

PART II.—FURS

Section 1.—The Fur Industry*

Although the relative importance of the fur industry in the Canadian economy has declined through the years, the production of wild and farm furs continues to contribute substantially to the national income and to individual income in certain areas. In addition to returns from the sale of pelts, the thriving fur farming industry has boosted the economy of many areas through creation of a chain of associated businesses such as feed supply houses and pelt processing stations. Demand from the industry for feed stuffs has resulted in the utilization of much of what was formerly waste from meat packing operations and poultry processing plants. In addition, some 50,000,000 lb. of rough fish and fish frames, formerly of little or no value, are used annually by this industry.

The value of raw furs produced in Canada in the 1964-65 season amounted to \$36,613,350, ranched furs accounting for 58.4 p.c. and wild pelts for the remainder. Canada accounts for about one twelfth of the world production of ranched mink pelts and one quarter of the world production of wild furs. A large proportion of the Canadian fur crop is exported, the principal varieties being mink, beaver, seal, muskrat and fox; in 1965 the value of raw furs exported was \$29,503,777 and during the same year raw furs worth \$19,144,817 were imported.

Fur Trapping.—The value of the wild furs caught in 1964-65 was \$15,236,798. In that season Canadian trappers took 4,163,277 pelts of all species, ranging from 564 polar bear skins which realized an average price of \$99.12, to 1,503,756 squirrel pelts averaging \$0.59. An estimated 50,000 Canadians participate annually in fur trapping activities which in recent seasons have yielded an average revenue of approximately \$15,000,000 including the value of the sealskin crop. Returns from the trapping enterprise are distributed through countless northern villages, providing a welcome source of revenue for many part-time trappers as well as for the professionals.

A good proportion of the wild fur catch comes from the central and southern portions of the provinces. Some species have adjusted to life in partly settled areas and each year substantial catches of beaver, muskrat, mink, raccoon, wolf and squirrel are made in areas of mixed farm and bushland. As a result of the failure of raw fur prices to keep pace with rising commodity costs, most of the trappers in these areas operate on a part-time basis only. Many are full-time wage-earners who carry on their trapping activities during weekends or on holidays.

In the northern areas also, the production of most of the important fur varieties is being well maintained. Comparatively few opportunities for wage employment exist in these areas and trapping remains an important source of revenue. Since 1938 no trapping licences have been issued to non-Indians in the Northwest Territories, other than to individuals holding licences at that date and their offspring. Consequently, most of the fur catch in the Northwest Territories is taken by Indian, metis and Eskimo trappers. A trend has developed in recent years whereby native trappers, who formerly spent the winter months along with their families on the trapline, now congregate with their dependants in the settlements. This community-type living has certain undesirable results; the areas around the settlements tend to be over-trapped and the less accessible areas neglected, with consequent waste of the fur resource.

Fur Farming.—Mink is by far the most important fur bearer raised on fur farms; chinchilla, fox and nutria are also raised but these account for less than 1 p.c. of the total value of pelts produced.

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