animals in fur farms.

Having established that the legislative landscape is severely lacking, confusing, and often nonsensical, the situation reaches the point of absurdity as it became clear during our research that some states do not know which department has authority regarding fur farming oversight and enforcement of regulations.

Upon contacting states' wildlife management and agriculture departments, there were various instances of confusion as to which of the departments were responsible for fur farms, leaving the issue with no oversight whatsoever. The Department of Natural Resources of Ohio, for example, stated, *"regarding fur farm regulations, you will need to contact the Ohio Department of Agriculture for that information, since fur farms fall under their authority."* Then, the response received from Ohio's Department of Agriculture was, *"The Ohio Department of Agriculture does not have regulatory oversight over these farms."*

Another example of such confusion was found in Wisconsin, the largest producer of mink pelts in the United States. Their Department of Natural Resources stated that it does not have oversight of fur farms because "domestic fur-bearing animal farms" are considered an agricultural pursuit, so they are exempt from the department's oversight. The department further stated, *"Unfortunately, I am not sure who best to direct you to as you continue your search for information. My apologies."* We also reached out to Wisconsin's Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, but a response was never received.

Legislative and regulatory information was extremely difficult to find, highlighting the problem of

transparency from state agencies on not only the prevalence of fur farming in the states where fur farming occurs, but also on the regulations governing how the farms operate and how animals are kept and cared for. The majority of states do not readily publish such information, nor do they make finding the information easily accessible or user friendly. Less than half of the states had their fur farming regulations easily accessible, while the majority required our researcher to contact not only the states' wildlife management departments, but also their departments of agriculture. As already mentioned, even detailed correspondence with one or both of these state departments provided no answers in some cases.

From the disparate information that was able to be gleaned from the relevant states, the following analysis was carried out.

Over the years, nationwide mink pelt production numbers have been decreasing. Since 2016, mink pelt production has dropped 28%.¹

Establishing numbers of animals suffering and dying in the U.S. is complex because, as we have seen, many states do not have

a clear idea of the number of farms – and animals kept by them – within their jurisdictions. In addition, much publicly available data applies to mink farming but not to the farming of other furbearing species such as fox, bobcat, nutria, rabbit, and chinchilla. The numbers we do have access to likely represent only a small percentage of the lives taken annually by this industry.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA NASS), which is the federal agency tasked at collating agricultural data within the United States, listed on the 2017 agriculture census that there were 18 states with 236 mink fur farms.² Add to the USDA NASS number the number of additional states and farms that have been brought to our attention as part of this and earlier research, and we arrive at Born Free USA's

	2017	2018	2019
Pelt Production Decrease from Previous Year	4%	9%	15%
Mink Pelts Produced	3.31 million	3.10 million	2.70 million
Value of Pelts Produced	\$120 million	\$82.6 million	\$59.2 million
Female Mink Bred to Raise Kits	731,000	658,000	359,850

Table 1. Data showing the decrease of mink pelt production numbers since 2016.

HOW MANY FUR FARMS ARE IN THE UNITED STATES?

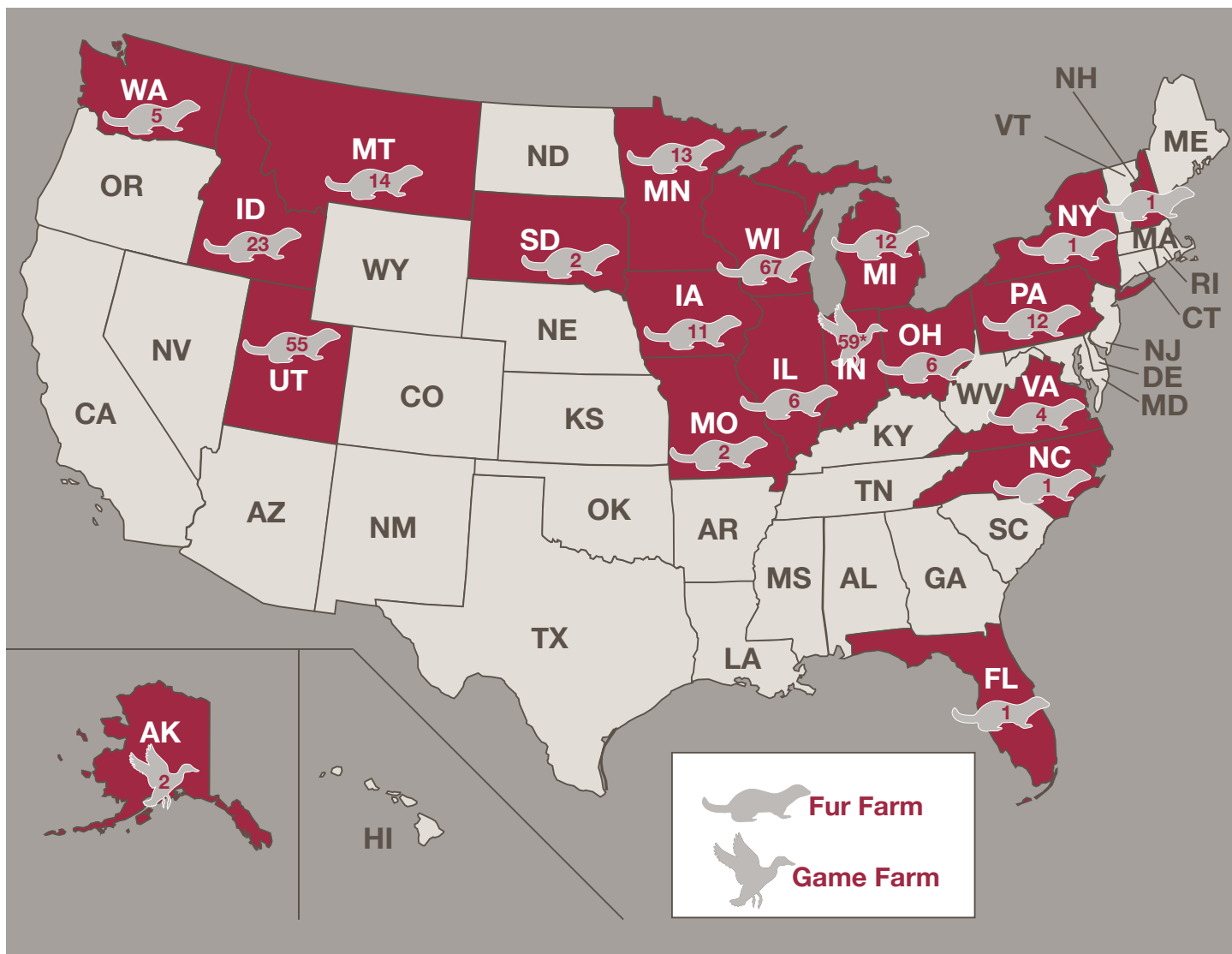
Mink pelt production may be on the decrease, which is welcome news but, from available data, fur farming is still prolific. Unfortunately, due to the lack of fur farm legislation, concrete figures are impossible to confirm. However, Born Free USA has been able to establish a minimum estimation of around 21 states with 253 fur farms, which differs from the Fur Commission USA's numbers of 22 states with 245 fur farms. The United States Department of Agriculture

estimate above. This does not include, of course, states whose relevant departments have no information on the presence or absence of fur farms within their jurisdictions. As such, we have no way of knowing the true extent of this practice in the U.S.

1 "Mink." *United States Department of Agriculture, Economics, Statistics and Market Information System*, <https://usda.library.cornell.edu/concern/publications/2227mp65f>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

2 "Quick Stats." *United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service*, <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/results/A3FCD111-E018-33DA-BE54-CCEDBF4FF5F2>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

ANALYSIS



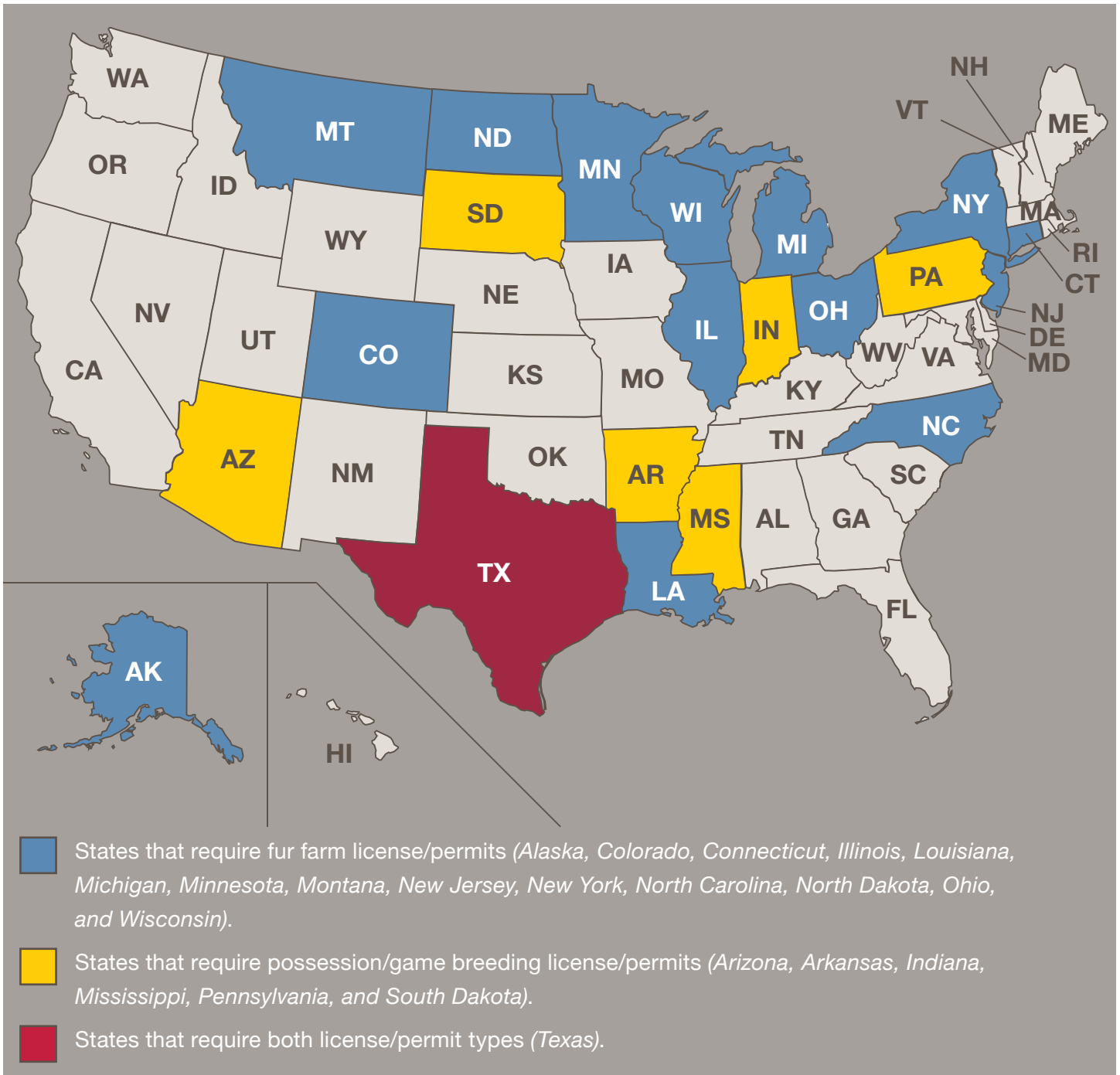
* The number of fur farms noted within each state are best estimates from combining Born Free USA's research data and USDA NASS numbers.

* Alaska's Department of Fish and Game define a "Game Farm" as the means of the business propagating, breeding, raising, or producing game in captivity for the purpose of marketing the game or its products. Thereby, the two game farms may not be fur farms.

* Indiana's Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife define a "Game Breeder Farm" as one that sells non-migratory game birds, game mammals, or furbearing mammals for fur or as pets or for other purposes. Therefore, they may not be selling them solely for their fur and the 59 game breeder farms may not be fur farms.

* Indiana's Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife define a "Game Breeder Farm" as one that sells non-migratory game birds, game mammals, or furbearing mammals for fur or as pets or for other purposes. Therefore, they may not be selling them solely for their fur and the 59 game breeder farms may not be fur farms.

LICENSING



The limited licensing requirements that exist are of two kinds:

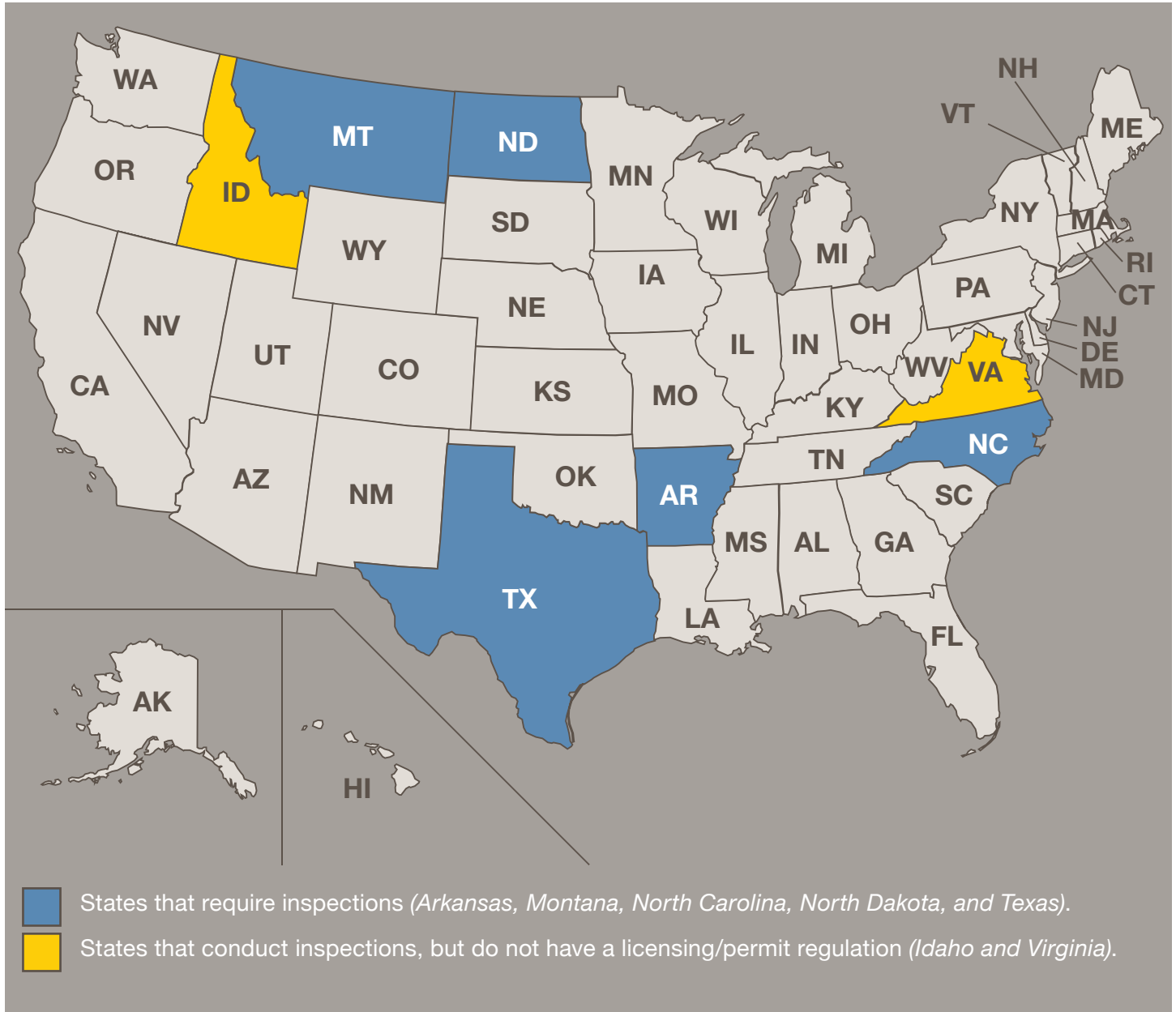
1. A specific license/permit to operate a fur farm, or
2. A license/permit for possession and/or game breeding of furbearing animals/wildlife.

The first regulates the specific operation of a fur farm and the second covers a broad range of potential activities involving specific furbearing and other species. There is little consistency in regulations from state to state so meaningful comparison is not possible. At least 21 states

require at least one of these types of license, 15 states demand a fur farm license/permit and 7 states require a possession/game breeding of furbearing animals/wildlife license/permit. Texas requires both types of license/permit.

INSPECTIONS

Our research found that only seven states have a regulation that allows the authoritative state agency to conduct fur farm inspections. Two of these states, however, do not require any kind of license or permit to operate a fur farm so it is unclear how the regulations in these instances can possibly be implemented and enforced. It stands to reason that a licensing regime that is not underpinned by a program of inspection holds little value.



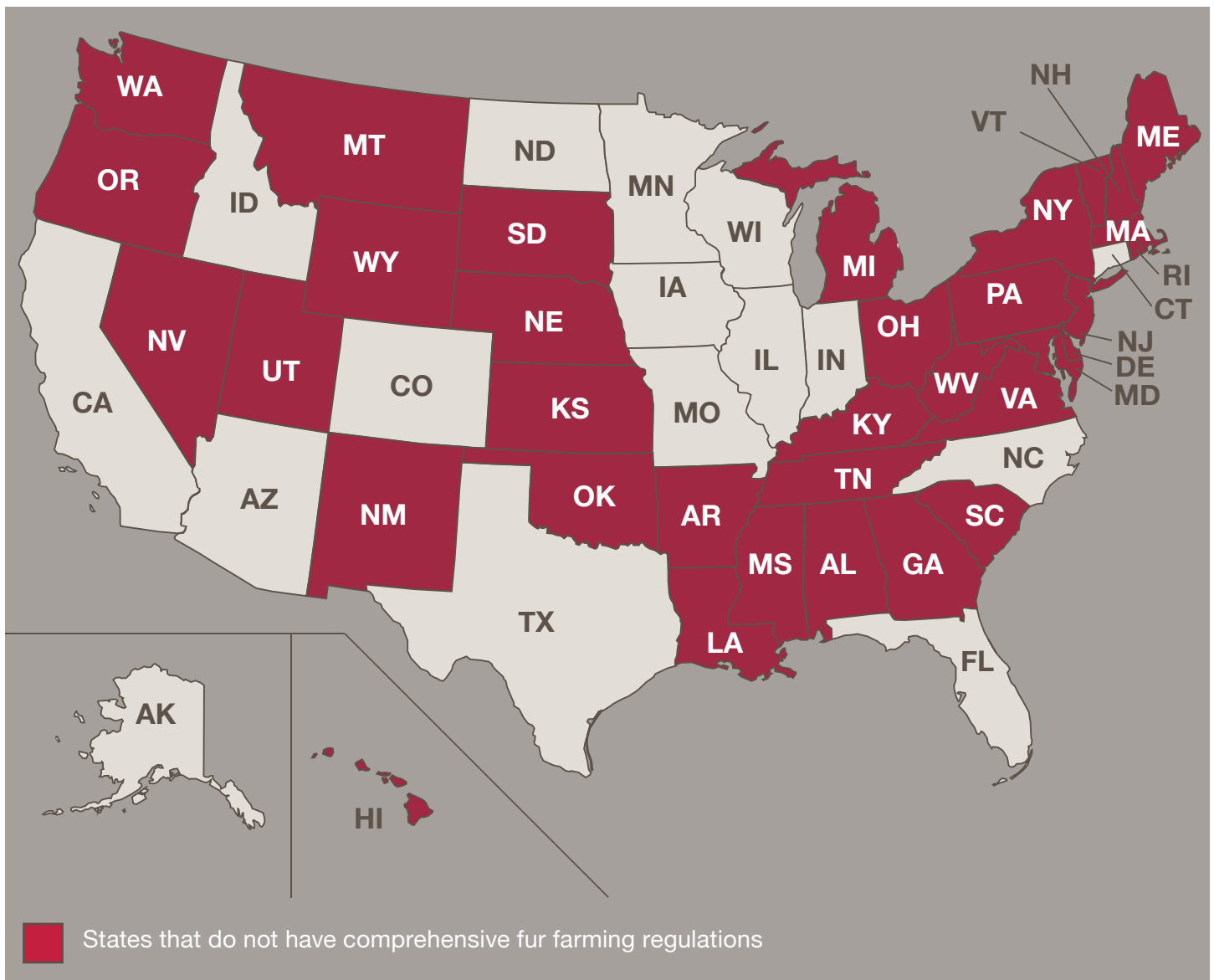
COMPREHENSIVE FUR FARM REGULATIONS

At least 34 states do not have comprehensive fur farming regulations and many have no regulation whatsoever dealing with animal welfare. Furthermore, a state saying that it has fur farm regulations can be misleading because several states have a lone fur farm regulation that simply states what a fur farm is and/or defines furbearing species. Kansas, for example, can say that it has fur farming regulations, but its only regulation is that

the state requires furbearers to be accompanied with a health certificate. Maine is considered to have fur farm regulations because it defines what a furbearer is and prohibits wild animals in captivity; however, mink farming is excluded since it is considered an agricultural pursuit.

States with various animal welfare regulations are Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin, while Michigan has a

few animal welfare regulations. It should be noted that among these six, two states – Michigan and Missouri – do not include regulations on licensing and inspections, which arguably defeats the purpose of having animal welfare fur farm regulations. While Wisconsin, a state that has several animal welfare regulations, requires a fur farm license, but licensing is not underpinned by an inspection regime.



There are only three states that combine licensing, inspection, and minimum welfare regulations. Those are North Carolina, North Dakota, and Texas.

AGENCY CONFUSION ON WHO HAS OVERSIGHT

Relevant state departments in New Jersey, Ohio, and Wisconsin informed our researcher that they either do not have regulatory authority over fur farming or that they are unsure of who has authority.

In these cases, state departments of agriculture would say that

regulating fur farms was the duty of each state's wildlife management department because furbearers such as mink and fox are wildlife, while state wildlife management departments pointed to the agriculture departments as having responsibility for "agricultural pursuits."

PARAMETERS FOR ESTABLISHING WHETHER LICENSING IS APPLICABLE

The legal parameters within which licensing decisions are taken differ from state to state, making like-for-like comparisons difficult.

Differing regulations contain a wide variety of language that can range from simple, such as defining a furbearer as a mink or fox, to more complex language that excludes certain species and differentiates between "wild" (free-living) mink and fox from ranched mink and fox, for example. Dishearteningly, most states with licensing regulations have an exception for farming mink. At least nine states were found to have definition language that is not straightforward.

AT LEAST 34 STATES DO NOT HAVE COMPREHENSIVE FUR FARMING REGULATIONS AND MANY HAVE NO REGULATION WHATSOEVER DEALING WITH ANIMAL WELFARE.



STATE	PARAMETERS FOR ESTABLISHING WHETHER A LICENSE IS REQUIRED FOR FUR FARMING
Arizona	Lists numerous species that are essentially prohibited from being held captive, including many furbearers such as foxes, weasels, nutrias, beaver, etc. However, mink are not listed as a restricted species.
Arkansas	Requires general permits applicable to captive wildlife for someone who wants to run a fur farm. They would need an Importation Permit to obtain stock and would need a Wildlife Breeder/Dealer permit to operate.
Colorado	Requires a Wildlife Park License, which includes live mammals and furbearers for the lawful possession, propagation, and sale of native and exotic wildlife. However, there is an exception, in that “Domesticated races of mink (<i>Mustela vison</i>)” are exempt from licensing requirements.
Indiana	Only requires a license for native species such as gray and red foxes, coyotes, raccoons, and skunks, and there is an exception for marten, nutria, and mink farms. A game breeder’s license allows the sale of these species for fur or as pets or other purposes; therefore, they may not sell them solely for fur. In addition, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources does not require a license to possess non-native species of foxes such as artic and fennec foxes.
Missouri	Has an exception that requirements of the regulation shall not apply to wildlife under the care of a veterinarian or rehabilitation center, or to animals legally held in circuses, publicly owned zoos, American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) accredited not-for-profit facilities, bona fide research facilities, or on fur farms whose sole purposes are to sell pelts or live animals to other fur farms and whose facilities meet generally accepted fur farming industry standards.
Montana	Requires a fur farm license to propagate furbearers. However, Montana’s definition of a “furbearer” means a marten or sable, otter, muskrat, fisher, bobcat, lynx, wolverine, or beaver. The term does not include fox or mink.
North Dakota	Does not require a license for category one species, which includes rabbits, chinchillas, ranch fox, and ranch mink, but does require a license for category two species such as bobcat, otters, martens, fishers, kit or swift foxes, badgers, coyotes, mink, red and gray foxes, muskrats, beavers, weasels, opossums, prairie dogs, and other ground squirrels.
Ohio	Ohio’s Department of Natural Resources states that there are no fur farms of the species they regulate, which excludes mink/mink farms because mink are considered a domestic species and an agricultural pursuit; therefore, mink/mink farms may be present in Ohio and the state’s Department of Agriculture does not have regulatory oversight.
Pennsylvania	Only requires a license for the possession of bobcat, coyote, red and gray fox, and full-blood wolves or crossbreeds thereof.

Table 2. State furbearer parameters to establish licensing requirements.

The language used in many of the regulations relating to fur farms limit (often arbitrarily) their application and create very narrow parameters within which a license might be required. This results in the extremely limited potential for protection for animals in fur farms being further reduced by virtue of deliberate exemptions for the industry.

COMPARISON TO EUROPEAN FUR FARMING LEGISLATION



Europe has been more progressive than other parts of the world on fur farm legislation. Out of the three largest fur farming continents, Europe has the most numerous and rigorous fur farm regulations, while most of North America and Asia have extremely limited or no regulation. Substantial progress has been made in Europe on both fur farm bans and partial bans, but also in the specificity and measurability of the existing regulations.

Nine European countries have banned fur farms, including the Netherlands' recent decision to ban fur farming three years early due to COVID-19 outbreaks on mink farms. Northern Ireland has also banned fur farming. While four European countries are phasing out fur farms by a specified date, three countries have a partial fur farm ban that excludes certain species from being farmed, and two countries have regulations that are so strict they have created a *de facto* ban and are forcing fur farms to close for inability to meet them. In the U.S., only five states – Arizona, Illinois, North Dakota, Virginia, and Wisconsin – were found to prohibit certain species, including fox, bobcat, non-domestic rabbits, and nutria.

Each state within the U.S. is in a position to ban this cruel and archaic practice via state law but, instead, the U.S. has been left behind as other countries make progress.

CONCLUSION

Concern for furbearing animals has increased in many countries, with countless movements to ban a variety of processes – from import to export, production to sale – in the fur for fashion industry. Work to this end has resulted in an increase of not only retailers, designers, and manufacturers committing to fur-free policies, but also in the development and implementation of legislative bans on animal welfare grounds. The U.S. has been left behind. While other countries have made significant progress in closing down the fur farm industry, the U.S. is failing to make any progress and fur farm legislation remains almost identical today as it did over a decade ago. As a result, the U.S. has neglected to protect furbearing animals, conduct fur farm oversight and enforcement, and provide industry transparency.

With the undeniable suffering that is caused to animals in the fur farming industry, coupled with the now clear risk of the spread of zoonotic diseases, such as COVID-19, there is no excuse for state and federal legislatures to allow continued inertia on this issue. The U.S. must move with urgency towards the implementation of bans across the states in the interests of both animal welfare and public health.



MOVING THE UNITED STATES FORWARD



It is clear that the United States has to make drastic changes to protect animals from the horrors of fur farming and humans from the serious health risks that the industry may pose, exemplified by the outbreak of COVID-19 in at least one Utah fur farm. Born Free USA believes that fundamental steps must be taken as we move towards legislative bans across the nation, as follows.

The first must be focused on raising awareness of the issue among the general public. Fur farms in the U.S. are a very much hidden and unspoken industry. The fact that the American public may be largely unaware of the presence of fur farms in their own backyard allows the industry to continue unchallenged.

Secondly, both federal and state agencies, along with their respective representatives, must understand the demand

for change and act based on the will of their constituents. A poll released in September 2020 confirmed that only one-in-four U.S. citizens (25%) are in favor of killing animals for their fur. Aversion to the practice is highest among women (85%).¹ The existence of fur farms in the United States is not reflective of public opinion on this issue, and elected representatives need to act on this basis.

Lawmakers also need to understand the current legislative landscape relating to fur farms and, importantly, the lack of control and oversight currently in place and the implications this has for the animals themselves and public health.

In the short term, as we move towards outright prohibition, states must make it mandatory that the fur farm industry is transparent. Regulations must be enacted (or

existing regulations enforced) requiring states to publish fur farm regulations prominently, along with clear information about the number of fur farms within their jurisdictions, to allow for easy public access. Transparency is very important as we work towards legislative change because it allows the public to be informed and to hold both the overseeing agencies and the fur farm industry accountable.

Other than changing U.S. fur farm legislation, continuing the fight on fur manufacturing and sale bans and in pushing for a fur-free retail environment will also continue to help move the United States forward. Ultimately, the only way to protect animals, and people, from the overwhelmingly negative impact of this industry is to prohibit it altogether, as is now happening swiftly on other continents.

¹ Research Co. 2020. Canadians And Americans Differ On Issues Related To Animals. [online] Available at: <https://researchco.ca/2020/09/22/canada-us-animals/>. Accessed September 23, 2020.



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