

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Sweden Bans Mink Breeding Until 2022

Country: Sweden

Post: The Hague

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Livestock and Products, Agriculture in the News, Pest/Disease Occurrences

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Report Highlights:

In October 2020, the first cases of coronavirus were identified on Swedish mink farms. Sweden responded by standing up a surveillance program and imposing a series of control measures. The Swedish Veterinary Institute and the Swedish Public Health Agency also conducted a joint risk assessment, and subsequently determined, from an infection control point of view, it would be inappropriate to increase the size of the mink population in 2021. Accordingly, the Swedish Board of Agriculture imposed a ban on mink breeding until December 31, 2021. Farmers will be permitted to keep their breeding animals to resume operations in 2022.

Background

In October 2020, the first cases of coronavirus were identified on Swedish mink farms in Blekinge.¹ Subsequently, several infections were discovered in connection with a Swedish surveillance program (see <https://www.sva.se/djurhalsa/smittlage/overvakning-av-sars-cov-2-hos-mink/> - in Swedish) that began after mink in the Netherlands and Denmark, among others, were confirmed to be infected during the summer and autumn of 2020.² Over the course of the following months, infections were confirmed on a total of 13 of 40 mink farms in Sweden.³

To halt the spread of the virus, Sweden imposed a series of control measures in November 2020, which were updated in January 2021,⁴ and include:

1. Deceased mink may not be moved from the stable without permission from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, unless for destruction or sampling.
2. Necessary measures shall be taken to prevent mink from escaping the stable.
3. Necessary measures shall be taken to minimize the risk of disease spread in the stable.
4. Implements, machinery, or other equipment carried between establishments must be decontaminated and disinfected before being taken into a new establishment.
5. Only the following persons may enter the farm without special permission from the Swedish Board of Agriculture:
 - a. persons necessary to take care of the animals,
 - b. veterinarian or other staff appointed by the Swedish Board of Agriculture,
 - c. persons exercising official supervision,
 - d. police and emergency services, and
 - e. persons participating in culling and fur work.
6. Persons present at the installation must, as much as possible, wear face masks of a type without an exhaust valve.
7. When entering and leaving the facility, wash your hands with soap and water. Hand alcohol must then be used which is allowed to air dry.
8. Clothes and shoes must be changed when entering and leaving the facility, so that the same clothing and shoes are not used inside the facility as outside. Alternatively, protective clothing and safety shoes can be used in the facility.
9. Persons working with a mink herd found to be infected with coronavirus may not have contact with other mink for at least 14 days, except for the persons listed in point 5 (b) to (d) above, provided that appropriate infection control measures are taken. For other persons, a special permit from the Swedish Board of Agriculture is required; and

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/nyheter-och-press/nyhetsarkiv/2020/december/inte-samma-virusvariant-hos-svenska-och-danska-minkar/>

² For additional information on the situation in Denmark and the Netherlands, see, e.g., [DA2020-0013: Government to Cull All Mink in Denmark Due to COVID-19](#) and [NL2020-0042: Dutch Mink Industry to Close in 2021 Due to Coronavirus](#).

³ See, e.g., <https://www.thelocal.se/20210127/sweden-halts-mink-breeding-over-coronavirus-concerns> and https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/MM/Sweden_mink_6Nov2020.pdf

⁴ See <https://jordbruksverket.se/download/18.419abbec17737497ef45bafa/1611667268459/Beslut-om-isolering-och-restriktioner.pdf>

10. The health status of the herd must be documented daily. In the event of increased mortality or other signs of illness in the herd, the Swedish Board of Agriculture must be notified, and mink must be tested for coronavirus in accordance with instructions from the Swedish Board of Agriculture.
11. People who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have symptoms that may be due to COVID-19 should avoid entering a mink farm as much as possible.

Since mink in Sweden tested positive during the monitoring program, and in the interest of protecting human and animal health, the Swedish Board of Agriculture also imposed a ban on the movement of mink, and the isolation of mink facilities, to prevent the continued spread of infection in the country (until April 20, 2021, unless extended).

Breeding Ban Imposed

The Swedish Veterinary Institute (SVA) and the Swedish Public Health Agency also conducted a joint risk assessment⁵ which found, in part:

- The probability of introducing coronavirus from human to mink is high so long as the disease circulates in society.
- Even strict biosafety measures, including protective equipment, face masks, and recommendations for regular testing for COVID-19 among staff, are insufficient to prevent introduction.
- The risk of humans and susceptible animals (mainly mink but also cats and to some extent dogs) being infected with coronavirus in this environment is high, despite strict biosafety features; and,
- There is likely a strong relationship between the number of animals in an infected herd and the extent of infection spread and infection pressure in the local environment; the more animals become infected, the stronger the multiplication of the virus that takes place.

They noted that once the coronavirus has been introduced into a herd, there is a rapid and extensive spread of infection to other mink and to the surrounding environment, with a risk of spreading to humans as well. Moreover, they added that because there are several cycles of replication from mink to mink, there are also more changes in the genome (mutations) that accumulate. Because further spread of the virus cannot be ruled out in the spring-summer period, which coincides with the birthing period, the addition of 450-500,000 susceptible animals could result in a virus reservoir for continued transmission. Accordingly, from an infection control point of view, the SVA and the Swedish Public Health Agency deemed it would be inappropriate to increase the size of the mink population.

Subsequently, the Swedish Board of Agriculture confirmed it shared the SVA's and the Swedish Public Health Agency's assessment that, from an infection control point of view, it would be inappropriate to increase the size of the mink population under current conditions. Accordingly, it has imposed a ban on mink breeding⁶ until December 31, 2021.⁷ Farmers will be permitted to keep their breeding animals to resume operations in 2022.⁸

⁵ See <https://jordbruksverket.se/download/18.38d764e91773756209994d25/1611747833843/Beslut-forbud-mot-parning-och-uppfokning-av-mink.pdf>

⁶ If kits are produced, it is recommended they be culled.

⁷ See, e.g., <https://www.expressen.se/tv/nyheter/coronaviruset/uppfodning-av-minkar-forbjuds-for-2021/>

⁸ See <https://www.thelocal.se/20210127/sweden-halts-mink-breeding-over-coronavirus-concerns>

Attachments:

No Attachments.