UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

2026 Resolution

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RESOLUTION NUMBER: 16 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT MATTER: Disease Response and Indemnity for Captive Furbearers

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association requests that the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Farm Service Agency add domestic mink, chinchillas, sables, red foxes, and rabbits to the list of livestock species eligible for disease-response resources and indemnity for losses resulting from foreign and emerging animal diseases.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

While the fur industry has declined in recent years, farms producing fur still exist in many states. Captive species raised for fur include mink, chinchillas, sables, foxes, and rabbits. Mink farms dominate the industry, with an estimated 70 to 100 mink farms remaining in the United States. Commercial mink farms have historically operated in 22 states, with Wisconsin and Utah having the largest numbers of farms.

The value of mink pelt production varies annually but is currently estimated at $85 million per year, based on the production of approximately 1,000,000 pelts at an average value of $85 each, according to Fur Commission USA. Pelt values vary by color, and breeding stock carries additional value, with male breeder mink currently valued at approximately $350 each and female breeder mink at approximately $200 each.

Despite the mink industry generating millions of dollars annually, mink are not considered livestock by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) or the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and, therefore, are not eligible for compensation for losses due to foreign animal diseases such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Programs such as the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) are designed to provide financial compensation to livestock owners who experience livestock losses exceeding normal mortality levels. Mink are not considered eligible livestock for LIP or ELAP.

Cases of HPAI and SARS-CoV-2 in mink demonstrate the potentially devastating effects of these diseases on mink and other carnivores; however, the risks these diseases pose to public and animal health once introduced onto a mink farm are not fully understood. SARS-CoV-2 killed up to 50 percent of breeder mink on affected farms. An H5N1 outbreak in Spain in 2022 infected more than 50,000 mink and provided evidence of mammal-to-mammal transmission of the virus. No human cases were associated with the outbreak, and the animals were destroyed.[1]

Producers who are eligible to receive compensation for their losses, regardless of species, may be more likely to report disease outbreaks and work with state animal health officials to implement biosecurity practices and other measures to reduce the risk of disease spread. For foreign animal and emerging diseases, cooperation among all parties is critical to controlling and containing outbreaks. Excluding susceptible production species from compensation programs and other response resources may hinder animal health officials' ability to effectively manage disease outbreaks.

[1] Agüero Montserrat, et al. *Highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5N1) virus infection in farmed minks, Spain, October 2022.* Euro Surveill. 2023;28(3):pii=2300001. https://doi.org/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2023.28.3.2300001