

Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals

Ranched Fox

THE CODES OF PRACTICE:

The Codes of Practice are nationally developed guidelines for the care and handling of different species of farm animals. Codes of Practice are not intended to be used as production manuals; instead, the Codes are designed to be used as an educational tool in the promotion of sound husbandry and welfare practices. The Codes contain recommendations to assist farmers and others in the agriculture and food sector to compare and improve their own management practices.

THE FOX CODE:

Domestication and artificial selection of livestock have made farm animals dependent on humans. Consequently, according to the currently accepted moral and ethical standards of our society, people must accept this dependence as a commitment to practice humane conduct toward domestic animals and to prevent avoidable suffering at all stages of an animal's life. This voluntary Code of Practice, developed in 1989, represents a step toward meeting that commitment.

The ranched fox in Canada is a descendant of two wild fox species, the common red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and the arctic fox (*Lagopus lagopus*) native to areas of North America, Europe and Asia. In the wild, the most common color phases of the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) are red (46-77% of the population), cross (20-40%) and silver (2-17%). Fox ranching has taken place in North America since the late 19th century, with farming of silver fox beginning on Prince Edward Island in about 1870 and raising of arctic fox off the coast of Alaska by 1865.

Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of ranched fox



The Recommended Code of Practice does not claim to be comprehensive of all circumstances, but attempts to define high standards of production and well being of foxes in commercial, research, educational and farm operations. This factsheet highlights only a small amount of the information found in the complete Recommended Code of Practice. A copy of the complete Code of Practice can be obtained from the Canada Fox Breeders Association.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Accommodation:

- A fox farm's location should be carefully selected. Due consideration should be given to local environmental conditions, foreseeable neighborhood development and anticipated farm growth.
- Slightly sloping land with good drainage and no risk of flooding forms the ideal site for a fox farm.
- A supply of fresh, clean water is necessary to supply the watering systems and to provide for daily clean-up in the feed preparation areas.
- It is advisable to construct a protective fence around the perimeter of the area where foxes are housed.

Sheds:

- Any building used to offer protection must be designed to provide clean, well ventilated and sanitary conditions.
- Sheds may be erected specifically to house foxes kept for breeding or those kept for pelting, or they may serve a combination of both purposes.
- Fox sheds are normally open-sided or partly closed. Where extreme conditions are encountered, such as strong winds, severe cold, drifting snow or driving rain, partial or total enclosure of sheds should be considered. However, foxes should be kept in enclosed buildings only if the environment indoors meets the natural needs of the foxes and does not interfere with the reproductive or furring cycles.
- Sheds should be situated in a direction that allows the use of natural ventilation and lighting.
- All equipment and services necessary for farm operation should be inspected regularly and kept in good working order.

Pens:

- Fox pens must provide an area that is large enough for the foxes to move around in naturally and must allow for activities such as rest, sleep, defecation and other functions that maintain the comfort of the animal.
- Whelping pens must provide an area that is large enough for females to deliver and rear their young to weaning age. Every fox confined in a cage must have reasonable freedom of movement.

Nests:

- A suitable, warm, dry nest that is large enough to house a vixen and her litter must be attached to or incorporated into every whelping pen.
- Nest boxes for a vixen and her litter must have a floor area of not less than 0.19 m² (2 sq ft).

The interior of the nest box must provide a dry, draft free environment and should include appropriate bedding during nesting periods.

- Nests should be large enough to allow each fox to lie and sleep comfortably. Nests are usually constructed of wood, untreated and free from other toxic materials.
- Special care should be taken to avoid projections into the nesting area that could cause discomfort to the foxes.

Food and Water:

Nutrition:

- Foxes must be fed a complete and wholesome diet that fulfills the various nutritional needs throughout their life cycle. It is essential that fox farmers have a working knowledge of the nutritional requirements of foxes.
- Nutritional advice is available and fox farmers should seek assistance in acquiring this advice from all sources. (Information can be obtained from the Canada Fox Breeders Association, 286 Fitzroy Street, Summerside, P.E.I. C1N 1J2)

Feed Distribution:

- A sufficient quantity of feed must be given at all times to ensure the health and well being of each fox.
- Spoiled feed should be removed from feeding areas.

Care and Supervision:

Supervision and Handling of Foxes:

- All foxes should be inspected at least once each day. The arrangement of fox pens should enable easy inspection of all areas of the farm and all housed foxes, particularly where one attendant is responsible for a large number of foxes.

Attendant:

- It is the fox farmer's responsibility to see that every person working with foxes understands and accepts the responsibility of preventing any avoidable suffering on the part of the animals. Before duties are assigned, personnel should be adequately instructed in the care and handling of foxes and should demonstrate a knowledge of the basic needs of the foxes entrusted to their care. Attendants should be able to recognize behavioural symptoms that indicate discomfort, disease or the need to consult a veterinarian.

Health and Disease:

- Fox farmers have a responsibility to be aware of the condition of their herd and should be able to recognize the signs of a distressed or sick animal.

Hygiene and Sanitation:

- Fox farmers must ensure good hygiene and sanitary measures to avoid conditions that are unpleasant for the animals. Regular removal and disposal of manure, and fly control, are essential to a good farm sanitation program.

- Manure should be removed regularly from under the pens, especially where drainage is less than adequate.
- Pens and nests housing foxes should be cleaned as required.

Transportation of Live Foxes:

- The transportation of foxes requires special attention to the design of traveling crates, the care of foxes while in transit and the completion of appropriate documentation as required by the transporter or government authority.
- Traveling crates must be adequately designed for transportation by road, rail and air to allow sufficient space, airflow and comfort for each animal.

All Codes of Practice are presently developed by a review committee made up of representatives from farm groups, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, animal scientists, federal and provincial governments, related agricultural sectors and interested individuals. The following are some of the groups that provided input at various stages in the drafting of this Code:

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| ● Canada Fox Breeders Association | ● Provincial governments of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario |
| ● Canadian Council on Animal Care | ● Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada |
| ● Canadian Federation of Humane Societies | |
| ● Canadian Veterinary Medical Association | |

In 1995, the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC) and its Canada Committee on Animals and its Expert Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour, took the lead, along with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, in updating existing Codes of Practice and developing new commodity codes.

Further information on the process of Code of Practice development can be obtained from the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC), Heritage House, Building 60, CEF, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C6. CARC website address: www.carc-crac.ca.

This factsheet was prepared by Penny Lawlis, Animal Care Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs with assistance of an Editorial Committee. Animal welfare factsheets have been printed and distributed through the financial support of your provincial agriculture department.

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