

Fur farming. Mink are raised in all provinces except Newfoundland. In 1974 the principal producers, in order of importance, were Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Alberta (Table 10.22).

The 1974 production of ranched mink totalling 1,113,061 pelts was slightly above the total of 1,065,808 pelts produced in 1973. After several seasons when mink pelt prices increased, returns for the 1974 production declined by approximately 18% from an average of \$18.00 a pelt in 1973 to \$14.76 in 1974. Difficulties experienced by producers through the lower returns were compounded by the continuing rise in production costs.

Due to the unfavourable cost-return situation and other factors, the number of Canadian mink farms continued to decline and the total at the end of 1975 was 393 (Table 10.22). It would probably not be entirely correct to use the shrinking tally of farms as a strict measure of the prosperity of the industry. The number of mink farms has declined, through good years and bad, since 1939 when there were 3,333 farms which produced 170,296 pelts (an average of 51 pelts per farm). In earlier years beginners in the mink business got started through the acquisition of a small number of breeding animals and built up from that point. Now entry into the business on a scale that would hold the promise of some return on investment within a reasonable time involves a high outlay of capital. This is a limiting factor in attracting newcomers to the industry while mink farming is experiencing attrition in numbers due to retirements.

In 1974, 1,548 fox pelts were produced on 55 farms across the country; this is 11% above the 1973 output of 1,395 pelts from 42 farms. The increase in production is attributed to the improved economic climate in the market for the long-haired furs. Values for silver and mutation fox pelts have risen sharply in the past decade, and the 1974 average price of \$104.87 a pelt was the highest recorded in over 50 years. Encouraged by the upturn, producers are expanding their operations and the demand for breeding animals is stronger than for many years.

Fur marketing. The bulk of Canada's fur production is sold at public auction through five fur auction firms in Montreal, North Bay, Winnipeg, Regina and Vancouver. At the auctions, furs are purchased through competitive bidding by buyers who may be purchasing for their own account or for firms in Canada or abroad. Canadian raw furs are usually sold in the raw or undressed state, facilitating entry into many countries which maintain tariffs on imports of dressed furs.

In 1974-75 exports of raw furs amounted to \$41 million, slightly below the 1973-74 exports valued at \$41.7 million. Imports for 1974-75 totalled \$55.9 million, a slight increase over the 1973-74 value of \$55.7 million and substantially above the earlier high of \$39.6 million in 1972-73. The increase in imports is due not only to a healthy fur retail business in Canada, but also to requirements occasioned through growing exports of fur garments. In 1975 exports of fur pieces amounted to \$36.5 million, the highest value on record for this class of export.

The export of fur fashion garments on an important scale is a fairly new development on the Canadian fur scene. Historically, Canadian exports of furs have consisted mainly of undressed pelts from fur farms and the trapline. There are fairly definite limits to which this last type of export can be developed. The production of wildlife pelts is relatively limited and not likely to be increased to any meaningful extent. In addition, in view of the highly competitive world fur farming situation, it is not practicable to visualize an open-end type increase in the production and export of ranch-raised furs.

In the fur manufacturing industry no such limits apply. Other factors, however, are present, principally import tariffs and competition from fur manufacturers in the importing countries. A high degree of efficiency in design and manufacture is required by Canada to compete and there is a growing "export group" among Canadian fur manufacturers which is extending the horizons of this formerly largely domestic industry.