



Chair Jeff Golden, Vice-Chair Dallas Heard

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery

Fur Commission USA OPPOSES SB 832

April 5, 2021

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Heard and Members of the Committee:

The Fur Commission USA urges your strong opposition to SB 832—the most extreme anti-animal agriculture bill introduced this session. For your reference, the Fur Commission USA (FCUSA) is a national, non-profit association representing U.S. mink farmers. Most of the mink farms in operation in the United States today are third and fourth generation family farms, and these operations have a long history of sustainability and robust animal welfare practices. Oregon is the 4th largest producer in the U.S., and today's U.S. mink are among the world's best cared-for livestock, with operating standards that are peer reviewed and endorsed by the Professional Animal Auditors Certification Organization (PAACO). The health and well-being of our animals is of utmost importance, which is why the introduction of SB 832 is so alarming.

Not only is the crux of the bill based on misinformation, but SB 832 is so poorly constructed that it would be difficult if not impossible to implement:

- **SB 832 confuses state agency jurisdiction.** SB 832 directs the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to conduct contact tracing for agricultural workers in section 2(3) and the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to shutter mink farms in section 5. Both directives are outside the agencies' respective authorities. The OHA is responsible for the state's contact tracing efforts, and in fact, contact tracing is already occurring, regardless of whether a farmworker, transportation or hospitality worker contracts COVID-19. Similarly, ODA is the agency with jurisdiction over agricultural operations, not the OHA as suggested in section 5.
- **SB 832 will result in the immediate slaughter of hundreds of thousands of animals.** When section 2(2)(a) is read alongside section 4, it appears to require the immediate culling and onsite burial of mink, given that transfer of the animals off of the farm is prohibited. The culling and burial of mink in Denmark raised several concerns around water quality and soil health;¹ neither of which are addressed in SB 832.
- **SB 832 violates the U.S. and State Constitution.** SB 832 directs the government to take private property and close mink farms immediately, presumably to serve the public purpose of reducing the spread of COVID-19. Section 2 prohibits the breeding or transfer of mink immediately, and section 4 shuts all mink farms within 180 days of enactment. These provisions are a

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/25/culled-mink-rise-from-the-dead-denmark-coronavirus>

direct taking of mink and eliminate the commercial value of the farm without any compensation for the families who have raised mink for generations. Section 14's suggestion of career re-training or access to business loans is not equivalent to compensation and is offensive to the farm families who have raised mink responsibly for generations in Oregon. Enforcement of SB 832 would likely result in immediate costly and time-consuming litigation against the State.

Proponents have created a false narrative that suggests that Oregon's family run mink farms are a threat to human health, playing on the public's fear surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, zoonotic disease transmission is not uncommon in agriculture, which is why Oregon's mink ranchers take biosecurity so seriously. The one Oregon mink farm with positive COVID-19 cases in November 2020 went into quarantine immediately and worked with the State Veterinarian and federal and state agencies to contain the virus.² The farm is now clear of the virus, which is a success story, not a reason to shut down family farms.

Claims that Oregon's mink farms present a high risk to Oregon's affected communities are outrageous and not justified by state or federal public health agencies. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there is no evidence that animals play a significant role in spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. People can spread the COVID-19 virus to mink, and that mink can spread the virus to other mink; however, the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be extremely low.³ The potential risk of COVID-19 is further reduced now that agricultural workers are eligible for vaccination in Oregon. A vaccine for mink has also been developed and tested, with 2 million doses to be distributed in a matter of weeks. Another 2 million doses will be ready July 1, 2021. This vaccine is also being used for zoo animals and domestic pets.

FCUSA urges your swift rejection of SB 832 and the false narrative this poorly crafted bill is built on. SB 832 would dismantle multi-generational farms, seize private property and eliminate family livelihoods based on an overreaction to unsubstantiated and frivolous allegations by extreme animal rights groups.

Stand with family farms and against fearmongering and vote "NO" on SB 832.

² https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/sars-cov-2-mink-guidance.pdf

³ https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/sars-cov-2-guidance-for-farmed-mink.pdf