

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Denmark Struggling with COVID-19 Prevalence in its Mink Industry

Country: Denmark

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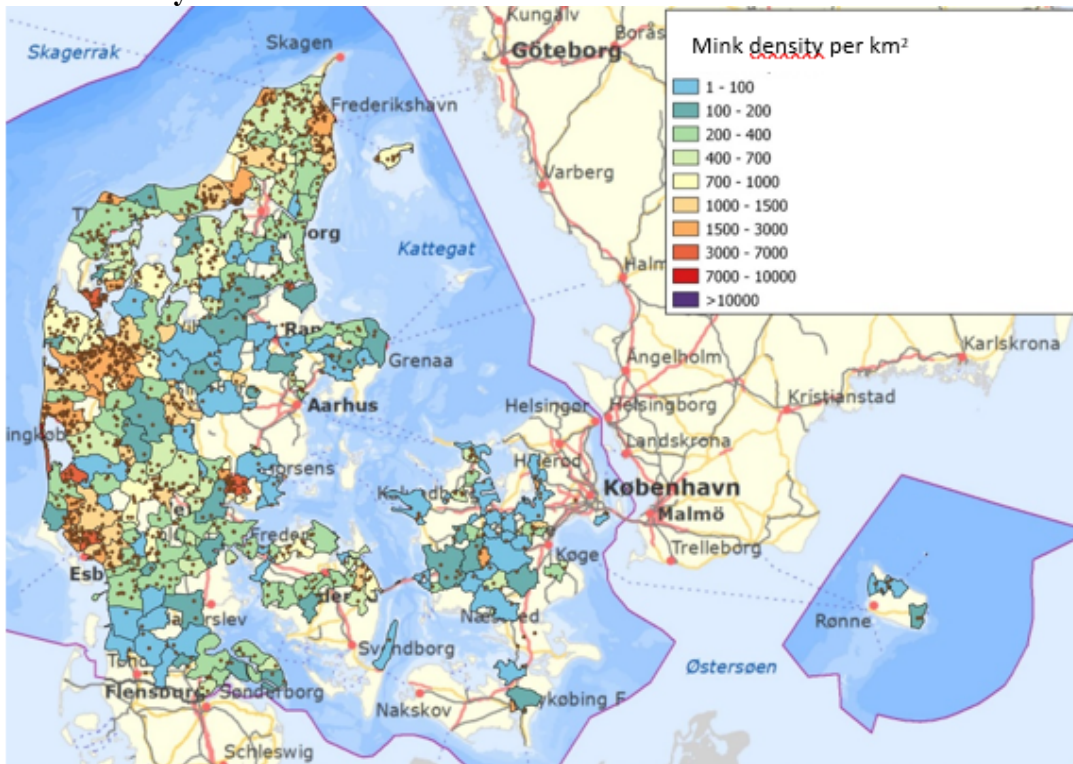
Report Highlights:

Coronavirus (COVID-19) infections are spreading rapidly among Danish mink farms. As of November 1, 2020, the Danish Veterinary Service reported 191 cases of the virus on Danish mink farms. In an attempt to stop the virus from spreading, the Danish Government has ordered the clearing of mink at all farms located within a radius of 7.8 km of an infected farm (bringing in another 209 farms). The 400 farms account for a little more than one-third of the Danish industry. Meanwhile, Danish politicians have varying positions on the future of mink production in the country. The Danish Government, however, believes that the sector is economically important and that there must still be a Danish mink industry after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

Danish media reported that 191 Danish mink farms have been infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) in Denmark as of November 1, 2020. The infections began in Northern Jutland¹ and have spread to other intensive production areas in the country, particularly Central and Western Jutland. In Denmark, there are 1,138 mink farms with approximately 6,000 people directly employed on these farms.

Figure 1. Mink Density in Denmark



Source: www.sundhed.dk/sundhedsfaglig/information-til-praksis/midtjylland/almen-praksis/coronavirus/patienter-med-kontakt-til-mink/

When a COVID-19 infection is detected on a mink farm, the animals are culled and, as a precautionary measure, mink are also culled on other farms within a 7.8 kilometer radius of the infected farm (covering another 209 farms as of November 1, 2020). This means that in total, 400 farms will have to be cleared, equivalent to one-third of the Danish industry.²

Discussion on the Potential Human Health Impact

According to the Director of the Danish National Serum Institute, the many outbreaks of COVID-19 among mink may have exacerbated the infection of humans in parts of Jutland (where a variant may have spread to the local population).³ The Danish Serum Institute warned that there is also a risk that

¹ See [DA2020-0004: Government to Cull Mink on COVID-19 Infected Farm in North Jutland](https://www.information.dk/indland/2020/10/myndigheder-kendte-trussel-virusmutationer-mink-laenge-inden-minister-reagerede)

² <https://www.tvmidtvest.dk/struer/martin-merilld-testet-positiv-hans-13000-mink-maa-formentlig-lade-livet>

³ <https://www.information.dk/indland/2020/10/myndigheder-kendte-trussel-virusmutationer-mink-laenge-inden-minister-reagerede>

mutations of COVID-19 in mink may mean that future vaccines may also not be as effective as they should be.

Two variants of COVID-19, which have arisen in Danish mink, have already been observed, and the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration noted that “{i}t is also likely that people who have already been infected can become infected again with the two virus variants which means, in that case, herd immunity is absent.”⁴ The Danish Serum Institute and the University of Copenhagen have concluded that the previous measures to prevent transmission between humans and mink had either not worked or had not been implemented properly. They commented “{t}he continued development of the virus in mink with more and more mutations and the spread by transmission to humans in Denmark poses a potential danger to public health and to the expected effects of a vaccine.”⁵

Government Under Pressure

Danish media have reported that the authorities have not reacted promptly enough to the virus mutation that has occurred in mink. The Danish Minister of Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries, Mogens Jensen, was reportedly informed about the mutation development sometime after the authorities became aware of the problem. Notwithstanding this, the Minister has received criticism for not taking more expeditious action. Addressing Denmark’s “leisurely response” to the issue of viral mutations in mink, Professor of Clinical Microbiology at the University of Southern Denmark, Hans Jørn Kolmos, commented, “{t}he time factor is crucial. It is as if one has not really understood that infectious diseases are spreading at a pace that {the diseases} themselves determine. The infection does not lie dormant while we discuss what to do about it.”⁶

DAFC Chairman Critical of the Government

The Chairman of the [Danish Agricultural and Food Council](#),⁷ Martin Merrild, announced he has tested positive for COVID-19, and that one of the mink on his farm in Struer also tested positive. He added that more mink on his farm are showing symptoms, but that the Government does not work on the weekends and, accordingly, had not come out to expeditiously assess the situation. As the media reports up to 7 million mink are currently located in the culling zones, Mr. Merrild has expressed frustration with the Government’s approach:

In my many years in service to the profession, I have never experienced anything this insane. The Government is acting heedlessly and is completely argument-resistant. It claims that it wants to maintain the fur industry in Denmark, but at the same time it continues carelessly with a culling strategy, which is pushing the entire industry into the abyss.⁸

⁴ <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/carl-valentin-der-er-ingen-fremtid-for-minkindustrien-i-danmark>

⁵ <https://www.information.dk/indland/2020/10/myndigheder-kendte-trussel-virusmutationer-mink-laenge-inden-minister-reagerede>

⁶ <https://finans.dk/politik/ECE12516515/myndigheder-rugede-paa-viden-om-coronamutationer-i-mink/?ctxref=ext>

⁷ The Council represents the farming and food industries of Denmark including companies, trade and farmers’ associations.

⁸ <https://finans.dk/erhverv/ECE12528067/landbrugets-formand-er-ramt-af-corona-det-samme-er-minkene-paa-hans-gaard-formentlig/?ctxref=ext>

Parliamentarians Do Not Have a Unified Position

Minister Jensen has called the spread of infection in mink “a serious threat to society as a whole.” Nevertheless, liberal party, Venstre, believes that the killing of mink should stop. This is due, in part, to the fact that only 4 of the 176 confirmed cases of infection with the mink variant of COVID-19 had been found in people without a known connection to a mink farm (as of October 29, 2020). Minister Jensen, however, noted that it would be “deeply irresponsible” to stop the culling of mink.⁹

On the other side, the Danish Socialist party, SF, believes that the mink industry should be phased out. It has long been on the agenda of the party to end mink production in the country, “and {the party believes} now is the right moment to do so,” according to Minister of Parliament, Carl Valentin (his party’s food and animal welfare spokesman). Valentin continued by saying that Denmark should follow other countries’ example, highlighting the Netherlands – which will ban mink production as of the Spring of 2021¹⁰ - as an example.

Minster Jensen has said that it is the Government’s starting position to continue to have mink production in Denmark after the pandemic as there are many jobs associated with the sector and that it is an important part of the Danish economy. Minster Jensen acknowledged that under what conditions the industry can continue during this pandemic remains unclear, but the Government must ensure “that mink production does not pose a risk that COVID-19 will spread to society via mink.”¹¹

Attachments:

No Attachments.

⁹ <https://www.altinget.dk/foedevarer/artikel/mogens-jensen-angriber-mink-udmelding-om-aflivninger-fra-venstre-dybt-uansvarligt>

¹⁰ For additional information, see [NL2020-0042: Dutch Mink Industry to Close in 2021 Due to Coronavirus](#).

¹¹ <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2020-10-28-folketinget-splittet-om-mink-skal-aflivningen-eller-produktionen-stoppes>